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Adventurous explorations of life and faith

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ISSN 1324-6623
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Batch One, 2018
Crosspollination
What counts as theology? How is theology different to philosophy? Or poetry? We might define theology as a discipline with its own vocabulary, sources and methods distinct from other disciplines. But such a rigid distinction would diminish possibilities for creativity beyond traditional patterns of thought.

We often define genres or disciplines by indicating their essentials: What is an action movie? (gripping!) Or a fairy tale? (always a happy ending). What would AFL be without its essential oval shaped ball?

Ludwig Wittgenstein’s family resemblance model suggests an alternative approach to essential definitions. Instead of finding a common thread defining all theology, we could perceive a web of similarities and variations – like having your uncle’s bulbous nose, mother’s luscious lips and a smidge of your grandfather’s temper. Every iteration of theology is related, yet each is entirely unique.

This approach frees theology to engage widely with other modes of thinking and expression, like the arts, science, philosophy and psychology, a fertile ground for engaged Christian faith. reo seeks to promote creative theology that resembles this and that, enriching our understanding of the good news that intermingles with the rambunctious human family of culture, language and ideas.

Dr. Sam Curkpatrick is a tutor in theology at Stirling Theological College and Partnership Coordinator (Vic Tas) for Australian Churches of Christ Global Mission Partners.

**WORDPLAY** is a segment of reo open to submissions under 200 words, exploring words, metaphors or concepts that have enriched your understanding of Christian faith in a new way.
In 1545 Luther recounts a life-altering experience of grace after prolonged internal turmoil over a just and righteous God unappeased by a perpetually sinful conscience such as his. This personal revelation, of salvation by faith alone, became a platform for ecclesial renewal and reform. Luther’s driving theme of reform is that righteousness is achieved by faith not works; this new doctrine shifts the paradigm completely for the individual, releasing freedom and direct access to God through faith, therefore relieving burdensome penances and continuous salvific practices. The late medieval Church came under enormous pressure to reform its authority and its preaching of the gospel, having allowed widespread legalistic extortion. This article will discuss the implications of Luther’s ethical stance as framed around four foci: justification by faith, its impact on the individual and the church, and the responsibility invoked by this freedom, in dialogue with three key Luther texts. Christian freedom and responsibility seem somewhat antithetical but are drawn together by Luther in a complimentary embrace.
Justification by Faith

In Luther’s early training, the theological principle that God would not reward someone unless they earnt it, resonated; however due to incongruent teaching between individual theologians, theological schools and the official teaching of the church, confusion reigned. Heavily influenced by the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and supremely focused on the Bible as the source of Christian theology, rather than scholastic tradition or Aristotle, Luther embodied an innate desire for righteousness. He was diligent in his duties, confessed his sin consistently but was left despairingly filled with guilt. Immersed over several years in the Epistle to the Romans, Luther began to find peace and ‘liberating certainty’ in the basic principle that would ultimately touch the world, that of justification by faith alone. Faith is simply trust in God; the individual benefits from the promise found in Christ, of sharing in Christ’s righteousness. This is described in Luther’s ‘Two Kinds of Righteousness’, as coming from another outside ourselves; this alien righteousness from God makes no demands apart from faith.

Impact on the Individual

Within Luther’s rediscovery, the individual and their relationship with God becomes central; this appealed to the growing individualist culture and challenged the early medieval worldview of the Church’s central mediating role. Luther attacks the notion that human exertion could ever achieve reconciliation with God in his ‘Heidelberg Disputation’, stating that anyone who believes that they can attain God’s grace by themselves effectively doubles their sin. He expounds this warning to the individual in his later letter to Pope Leo X, calling those who erroneously load righteousness on to good works as deceived and even blasphemous, bidding to steal God’s glory.

Luther notes that the perverse notion concerning works was compounded by tradition and deceitful teachers pontificating on penitence, confession and satisfaction without teaching about faith—law without gospel. Rather, an individual can enter a relationship with God directly by trusting in Christ and his death and resurrection, consequently removing the need for mediators and the role of the church in matters of salvation. This levels the playing field, returning the onus of responsibility to the
individual; all believers now share this common priesthood. This revelation rumbled the late medieval church foundations by questioning the purpose of purgatory and exposing systemic exploitation of its people.

Impact on the Church
This ethical stance also held serious implications for the already criticized church practice of indulgence selling. The ninety-five theses, posted in October 1517, gathered increasing public interest throughout Europe despite a slow response from Church hierarchy. Due to the political climate, official condemnation of the theses came over two and a half years later in the papal bull *Exsurge Domine May 1520*.

Luther was a prolific writer and published many pamphlets and tracts that called for a radical overhaul of the German Church and instructed Christian living. Many of these works were presented at the Diet of Worms in 1521 where Luther was summoned and requested to recant, to which he refused. Long held criticisms and broad resentment surrounding church practices, such as fees for sacramental offices, tithes and immunities, fuelled Luther’s call for a complete renovation of Church life. Luther’s approach to the Word of God elevated Scripture over Church hierarchy adding challenge to the already questioned Catholic authority of tradition and Scripture; *sola scriptura* became the Protestant watchword. Luther’s influence was largely spread by his use of the common language to appeal to all believers—the ordinary and marginalised—enabling them to interpret Scripture and exercise their power and freedom which their ‘common priesthood entitled them’.

Freedom’s Responsibility
After exploring the impact of justification by faith on the individual and the wider church, we now arrive at Luther’s explanation of Christian freedom. Luther alleviates concerns of unrestrained liberty and pious extremes potentially stemming from misreadings of his assertion of *justification by faith* in his irenic, *Treatise on Christian Liberty*. The seeming contradiction of Luther’s opening proposition is that ‘A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none’ and ‘A Christian is perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all’; yet paradoxically, these are held together as a
complementing pair. Through the old religious scale, works were attributed varying levels of merit; with Luther’s doctrine, faith unshackles works from redeemable merit giving freedom to serve out of love. Christian disciplines and public works continue as before, undiminished; however, they are renewed in purpose, done without the hope of reward and as an expression of joyful, willing submission and servitude out of the fullness and wealth of faith. Luther cautions against religious extremes; once again driven back to Scripture, we are exhorted to take the middle course and in all things, remain humble and theodidacti, as taught by God.

Conclusion
For Luther, no amount of human ingenuity or legal compliance can accomplish righteousness. This righteousness we seek does not originate in us but comes from outside as otherwise or alien and is offered as gift through faith. Luther scolds the teaching in Church tradition for distorting the gospel by reinforcing law while neglecting faith, and for coming between people and God. His writing repositions the individual into direct responsibility before God. With already rising public discontent, Luther’s stance challenged the Church to self-examination and reform. Along with the political climate and access to the printing press, Luther gained the support needed to shake the very foundations of the Church, calling into question its theology and its true source of authority and practice. Keeping Scripture at the forefront and using the vernacular, Luther worked to give every believer the opportunity to read and interpret Scripture for themselves. Luther’s theology reorients works, disconnecting them from righteous attainment and effectively removing the bondage of legalism. As works are freed from this bondage to become authentic response, this is the source of true freedom for the believer.

Reflection
As a twenty-something office worker dabbling in spirituality, it was Scripture that repeatedly read my situation and alerted me to something other. As a complete stranger to Christian faith and church tradition it was the vernacular that enabled me to seek and understand initially without formal instruction. Much has been learned since then including an
unfolding reality of the gift of grace in Christ. Christian freedom as Luther describes continues to be walked out daily, on display to the world, where Christ can be found by all.

*Sue Maric is the minister at Thornbury Church of Christ and is studying a B.Theol. at Stirling Theological College. She is married to Branko and they have three children.*

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**ENDNOTES**


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Jesus said that the kingdom of God was like a tiny mustard seed (Luke 13:18-19). A mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds in the world. It is extraordinary that something about the same size as a grain of sand is what Jesus selected as a metaphor for God's kingdom. We think of kingdoms as mighty. Kingdoms have armies and strongholds that cannot be penetrated. They have defenses and structures to ensure the prominence and supremacy of their monarch. Everyone serves the monarch so that the kingdom might prosper and therefore, hopefully, all will survive. The power comes from the top and dissipates downwards. Those at the bottom usually miss out.

God’s kingdom is very different. But comparing the kingdom of God to a mustard seed? Really? How can something so small and common possibly be an appropriate metaphor? Jesus said that the Kingdom of God was like a man who took a small mustard seed and planted it in a garden. It grew and became a tree where all the birds enjoyed perching in its branches.

We know that a mustard seed is tiny but in the parable we see that when it is planted it becomes a tree. Not just any tree - a mighty garden tree that the birds perch in. We think we get it. Our cultural values encourage the value of a big, powerful tree. Large trees like oak trees and mighty eucalypts are excellent imagery for a kingdom.

So we read on because the parable seems to make more sense now. Except that we are wrong and have imposed our values onto the text.

By reading the text this way, we force the text to fit into our top-down power structures and in so doing we sweep his message away and deny the small and powerless and overlook their example. Too often the powerful take over and miss the real, deeper message. Jesus meant it when he said that the kingdom of God was like a mustard seed and he meant it when he said it was like that the seed grows into a large garden tree. But not a particularly grand tree – a garden tree! Mustard trees only grow to about five meters in height and are not even ranked as trees. Botanists classify them as shrubs.
In a garden, they provide wonderful perches for birds over the fruit, vegetables and herbs. However, they are shrubs.

The parable of the mustard seeds continues. Besides being very hardy, mustard shrubs are particularly good at two things. A healthy mustard shrub can produce up to 8000 seeds so they reproduce other mustard shrubs very well. For example, if you left a mustard shrub alone in your yard for a few years you might come back to find the area taken over by them. Actually, ‘the birds that perch in its’ branches’, will probably transport mustard seeds around the neighborhood also!

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which when planted grows into a mustard shrub that grows and spreads. This small seed represents things that are ordinary and unremarkable yet, which bear fruit in all sorts of unpredictable places. Jesus did not choose the Temple, a mighty tree of the forest or a powerful monarch for his kingdom metaphor.

The Kingdom of God seeks to bring about shalom where it is needed most: the everyday, the commonplace, markets, workplaces, prisons, slums, schools and neighborhoods.

This has always been the case for the mission of God. It is the nature of God’s kingdom.

Andrew Menzies is Principal of Stirling Theological College. This is an extract from his new book, Kingdom Communities: Shining the Light of Christ through Faith, Hope and Love, by Andrew Menzies and Dean Phelan (Morning Star Publishing, 2018).
Philosophical tradition has asked many good questions concerning human freedom, ethics, identity and society. These questions and subsequent explorations are valuable for informing theology in its responses to perennial issues of human existence. With such prefacing, theology is spared potential misjudgment in speaking past existential concerns of human life by not hearing the tonality, nuances and pertinence of present questions.

If theology is to speak into human experience concerning good and evil, it is helpful to know how a particular generation has been informed, implicitly and explicitly, in distinguishing and interpreting good and evil. If actions and responsibilities are of premium value in expressing Christian faith and presence, it is helpful to know how integrity is cast within human aspirations, even though expressions of integrity change from one culture and generation to another.

Genuine philosophy, by contrast to either cynicism or quackery, engages issues that daily affect life within our shared perceptions and difficult differences over perspective.

Philosophy (philosophia) is love of wisdom. If God is the source of truth, then articulation of sincere though variegated yearnings toward integral life and veritable goodness—so implicitly also Christian faith—are surely to be found within human wrestling with ambiguities of existence.

Stephen Curkpatrick is Lecturer in Christian Theology and Academic Dean at Stirling Theological College.
AWARENESS OF GOD IN THE HUMAN DYNAMIC OF RELIGION according to the Old Testament

Dr. Hery Susanto

Kesadaran akan Allah di dalam Dinamika Religiusitas Manusia menurut Perjanjian Lam

Abstraksi

Kesadaran akan Allah merupakan dasar religius manusia di tengah perkembangan kehidupan manusia yang terus bergerak secara progresif. Perjanjian Lama memberikan kisah yang mencerminkan tentang pergumulan manusia untuk dapat memahami dan mengenal eksistensi Allah di dalam realitas kehidupan mereka. Allah adalah nyata dan hadir di dalam setiap aspek kehidupan manusia. Jadi dalam tulisan artikel ini akan ditunjukkan mengenai pentingnya kesadaran akan Allah bagi kehidupan iman manusia hingga

A response from
Karen Yunia

Awareness of God is fundamental to human faith and the continual enrichment and development of life. Such awareness is more than a general perception: it is an engagement with an integral acquaintance, evoking specific actions that are sensitive to the character and quality of that relationship.

Essential questions of human existence call into question human identity: Who am I? Where do I come from? The core of this valuation eventually, is directed to the awareness and existence of a relational God. Scripture narrates the wrestling of human beings in acknowledging and understanding the presence of God amid human experience. Through these narratives, awareness of God continually develops; likewise, the social, religious, cultural and political dynamics of humanity are continually challenged and develop through the story of Israel.

The existence of God is pervasive in every aspect of human life and so an awareness of God animates human development and flourishing in all ages. God is the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the last—who is revealed and made known through Jesus Christ, so that we can grow in understanding and knowledge of God. Therefore, our awareness of God is dynamic and growing, personal and social, as God is disclosed to us.

Karen Yunia is PhD candidate, tutor and translator at Stirling Theological College.
Kesadaran secara umum dapat diartikan sebagai sebuah rasa kepekaan terhadap sesuatu hal yang direfleksikan dari hati dan menghasilkan pengertian.\(^1\) Pada intinya kesadaran merupakan hasil penyatuan antara hati dengan otak terhadap kebenaran yang sebenarnya. Di dalam Kamus Filsafat dikatakan bahwa kesadaran berarti suatu pengalaman akan hal-hal dan kegiatan-kegiatan dari kesadaran seseorang seperti pencerapan, representasi, pikiran, perasaan, emosi, hasrat terhadap segala sesuatu.\(^2\)

Di dalam bahasa Inggris terdapat dua istilah yang berhubungan erat dengan kesadaran yaitu “consciousness” dan “awareness”. Consciousness berasal dari bahasa Latin yaitu concentratio yang artinya ‘mengerti dengan’. Kata consciousness berarti “the state of being able to use your senses and mental powers to understand what is happening; or a state of being who aware of something.”\(^3\)

Kata awareness berasal dari akar kata ‘aware’ yang lebih menekankan kepada kesadaran yang melibatkan segala pemahaman dan menghasilkan sebuah sikap tertentu terhadap suatu hal. Istilah awareness mengedepankan tingkat consciousness yang lebih tinggi karena bukan hanya sekedar kognitif saja.\(^4\)

Edmund Husserl sebagaimana dikutip oleh Zaenal Abidin (202:147), menyatakan:

Kesadaran adalah intensional yang mengarah kepada sesuatu yang disadari (yang disebut objek intensional atau normatic) dan setiap aktivitas menyadari (disebut aktivitas intensional atau noetic) adalah aktivitas menyadari sesuatu.\(^6\)

Pengertian Husserl mengenai kesadaran dikaitkan secara langsung antara obyek yang disadari (normatif) dengan sebuah kegiatan aktif menyadari (noetic). Maka dapat disimpulkan bahwa kesadaran ini tidak hanya terbatas kepada pemahaman terhadap obyek, tapi berkorelasi dengan tindakan atau perbuatan yang menunjukkan kesadaran tersebut.

Kesadaran manusia menunjukkan sebuah eksistensi diri yang dipengaruhi oleh tiga sifat yaitu faktisitas, transendensi dan kebutuhan untuk mengerti. Faktisitas berarti sebuah eksistensi yang selalu nampak di depan kesadaran manusia sebagai sesuatu yang sudah ada. Transendensi pada eksistensi manusia berarti suatu sifat yang nampak secara langsung dalam kesadaran manusia bahwa ia manusia, bukan hanya sekedar tubuh yang nampak dalam ruang dan waktu bersama ‘ada’ yang lain, namun manusia dapat melampaui dirinya melewati batas ruang dan waktu dalam kesadarannya. Keberadaan kebutuhan untuk mengerti merupakan sifat yang paling menonjol dalam kesadaran manusia.\(^7\)

Manusia selalu ter dorong untuk selalu mempertanyakan hakikat diri dan dunianya. Akibatnya muncullah pertanyaan mengenai siapa dirinya dan dari masa sekarang.
mana ia berasal. Muara pemikiran ini akhirnya mengarah kepada kesadaran akan eksistensi Allah yang mengatur dan menyebabkan segala sesuatu terjadi di dalam dunia.

**Pemahaman Umum tentang Kesadaran akan Allah**

Kesadaran akan Allah merupakan kesadaran tertinggi manusia untuk memahami dan bertindak sesuai pemahamannya tentang Allah yang berpribadi (masuk di dalam kerangka berpikir manusia) terhadap segala sesuatu yang dialami di dalam hidupnya.

Meskipun secara kronologis perkembangan kesadaran manusia berlangsung pada tiga tahap; sensasi (pengindraan), perceptual (pemahaman), dan konseptual (pengertian).**8** Secara epistemologi, dasar dari segala pengetahuan manusia adalah tahap perceptual.

**Definisi Kesadaran akan Allah**

Kesadaran akan Allah dapat meningkat ketika seseorang mengalami pengalaman rohani bersama Allah. Seorang peneliti bernama Wallace mengatakan:

*The main reason in a way of handling the evidence of religious experience has to do with conception of the way in which experience he has in mind is direct or immediate awareness of God. And certainly it is quite common and, also natural and appropriate for believers in God to characterise their experience in this way. Second, the emphasis on direct experience of God leads to claim only that his own belief in God is justified by his experience of God.* **9**

Pengalaman religius seseorang akan mempengaruhi konsepsinya dan membangkitkan kesadaran akan Allah dalam memaknai pengalaman hidupnya.

Wallace juga mengatakan bahwa pengetahuan akan Allah dapat memberikan pengetahuan yang melampaui akal pikirannya dalam mencermati atau memahami misteri kehidupan.

*The knowledge of God is, nevertheless, a transcendental knowledge because man’s basic and original orientation toward absolute mystery, which constitutes his fundamental experience of God, is a permanent existential of man as a spiritual subject. This means that the explicit, conceptual and thematic knowledge, which we usually think of when we speak of the knowledge of God... is a reflection upon man’s transcendental orientation towards mystery... it is not however the original and foundational mode of the transcendental experience of this mystery. It belongs necessarily to the very nature of human knowledge that thought is self reflexive, that we think of a concrete object within the infinite and apparently empty horizon of thinking itself.* **10**

Wallace berpendapat bahwa pengetahuan tentang Allah merupakan refleksi orientasi transcendental manusia terhadap misteri (hal-hal yang tidak jelas). Artinya manusia tidak sedang sungguh-sungguh mengalami misteri itu secara mendasar, karena semua yang terjadi masuk dalam refleksi diri untuk...
memahami segala hal yang dialaminya. Maksudnya adalah jika seseorang memiliki kemampuan refleksi diri yang rendah, ia tidak akan dapat mengalami pengalaman/pengetahuan tentang Allah dengan benar. Namun jika seseorang tersebut memiliki kemampuan refleksi diri yang tinggi, ia akan mampu memperoleh kesadaran tentang Allah yang lebih baik.

Sebagai contoh konkret adalah jika ada dua orang mengalami sebuah pengalaman yang sama, mereka dapat merespons dengan cara yang berbeda. Peristiwa banjir di Jakarta memberikan gambaran yang jelas. Ada orang yang merasa bahwa ini sudah nasib yang ditentukan oleh Tuhan, sehingga mereka menerima itu dan tidak mau direlokasikan dari tempat banjir itu. Ada yang menyikapi dengan bijak untuk mencari tempat tinggal baru; ada yang berdoa meminta agar masalah banjir segera diselesaikan; ada pula yang justru mengambil kesempatan untuk mendapatkan uang lebih dengan peristiwa itu, misalnya menyewakan ban karet atau mengambil barang-barang yang ditinggalkan pemiliknya. Bagi orang-orang tersebut, Allah dapat memberikan anugerah, penderitaan, kutukan, berkat, rejeki pada saat bersamaan, melalui peristiwa yang sama tergantung persepsi mereka terhadap peristiwa itu. Pemahaman tentang Allah menjadi suatu hal yang subyektif dari manusia. Sedangkan iman Kristen meyakini bahwa Allah tidak akan memberikan rancangan kecelakaan kecelsakaan kepada manusia. Semua yang diberikan Allah adalah sesuai kehendak-Nya tanpa memerlukan persetujuan manusia.


Sebagai orang percaya kepada Kristus, kesadaran akan Allah menjadi lebih nyata, karena Allah sendiri yang memberikan penyataan-Nya. 12 Sementara itu bagi banyak orang pada umumnya mereka masih mencari sosok atau figur Allah yang nyata dari apa yang mereka dapat ketahui atau alami. Misalnya melalui meditasi, perbuatan baik, penyucian diri dan lain sebagainya. Semua itu tidak memberikan kesimpulan kesadaran yang sama tentang ‘allah’ yang sesungguhnya. Argumennya adalah karena keterbatasan akal budi manusia di dalam memahami hal adikodrati, hanya Allah sendiri yang memberikan pencerahan kepada manusia sehingga manusia dapat ‘menerima’ bukan ‘mencari’ Allah.
Perkembangan Kesadaran akan Allah di dalam Perjanjian Lama

Di dalam Alkitab khususnya Perjanjian Lama dikisahkan tentang bagaimana manusia selalu terkait dengan Allah. Namun pada setiap masa, kesadaran mereka tentang Allah mengalami perkembangan.

Zaman Penciptaan

Kejadian 1-11 mengungkapkan bahwa natur manusia diciptakan menurut rupa dan gambar Allah, sehingga mereka mempunyai kesadaran akan Allah. Meskipun manusia sudah memberontak terhadap Allah dan kehilangan hubungannya yang langsung dengan Allah. Namun kehilangan itu tidak menghancurkan gambar Allah dalam dirinya atau membinasakan kesadaran itu. Praktek religiusitas mereka melalui perkataan maupun perbuatan menunjukkan bahwa mereka tetap terkait dengan Allah. Misalnya: Hawa melahirkan Kain dan berkata bahwa ia mendapatkan seorang anak laki-laki karena pertolongan TUHAN (Kej. 4:1), Kain mempersembahkan korban kepada TUHAN (Kej. 4:3), dan mereka mulai memanggil nama TUHAN (Kej. 4:26).

Dalam pasal-pasal itu Allah dikenal dengan YHWH. Sekalipun manusia belum mengenal nama YHWH, namun mereka sungguh-sungguh menyembah Dia. Manusia mengenal Allah sebagai pencipta dunia, pemberi berkat, hakim dan pelindung. Mereka memberi respons pada Dia melalui bentuk persembahan, permohonan dan pemberitaan.

Kejadian 1 -11 secara tidak langsung memperlihatkan adanya kesadaran religius pada semua manusia. Pasal-pasal itu juga menunjukkan bahwa Allah memerintah seluruh dunia dan ikut terlibat dalam segala hal yang terjadi di dunia dalam upaya untuk memelihara karya cipta-Nya.


Menurut Perjanjian Lama, hikmat Allah turut berperan dalam penciptaan dan tercermin dalam apa yang diciptakan (Amsal 3:19-20; 8:22-31). Nafas Allah yang Mahakuasa berada di dalam manusia karena ia diciptakan (misalnya Ayub 32:8). Kedua ide itu merupakan alasan teologis untuk menganggap kebenaran Allah dicerminkan dalam dunia yang diciptakan serta dalam pengalaman, kebudayaan, pemikiran dan agama manusia. Dengan demikian tulisan hikmat menunjukkan bagaimana kesadaran akan Allah bagi orang Israel telah mentransformasi hal baik dari kebudayaan lain: nilai-nilainya diakui tetapi
unsur pemujaan berhala atau politeisme dihilangkan. Mengingat ini, maka tradisi hikmat dipakai sebagai titik tolak bagi upaya mengkomunikasikan kepercayaan alkitabiah kepada kebudayaan lain dalam upaya berdialog antar-agama.

Kesadaran akan Allah pada masa penciptaan menunjukkan kesadaran spiritual yang tinggi. Kesadaran tersebut memberikan pengalaman berkomunikasi dengan Allah yang personal dan tunggal. Allah dalam pemikiran mereka bukan sekedar dewa yang berkuasa dan tidak kompromi dengan manusia tetapi pribadi yang dapat diajak berdialog langsung dengan umat-Nya.

Zaman Bapa-Bapa Leluhur

Kejadian 12 - 50 berbicara tentang karya dan perkataan Allah berhubungan dengan bapa leluhur Israel, menyangkut rencana khusus yang la tentukan bagi mereka. Karena itu dapat dikatakan, pandangan pasal-pasal itu terhadap agama-agama asing berubah dan pandangan yang inklusif menjadi pandangan yang lebih eksklusif, sebagai dimulainya sebuah umat yang memiliki Allah secara eksklusif.

Bapa leluhur Israel tampaknya tidak menganggap bahwa bangsa-bangsa Kanaan sama sekali tidak mengenal Allah. Namun mereka mendirikir sendiri tempat-tempat pemujaan yang mereka pakai; mereka tidak menggunakan tempat-tempat pemujaan orang Kanaan, walaupun kedua tempat pemujaan itu sering terletak berdekatan. Sama seperti beberapa bangsa lain di Timur Tengah kuno, Israel senantiasa yakin bahwa Allah adalah Allah bapa leluhur mereka, yang telah menjalin hubungan khusus dan memimpin kehidupan mereka.

Allah dalam Kejadian 12 - 50 ini diyakini sama dengan Allah yang kemudian hari disebut Israel sebagai YHWH, Namun Allah itu juga disebut dengan nama lain, yaitu lxe, yang sering digabungkan dengan ungkapan lain. Dalam bahasa-bahasa Semit kata lxe dalam bahasa Ibrani dapat berfungsi sebagai kata benda yang berarti 'ilah' (sama seperti MyhiOlx;e dalam Keluaran 15:2; 20:5) atau menjadi nama pribadi untuk ilah itu. Karena itu kata lxe kadang-kadang disalin saja sebagai lxe (nama), kadang-kadang diterjemahkan 'Allah' atau 'ilah'.


anak perempuan seorang imam kepada dia sebagai istrinya (ayat 45). Namun ternyata pada masa keluaran, Firaun menolak untuk mengakui YHWH sebagai Allah. Riwayat keluaran mempunyai sub-tema yang menjelaskan bagaimana Firaun dipaksa untuk mengakui YHWH sebagai Allah (Keluaran 5:2; 7:5,17; 8:10,22; 9:15,29; 14:18,25). Kalaupun ada kalanya kita bersikap positif akan pengalaman dan ibadat beberapa agama lain, namun ada juga situasi di mana pertentangan tidak dapat dielakkan. Pada peristiwa keluaran dari Mesir, Israel harus menentang tuntutan agar dewa-dewa lain diakui sebagai ilah.


Sebaliknya, Allah berkarya dalam sejarah Israel agar ia dikenal sebagai YHWH yang menyelamatkan manusia melalui perjanjian-Nya dengan mereka; dan karya Allah itu bukan hanya untuk Israel tetapi bertujuan agar bangsa-bangsa yang pada waktu itu memuja YHWH dengan cara yang kurang sempurna, memakai nama El, nanti akan menyembah Dia dengan sempurna sebagai satu-satunya Allah.

Kesimpulannya adalah kesadaran akan Allah yang personal bukan hanya menjadi kesadaran bangsa Israel saja, tetapi juga menjadi tugas setiap umat Allah untuk menjadikan kesadaran akan Allah sebagai bagian utama di dalam kehidupan mereka. Pada masa ini kesadaran akan Allah masih tinggi karena Allah bersedia menyatakan diri secara khusus kepada Musa mengenai nama-Nya. Pengenalan mereka akan Allah sebagai Allah yang mengendalikan segala sesuatu dipahami manusia sebagai kesadaran akan keberadaan mereka sebagai umat yang harus mengabdikan kepada Allahnya.

Zaman Perjanjian di Sinai

Dalam Kitab Keluaran diterangkan bahwa Allah melepaskan umat-Nya dari perbudakan di Mesir. Ia mengikat perjanjian dengan mereka di Gunung Sinai, kemudian memberikan negeri Kanaan kepada mereka sebagai tanah pusaka mereka. Semuanya itu terjadi sebagai penggenapan janji-janji yang telah dibuat Allah jauh sebelumnya. Dengan demikian agama Israel, yang mengakui Allah yang sama dengan bangsa Kanaan, diberi hak yang baru. Hal itu tampak dalam penyataan diri Allah kepada Musa mengenai nama YHWH dan dicerminkan dalam sentralitas nama tersebut dalam agama Israel seterusnya.

Allah yang dikenal dalam agama Israel itu adalah Allah yang juga dikenal secara kurang sempurna dalam agama-agama lain. Itu berarti, Israel masih dapat belajar dari agama-agama lain itu. Beberapa kebiasaan dan gagasan dalam agama Israel sejajar dengan agama-agama lain di Timur Tengah dan di daerah-daerah lain juga. Kesejajaran itu menunjukkan bahwa agama Israel dan agama-agama lain berkembang secara sejajar, namun tidak sama. Misalnya
imamat dan sistem pengorbanan biasa ditemukan dalam hampir semua agama, jadi tidak perlu menganggap Israel "meminjam" unsur-unsur ini dari agama Kanaan. Namun kadang-kadang Israel meminjam unsur-unsur tertentu dari kebudayaan sezaman mereka.


Pemujaan El tidak bertentangan dengan pengakuan itu, karena merupakan suatu bentuk dari pemujaan YHWH. Tetapi pemujaan dewa-dewa lain melanggar pengakuan tersebut. Pengakuan rohani itu menunjukkan kesadaran akan Allah yang lebih fokus kepada satu pribadi tertentu, ketika mereka mengaku bahwa Allah telah berkarya dan menyatakan diri secara menentukan dalam sejarah Israel.

Kesadaran akan Allah melebihi agama seseorang. Manusia tidak hanya memerlukan lebih banyak pengetahuan tentang kodrat Allah dan hakikat manusia; ia membutuhkan pemilihan hubungannya dengan Allah, sebelum ia dapat mencapai tujuannya. Manusia membutuhkan penyelamatan, bukan hanya penyataan saja. Wawasan apapun tentang kodrat Allah dan hakikat manusia yang dimiliki agama-agama lain, mereka tidak mempunyai kunci untuk memulihkan hubungan ini dan mencapai tujuan ini, karena hal tertentu hanya ada dalam Injil.

Perjanjian Lama dan Perjanjian Baru dapat disebut eksklusif dalam arti, kedua-duanya yakin akan pentingnya sejarah yang dimulai dengan janji Allah kepada para bapa leluhur Israel dan peristiwa keluaran dari Mesir. Namun kedua-duanya juga dapat disebut inklusif dalam arti, kedua perjanjian itu berkeyakinan bahwa sejarah ini akan mengikutsertakan segala bangsa.

Dengan demikian betapapun besarnya wawasan teologis dan spiritual dalam agama-agama lain, namun dapat dikatakan bahwa agama itu tidak mencakup Injil, karena tidak mengisahkan berita Injil. Karena itu suatu agama dapat diakui sebagai titik tolak bagi perjalanan rohani seseorang, namun....
agama itu tidak dapat diterima sebagai tujuan akhir. Agama-agama lain tidak menyelamatkan, bukan karena lebih rendah dari agama Kristen, melainkan karena agama-agama tersebut tidak menyaksikan karya-karya Allah yang menyelamatkan.

Kesimpulannya pada zaman perjanjian Sinai, Allah telah mengkonkretkan kesadaran rohani umat Israel untuk dapat mengenal Dia secara pribadi melalui berbagai peristiwa sejarah yang dialaminya serta menyadarkan bangsa-bangsa di luar Israel untuk mengenal siapa Allah yang sesungguhnya. Meskipun demikian bangsa Israel masih belum sadar dan mengenal Allah YHWH dengan baik, karena mereka masih mengalami fluktuasi iman dalam setiap permasalahan yang mereka hadapi. Kesadaran akan Allah yang mereka miliki cukup tinggi karena segala kehidupan mereka masih memiliki korespondensi langsung dengan Allah, hanya terkadang tidak berjalan dengan baik karena pengalaman mereka di padang gurun dalam penyertaan Allah.

Zaman Israel di Kanaan

Perjanjian Lama menggambarkan ekslusivitas Allah bagi umat Israel, namun juga misi Allah yang inklusif menyatakan kehendak-Nya kepada bangsa-bangsa lain melalui umat Israel.


Nabi Hosea menghardik Israel karena mereka dipengaruhi oleh unsur kesuburan dalam agama Baal itu. Namun ia mengambil alih gagasan agama Baal itu guna menjelaskan natur YHWH, yang secara terus terang disebut Tuhan yang memberi gandum dan anggur serta digambarkan sebagai kekasih Israel yang menjadikannya 'istri-Nya' (Hosea 2:8,16,19-20). Dalam menggambarkan hubungan YHWH dengan Israel sebagai perkawinan, Hosea memakai bahasa dan kiasan orang Kanaan, sekalipun ia melawan teologi yang mereka ungkapkan melalui pemakaian bahasa dan kiasan tersebut.


Pada peristiwa keluaran dari Mesir, YHWH menentang Firaun (yang dipandang sebagai dewa oleh bangsanya dan yang mewakili dewa-dewa Mesir) oleh karena ia menindas orang Ibrani. Dalam Kitab Kejadian, yang menceritakan hubungan Yusuf dan saudara-saudaranya dengan Firaun, tidak terjadi pertentangan seperti itu. Sebaliknya, Firaun pada zaman itu mengakui Allah Yusuf (Kejadian 41). Tetapi Firaun pada peristiwa keluaran itu menjalankan kebijaksanaan negara yang menindas di bidang politik, ekonomi, sosial dan agama, serta menolak mengakui Allah Musa (Keluaran 5:2). Kebijaksanaan itulah yang memacu YHWH bertindak untuk menegakkan keadilan dengan menghukum penindas dan melepaskan orang-orang tertindas. Kekalahan Firaun itu menyatakan bahwa YHWH melawan segala agama yang membenarkan tata masyarakat yang membiarkan penindasan yang tidak berperikemanusiaan.

Sikap yang adaptif terhadap agama orang Kanaan dalam kitab Kejadian selaras dengan kenyataan bahwa "kedurjanaan orang Amori itu belum genap" (Kejadian 15:16). Tetapi kenajisan yang dilakukan oleh penduduk-penduduk Kanaan pada abad-abad kemudian demikian hebat "sehingga negeri itu memuntahkan penduduknya" (Imamat 18:24-28).

Dengan kata lain, kesadaran akan Allah, bangsa Kanaan justru menunjukkan hal yang kontradiksi. Ritual keagamaan dan keyakinan mereka seolah-olah 'menyuap' allah mereka untuk menuruti kemauan mereka. Ketika Elia (dalam nama YHWH) menentang Bal dalam Gunung Karmel, yang menjadi pokok pertikaian bukan hanya pemujaan suatu ilah palsu melainkan juga usaha menentang sebuah sistem religi masyarakat, hukum di Israel yang diwarnai oleh agama Baal yang dibawa Izebel dari Fenisia. Peristiwa Nabot merupakan contoh usaha tersebut (1 Raja 21).


Di dalam Dasa Titah Allah, khususnya perintah kedua, terdapat penggabungan larangan membuat patung dengan larangan menyembah ilah lain (Kel. 20:4-5), karena pembuatan patung dapat beralih dengan mudah menjadi penyembahan ilah lain. Sebuah patung dapat menggambarkan YHWH atau Baal, jadi adalah lebih bijaksana untuk tidak membuat patung agar agama Baal dapat dihindarkan. Dalam Ulangan 4 dikatakan, patung yang tak bergerak tidak bisa mewakili YHWH yang pada hakikatnya berbicara dan bertindak. Sesuai dengan itu, Yesaya 44 dan 46 menentang pemakaian patung di Israel, baik secara pribadi maupun secara nasional. Namun 2 Samuel 7 melawan pembangunan rumah Allah dengan alasan yang mirip, tetapi kemudian mengizinkannya.

Alasan yang mendasari beberapa tuntutan Allah dalam agama Israel, berkaitan dengan kebudayaan baru dan Allah yang ingin membuat Israel memiliki gaya hidup umat Allah yang berbeda dengan bangsa yang lain. Bentuk kebudayaan atau tradisi asli mereka ber-inkulturisasi dengan penyataan Allah bahwa Allah Israel benar-benar hadir dan hidup di dalam sejarah kehidupan manusia. Bangsa lain akan melihat Allah YHWH sebagai Allah yang benar dan hidup melalui kehidupan Israel.

Kesimpulannya pada zaman ini kesadaran akan Allah sudah bercampur aduk dengan tradisi dan budaya penyembahan Baal. Akibatnya konsep kesadaran akan Allah yang personal menjadi komunal. Apa yang disadari oleh kebanyakan orang dianggap sebagai kebenaran.

Hal ini berarti sudah mulai terjadi penurunan tingkat kesadaran akan Allah.
Zaman Pembuangan Babel dan Persia


Pandangan eksklusif dalam Kitab Ezra dan Nehemia itu menjadi sifat khas selama masa berdirinya rumah Allah yang kedua (sesudah pembuangan) dan membedakannya dari masa sebelumnya.

Pada satu pihak, Ezra dan Nehemia mengungkapkan teologi mereka dengan menggunakan beberapa istilah dari kebudayaan dan agama, seperti yang dilakukan dalam kitab Keluaran dan Hosea. Pada pihak lain, kitab Keluaran, Ulangan dan Hosea bersifat separatis seperti halnya kitab Ezra dan Nehemia. Yesaya 19 dan beberapa perikop lain dalam tulisan para nabi biasanya dipandang bersikap inklusif dan bahan itu diduga ditulis pada zaman bait Allah yang kedua. Sedangkan Yesaya 40 - 55, yang memberikan pandangan universalis dalam Perjanjian Lama, juga memuat pandangan yang
paling tajam tentang agama-agama lain.

Jadi pandangan Perjanjian Lama tentang agama-agama lain bervariasi sesuai dengan sifat agama-agama tersebut dan juga sesuai dengan pengenalan mereka tentang figur Allah yang mereka yakini. Kesadaran akan Allah semakin meningkat dengan format yang berbeda-beda dalam setiap agama yang ada pada masa itu. Pembangunan bait Allah menjadi tolok ukur kesadaran mereka bahwa Allah yang mereka sembah memerlukan tempat khusus agar umat-Nya dapat datang dan menyembah Dia.


**Zaman Yunani**


Board for Mission and Unity menyatakan bahwa Perjanjian Lama memberi kesan keterbukaan terhadap agama-agama lain terkadang dapat diterima, tetapi ada kalanya keterbukaan itu membahayakan agama dan bangsa Israel, sehingga harus ditolak. Ketika Israel bersikap terbuka terhadap agama-agama lain, ia menjadi sangat kreatif dan ketika ia bersikap eksklusif dan menutup diri, ia makin dipermiskin.\textsuperscript{19} Pernyataan mereka tidak dapat diterima karena di dalam Kitab Daniel, ia dan ketiga rekannya bersikap eksklusif dan menutup diri, namun justru sangat kreatif. Konteks kehidupan Israel yang pluralistik menyediakan gambaran beberapa contoh tentang cara berhubungan dengan agama-agama lain dengan kesadaran spiritualitas yang berbeda.

Jadi kesimpulannya bahwa pada zaman Yunani, kesadaran akan Allah semakin plural, artinya keterbukaan kepada berbagai pandangan yang berbeda semakin dianggap hal biasa. Hal ini berpengaruh terhadap kesadaran akan Allah yang semakin sekuler. Perbedaan tidak dipersoalkan lagi karena dianggap setiap orang berhak memiliki kesadarannya sendiri tanpa merasa harus memperdebatkan siapa yang benar dan salah. Akibat berikutnya adalah kesadaran akan Allah menjadi bias sehingga tidak lagi mempersoalkan apakah seseorang itu atheis, politeis, atau monotheis.
Konklusi
Perjanjian Lama mengungkapkan sejumlah kisah yang mengindikasikan bahwa kesadaran akan Allah semakin berkembang di dalam caranya memahami tentang campur tangan Allah di dalam setiap kehidupan manusia. Manusia mengalami dinamika kesadaran akan Allah karena mengikuti era atau jaman di mana mereka hidup. Namun satu hal yang pasti bahwa Allah sudah ada sejak pada mula segala ciptaan dijadikan dan dari waktu ke waktu, Dia menyatakan diri-Nya. Upaya manusia di dalam memahami Allah tanpa campur tangan Allah akan berakibat munculnya kesadaran akan Allah yang klise atau sebatas memenuhi kepuasan batin saja.

Sementara itu ketika kesadaran akan Allah dibangun atas dasar pernyataan Allah dan pengalaman pribadi seseorang dengan Allah, maka yang terjadi adalah kesadaran mereka akan Allah menjadi sangat personal dan tertutup. Dinamika perkembangan religius manusia menunjukkan bahwa sampai kapanpun manusia dan Allah akan terus memiliki relasi yang berkembang sampai akhir jaman. Kehadiran Allah dalam kehidupan manusia menunjukkan bahwa manusia sebagai umat yang ber Tuhan akan selalu membutuhkan Tuhan yang berkuasa untuk mengatur dan mengelola alam semesta menurut otoritas-Nya.

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ENDNOTES:
1Purwadarminta, Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2002), 765.
4Aware means 1. knowing or realizing something, 2. Noticing that something is present, 3. Interested in and knowing about something and thinking it is important. Ibid., 72.
5Alain Morin, Levels of Consciousness and Self Awareness: A Comparison and Integration of Various Views (Canada: Mount Royale College, 2007), 1.
7Ibid., 42.
Dalam Alkitab berbahasa Ibrani, setiap kali muncul kata hvhy -YHWH maka mereka akan membacanya ynaOdxA Adonay yang berarti Tuhanku. Bangsa Israel melakukan hal ini karena berkaitan dengan teologi kekudusan. Bahwa mereka tidak boleh menyebut nama Tuhan dengan sembarangan.


William G Dever. Who were the Early Israelites? (Michigan: Grand Rapid,2003), 199.


GOING ON
Sarah Bacaller

Loss, whether material, relational or conceptual, poses a challenge to human resilience and aspiration, yet is pivotal to selfhood. Paradoxically, the stringent reassertion of particular markers of fixed or tribal identity can bind identity to loss, failing to recognise that dynamic selfhood grows beyond itself in experiencing loss or contradiction. How is movement through and beyond loss resourced? How is the reality of contradiction affirmed and maintained, without remaining an all encompassing, defining reality?

Time moves on. What seemed insurmountable yesterday, passes today; crisis narratives heralding doom are exposed as false prophecies tomorrow. If there seems no reason to keep going on, human resilience keeps going on because, unjustifiably, it chooses to ... even when contradiction cannot be resolved. This going on is itself a way of surmounting contradiction, whilst importantly recognising the real loss prefacing new gain. Reaching beyond what is, despite what is, human resilience negates its negation (Hegel). Selfhood expands to integrate or determine itself in relation to negation in looking to the next moment of becoming.

If identity is ‘in Christ’, this need not invoke static or defensive assertions of tribal identity toward ‘threats’ of contradiction. Actually, it represents continual willingness, courage and faith to become more than what any loss may suggest.

Sarah Bacaller is a tutor and research assistant in Christian Thought and History at Stirling Theological College.
Seeing women in ministry has always been a normality for me – indeed I had never really considered “women in ministry” a topic at all – having both my Mum and Dad in ordained ministry. I entered the community at Churches of Christ Theological College (now Stirling) as a young teenager. Mum was on faculty and we would come as a family to various functions. I enrolled to study when Merrill Kitchen was Principal, and when Merryl Blair, and my mum, as well as other women were on faculty. Women in leadership surrounded me.

Whilst for many in Churches of Christ encountering women in ministry is a normality, there are vestiges of past mentalities often belied in language. Surprising, given that our first woman was called to minister in 1931, and our first female deacon called in 1863. Here, I briefly follow the journey of women in ministry in Churches of Christ in Australia, while looking through the lens of my church ministry in Victoria. I certainly affirm how far we have come, but also suggest that we still have a way to go.

WOMEN IN MINISTRY IN CHURCHES OF CHRIST AUSTRALIA

Looking back on the role of women within Churches of Christ in Australia, I have been swept up in fascinating stories. The first woman to serve in an official ministry role was Mary Thompson, who was not only the first woman, but the first Churches of Christ member from Australia to serve on an international mission. It all came about when in 1891, she responded to a call for men to serve in India. She responded to the call when no men volunteered, and in desperation, her call was accepted.

Former Federal Co-ordinator of Churches of Christ in Australia, Craig Brown, ironically notes that ‘women could study to be
missionaries on foreign fields, but not study for local pastoral ministry’. Although women couldn’t study for Pastoral Ministry, they undoubtedly exhibited leadership. As congregations became established, deacons and sometimes elders were elected to give guidance and leadership. It is interesting to note that at Brighton, one of the three deacons appointed in 1863 was a woman. Intriguing, at a time when women were not seen in leadership positions within Churches of Christ in Australia.

In 1905, Miss Norman was given the distinction of being the first woman to read an essay before the brethren. Entitled, “Women’s Work in the Church”, no doubt was it read with much anxiety and apprehension. It was only seven years later in 1912 the first woman began studying at College of the Bible (now Stirling Theological College). It took 34 years after this when Miss Alice Barton was ordained into the ministry of Churches of Christ in Australia, in 1946. These ministries were indeed met with resistance from within the church.

It is humbling to recognise that our pioneering women of the 1970’s and 80’s were part of a wider movement toward equality in society and women’s ordination in the Christian church in which there were only 15 ordained women in Australian denominations – four of which were in Churches of Christ. We were, in fact, among the leaders of equity at that time. It was this movement that spoke into the rapidly changing lifestyle of women both within the church and within the wider community. More and more women were seeking paid employment and it was becoming increasingly accepted that women had talents, gifts and potential that could be utilised beyond the confines of home and even the church. Just imagine!

Rosie Ward, in Growing Women Leaders, states that ‘even today there is no avoiding the fact that we still live in a world where to be male has been normative and to be female has been different, derivative and secondary. That is true in society, and it is certainly true in the church. There is an expectation that leadership is male, so to some extent ‘woman leader’ and ‘women in leadership’ or ‘ministry’ are oxymoron’.
How important it is, then, to have significant and strong leadership of women within Churches of Christ in Australia. Two particularly inspiring women in recent time have been Lynette Leech and Merryl Blair. Although these two women have both had challenging experiences, the overwhelming message is that they were encouraged to continue to minister within church settings. Lynette has continued this message, suggesting that leaders have a responsibility to encourage gifted women (and men) to consider theological study and ministry formation. Merryl echoes this with a vocational roles in both church ministry and theological education, also mentoring young women exploring possibilities of ministry, which is far more effective than an argument with those who disagree theologically could ever be.

Part of the Churches of Christ movement must be to take into account the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, acknowledging that all Christians have direct access to God because of the loving relationship all people have with God through Jesus Christ. There must be an overarching acceptance that any Christian, man or woman, may fulfil the priestly functions of the church. This is indeed what Merryl and Lynette, and many women who have taken a leadership position within Churches of Christ – whatever it may be – have advocated over time.

CHURCH MINISTRY

Within my current ministry, the topic of women in ministry has indeed become relevant. While my experience has been that most people are welcoming and embracing of women in ministry, it seems to be that the loudest and most demanding voices are those that struggle with women in ministerial roles. This may reflect generational issues, or suggest anxiety around change. People who have been used to churches under male leadership struggle with a dwindling church led by a young female minister who challenges with questions and invites reflection, rather than exhibiting a more directive model of leadership. I have encountered disrespect, gossip, disparagement about what I wear and how I look. These issues have been confronted and have in
fact been named as a sexist problem by those who are challenged.

In recent anecdotal conversations with peer women in ministry in Churches of Christ in Victoria, however, I have found that the overwhelming message is that women are accepted within Churches of Christ today. There are, however, still challenges surround social stereotypes and role expectations, gender balance, justification of presence (trust) and respect of independent agency. For those outside Churches of Christ, the freedom of women within our movement can be surprising.

While there is still discrimination in certain settings, a woman in ministry is no longer an oddity, due to the struggle and determination of the women who have fought before us to allow us to enter into ministry in a generally simple and natural way, and within a community that is underpinned by commitment to the contribution of all members, regardless of age, race, or gender.

We must continue to journey together, gently and confidently, into a future that is full of bright hope for all people to ministers of the word of God. This won’t always be easy, and it won’t always bear fruit. Men in leadership positions must make it a natural part of the language of conversation for leadership in churches to be inclusive. Forums like AGM’s and Conferences must have a diverse range of voices. Women can stand firm in their call to pastoral ministry, in the wake of the determination and strength of the women who came before, paving the way for all of us today.

“FROM THIS VANTAGE POINT LOOKING BACK, WE CAN ONLY BE GRATEFUL FOR THE VISION OF CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF THE PAST, AS THEY FOUND WAYS OF EXPRESSING THEIR FAITH AND DEDICATED SERVICE TO GOD, THE CHURCH AND TO THE PEOPLE. WHILE THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH IS DIFFERENT IN MANY WAYS, NEVER-THE-LESS IT STILL MANIFESTS THE SAME QUALITIES OF COMMITMENT AND CREATIVITY THAT WAS CHARACTERISTIC OF OUR PREDECESSORS.” — Lesley Stirling
Lauren is both a graduate and a current student of Stirling Theological College. She is the minister at Hartwell Church of Christ.

(A good short resource on the history of the women in ministry in Churches of Christ, Australia is found on the Churches of Christ Australia website: ‘Telling our Story: Women in Ministry’)

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ENDNOTES:
As we approach the beginning of a new year, it is not uncommon to reflect on the year that has been – our celebrations, achievements, regrets, losses. Many of us have welcomed new members to our families; others may have had to say goodbye to loved ones. New chapters; final pages. It is a time to take stock of the world and wonder what is in store for us.

It is also a time to consider making new year’s resolutions – as if somehow this year we are going to keep them. Many people live their lives dwelling on the past and worrying about the future, so caught up with what has been and what may never be that they fail to see the present clearly.

We can learn from the past, and plan for the future, but ultimately, life is lived in the present.

As the great Colonel Sherman T. Potter from the MASH 4077th once
said, ‘If you ain’t where you’re at, you’re nowhere.’ If you are too busy looking back and wondering how and if you will ever get to where you want to be, you will never see the joy of life that is right in front of you.

We celebrate communion as a time to remember Jesus, his death, and resurrection. The emblems before us represent his body and his blood. Each of us will associate with this event in different ways: it is a very personal event but one which we share together. As each of us takes the biscuit and the grape juice, we will be thinking of different things – of what has transpired this past week, of what may be before us, of what may be affecting those we care about, of actions we are ashamed of, of words we wish we had said. Yet in this variation and difference, there is constancy that we can depend on – the never-failing love, grace and compassion of God. No matter the circumstance in which we find ourselves, we can be assured that God is with us in every moment.

Choose to live in the present; stand up for the downtrodden; speak out for those who don't have a voice; feed the hungry; give the stranger a home; respect those around you; and show love and compassion to each person you meet, knowing that the power and the grace of God is with you, today and every day.

Alice attended her first church service at Croydon Church of Christ when she was seven days old and spent her formative years there. She has been a member at Blackwood Church of Christ, SA since 1992.
“He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side. He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: ‘Follow me!’ and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.”

— Albert Schweitzer, *Quest for the Historical Jesus*
'What is your existence?' To be self-invested in diverse possibilities of existence, a centre is necessary or any construct that is close to it. A centre is necessary to indicate a presence, otherwise existence is a mere arbitrary possibility amongst many. This 'centre' is potent with layers of narrative that we cover ourselves in, investing materiality with significance so that our existence ultimately remains an enigma.

He comes to us as One unknown conveys a scene of Jesus as a traveller: he came to those who did not know Him. When asked, 'Who are you?' Jesus spoke from the midst of life, his identity forged in his very presence. No words of creed or doctrine, nor any programmatic or scholastic justification--he was without a passport.

He is present and he responds! This is everything: an offering of Christological testimony in the midst of life, creating vital possibilities for life in this existential relay of good news that is otherwise than security over our self in the and call to follow him.

Kevin is Children’s & Families’ Coordinator at Warragul Church of Christ and a recent graduate of Stirling Theological college.
**Phronesis: Practical Ethics and the Australian Chin Community**

by Min Cung Nung Lawngsang

**Introduction to practical wisdom**

This article will explore Ecclesiastes 7:1–25 alongside Aristotle’s concept of practical wisdom, *phronesis*. It will correlate the practical wisdom in this passage with contemporary theological methods that are applicable to Christian ministry. This article will demonstrate the relevance of Ecclesiastes for interpreting life experience and ministry. It suggests how to apply this portion of scripture as practical wisdom within the Chin immigrant community settling in Australia.

**Practical Wisdom**

According to Aristotle there are three forms of knowledge: *episteme*, which is scientific knowledge; *techne*, the formula for the application of this knowledge; and *phronesis*, practical wisdom which recognises that not all knowledge can be applied in a formulaic manner. ¹

“This practical wisdom guides us in acting contextually within a particular situation. *Phronesis* is not learnt, like *episteme* or *techne*, but acquired through experience in life”. ² Exploring the context of Aristotle’s teaching on ethics, Ryken notes: “Aristotle wrote his book on ethics not simply to underline the importance of practical wisdom to a good life and
good society, but also to urge the citizens and statesmen of the Athenian city-state to build institutions that encouraged citizens to learn to be practically wise".3

The book of Ecclesiastes exhibits the search for a type of wisdom we might similarly to Aristotle’s phronesis. Phronesis wisdom is deeply humble because it relies on discovering our own particular situation within human existence. Rather than having a fixed set of high-minded ethics, Ecclesiastes suggests that we cannot perceive the absolute source and the exact truth of anything.4 Using Pascal’s words, the book conveys our ‘range’, a type of phronesis we must learn, for we are something, yet we are not everything.5 Ecclesiastes, in pointing out that what has been is what will be (1:9-10, 4-11; 3:15, 6:12), opens up this grounded, practical type of wisdom.

One example where phronesis has been needed is when someone in my community dies. In our Chin culture, when a relative dies (for example, if a parent of one of the members of in my church dies) everyone comes to visit the grieving family. This is our culture. If someone dies, everyone must go to comfort them. However here, neighbours complain about traffic congestion and too many cars, because our cars will fill the entire street when someone dies. This is complicated because who shall we value more, the neighbour who cannot park on the street because our community has blocked it, or the grieving member of our church? The phronesis-response I have applied is that, instead of going to their house, we go to the church. We open the church for three days, and people can visit two or three at time and then we will hold a night service for all to attend.

Changing nature of time and culturally contextual ethics

We see throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, otherwise known as Qoheleth, that human beings will never comprehend every aspect of human existence. Ecclesiastes 7:1-12 demonstrates a tension that is distinctive of this text. Qoheleth demonstrates the complex nature of the world and the limited nature of human perspective.

No matter how long and hard we deliberate, our ethical reasoning may fail in practical life because we do not perceive our future reality. We may try to be prudent, but we do not know what the future
will hold (Ecclesiastes 7:14). Although we face similar events in life (9:11-12), life's changes are perplexing and difficult to accept (7:15; 8:14). As a result, the writer of Ecclesiastes suggests dedicating our live to the sovereignty of God in recognising our finite nature. *For what is your life? It is a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away* (James 4:13-14). Actually, death and birth indicate the reality of God as a creator and life-giver. These indicative signs of God take place within the particularities of human life, since everything has its own time. In every new situation we need to invoke *phronesis* that will help us to discern how to apply ourselves within changing contexts and challenges of life. It is because we cannot control our lives and the things which happen in life, but we have to apply practical wisdom in any context.

In community, in our transition period we have only recently been in Australia. Because our culture is very different to Australian culture, this creates a lot of issues in the family and in our communities and church. In Burma, male and female roles are very different and distinct. In Myanmar, the husband's role in the family is to make all of the important decisions. However, in Australia it is not appropriate or ethical for women to follow along with everything that men say. So it is not appropriate to teach children the old ways.

We find it very difficult to communicate between children and parents. In Myanmar, parents and children enjoyed family harmony, like heaven. However here, when children become youth and teenagers, we find it impossible to communicate. The parents are distressed and want to control the children; however, the children here know that that is not appropriate and can call the police if parents use tactics such as physical discipline to control the children. In Burma, the children are very obedient. But here, they are very disobedient. Even the teachers are frustrated with the Burmese children. The parents don't know how to raise them. This situation, we need to organise training for the parents. They need to know how to raise the children in the Aussie way. We must realise that this is impossible to solve completely because there is a cultural divide. It will resolve only very slowly.
Balance and limitation in the search for wisdom

We face the challenge of discerning goodness and ethical virtues within changing contexts. We need to respond wisely within any given situation. Whatever we do we must deliberate what will be good for our dignity and for others’ wellbeing.

Qohelth encourages living with balance and avoiding extremes. In this context, Qoheleth may have in mind the attempt to gain security by careful religious observation. 8 Similarly, Aristotle advocates one general, fundamental rule:

“In all our activities we must keep to the safe middle way and avoid faults that may arise either from insufficiency or excess. Thus, we need manliness, which is a virtue that lies between two extremes: cowardice and thoughtless bravado. Both avarice and extravagance are faults; rational generosity is free of both extremes. Moderation will preserve us both from excessive pride and from an overly harsh opinion”.9

In my community, I must remember the limitations of human wisdom even within denominations. I am a United Pentecostal minister, yet people in my Chin congregation come from a very different doctrinal stances. Their backgrounds are Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Assemblies of God and “Believers”, even Seventh Day Adventists. They are all members of one church because we are connected through our relationships, our language and our culture. Sometimes it is difficult as a pastor to hold it all together. The denominational divide causes conflict in our community from time to time. For example, even though some are baptised in a Trinitarian name, others are baptised in the name of Jesus only. There can be very tense meetings about this. Despite my own opinions according to my denomination and the opinions of many others, I have decided in wisdom that if the adults are happy with their old baptism, in whichever name or style, I accept them as they are and do not force another baptism. We have settled on only one baptism.
The value and fleeting nature of wisdom

In the beginning of Ecclesiastes, we see that the writer failed to figure out what matters in life, yet he still wants to know the right way to live. He really valued wisdom as a “precious gift” and showed its practical benefits, writing that wisdom can be a lifesaver (7:12), and that it makes one wise person more powerful than ten rulers in the city (7:19). There are many scriptures that value wisdom in similar ways: wisdom is pricier than pearls (Job 28:18), better than jewels (Proverbs 8:11) and the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook (Proverb 18:4).

The writer of Ecclesiastes also tells us how hard wisdom is to find. He was a man who had dedicated his whole life to find the meaning of life. He says, “All this I have tested by wisdom” (Ecclesiastes 7:23). He also says, “I turn my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and foolishness that is madness” (Ecclesiastes 7:25). However, he admits that he had failed to find wisdom he had been seeking all his life. He admits that it was far from him and it is very deep to find. Pascal states as follows:

“When I consider the short duration of life, swallowed up in the eternity that lies before and after it, when I consider the title space I fill, and I see, engulfed in the Infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant, and which know me not, I rest frightened, and astonished, for there is no reason why I should be here rather than there. Who put me here? Who now rather than then?”

However, the preacher did not stop his search for wisdom seeking the meaning of life. The best alternative is to admit that we do not have all the answers, but we also need to believe that God can do so we need to wait for whatever wisdom God provides.

There are several issues within Chin Immigrants community in Australia in this decade. There is a tension between our old cultures and the cultures of Australia, between youth and the aged, between husband and wife, between parents and children. We are in a transition period since we recently arrived in a different situation from a different background. We have many issues
and difficulties to resolve or get through, that we come across in many places. We work the best we can to figure out solutions and compromises which care for everyone. Yet we have to admit that there are some mysteries we do not understand. This is practical wisdom in accordance with our range, wisdom as the phronesis we seek to apply within our own context.

Min has just completed postgraduate study at Stirling Theological College and is the minister of the Apostolic Pentecostal Church in Croydon, a congregation of 300 Chin people. There are roughly 6000 people in the wider Chin immigrant community in Victoria; Min is actively involved in supporting this community. He is also the Chair of the Global Chin Pentecostal Council.

Bibliography


ENDNOTES:


“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”
– Søren Kierkegaard

The Stone-Campbell Movement has within its DNA a desire to represent a simple, accessible Christianity. The Churches of Christ denomination draws much of its preaching and theology from the person of Christ as revealed in the New Testament. The centrality of God’s Word, especially the New Testament, was seen to be crucial in the pursuit of unity. It might be argued, however, that this emphasis on the New Testament has contributed to a de-emphasis on the Old Testament. This is a topic that many have wrestled with throughout church history, and it is important for us to wrestle with as a community today. It is my contention that the Old Testament has much to offer the modern-day Christian, enhancing our understanding of God and the work of Christ, and in doing so offering the Churches of Christ denomination a richer experience of being members of God’s universal church.

**CHURCHES OF CHRIST CONTEXT**

“The lordship of Christ and the authority of His Word is foundational.”
– James B. North, *Union in Truth*

In his retrospective look at the Restoration Movement, James B. North argues that the preeminent danger for the movement is specifically related to a shift away from scriptural authority, which was characteristic
of the early movement and can be traced back to Thomas Campbell’s formative Declaration and Address (1809).\(^4\) Here, Campbell identifies the movement as having the ‘sole purpose of promoting simple evangelical Christianity,’ with the emphasis on the New Testament and overarching preference for simplicity.\(^5\) Conceding the Old and New Testaments are ‘inseparably connected,’ Campbell notes that, ‘the New Testament is as perfect a constitution for the worship, discipline and government of the New Testament church,’ while the Old Testament was for the Old Testament Church.\(^6\)

Campbell’s views were not just historical but shaped Australian Churches of Christ today. Minister and college lecturer Gordon Stirling, held a view of the New Testament closely linked to that of T. Campbell’s ‘Declaration and Address.’ For Stirling, the question of the Old Testament is one of relevance.

‘The New Testament tells a story, and in that story we can find out what basic Christianity was in the beginning and then work out what it should look like at any time and in any circumstance, especially in our time and in our sort of world.’\(^7\)

Alexander Campbell’s ‘Sermon on the Law’ (1846) is also crucial to gaining an understanding of the emphasis of Churches of Christ on the New Testament and the de-emphasis on the Old Testament, or the ‘law.’\(^8\) A. Campbell asserted that the law is superseded by Jesus’ summative words in the gospels—to love God and neighbor—and that adherence to the law was incapable of producing righteousness and eternal life: Jesus Himself was the fulfillment of the law.\(^9\)

‘The term "law," denotes in common usage, "a rule of action." It was used by the Jews, until the time of our Saviour, to distinguish the whole revelation made to the Patriarchs and Prophets, from the traditions and commandments of the Rabbis or Doctors of the law.’

‘We find all things whatsoever the law could not do are accomplished in him, and by him—that in him all Christians might be perfect and complete—for the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.’
‘Certainly, it is inconsistent to say that Christians should equally regard and obey the Old and New Testament.’ (A. Campbell, ‘Sermon on the Law’)

EARLY CHURCH CONTEXT

‘I see nothing in Scripture except Christ and Him crucified.’

– Martin Luther

Crucial in the discussion of the place of the Old Testament is consideration of church’s engagement with this issue throughout history. Finding the Old Testament’s ‘place’ in a Christ-focused perspective has been the subject of much debate – the likelihood being that reconciling the two testaments will always be debated. Important, albeit controversial figures such as Marcion, Origen, Luther and Erasmus, have held notable positions on this issue.

CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS

God of the Old and New Testament

The Old Testament plays a significant role in understanding the New. Recent authors have expressed that the Old Testament is underutilized within the contemporary church, even ignored.

If the God of the Old and New Testament is the same, then, as Goldingday argues, ‘We need the Old Testament for an understanding of the story of God’s working out His purpose, for its theology, for its spirituality, for its hope, for its understanding of mission, for its understanding of salvation, and for its ethics.’ Likewise, Barry L. Blackburn identifies a clear connection between the covenantal failures and subsequent exile of the Israelites, and the impending arrival of Jesus and God’s kingdom.

Further, a narrative picture of God across the testaments provides a richer view of God’s character and our need for the Messiah, a deeper appreciation for concepts such as sacrifice and forgiveness, as well as
the benefits of studying flawed characters who were used by God. All these aspects are diminished in rigid distinctions between old and new.

**Importance of the Old**

Another benefit of the Old Testament is that it is a story of a community who at times were faithful and honored their commitment to God, and at other times failed in this same pursuit. This is relevant in understanding the mixed ‘outcomes’ of the church today. Additionally, the stories of individuals like David, Esther, Ruth and Nehemiah offer hope and inspiration for today’s believer. Their lives show that God has a plan, that He forgives and that He uses ordinary people to accomplish His perfect plan. There is much material to be effectively preached and heard amongst such stories! ‘Given that portions of the Old Testament are polemical (opposing certain situations), better understanding the situations of God’s people being confronted will aid in understanding it’s authoritative truth.’

Most significantly, it is in hearing and understanding the authoritative truth of the whole of Scripture that might effectively bring about unification and the simplification of the gospel message – both key motivators behind the Stone-Campbell Movement.

**Voices for the Old Testament Today**

Where influential ‘voices’ such as Gowan, Brueggeman and Goldsworthy identify the difficulties associated with communicating God’s Word as revealed in the Old Testament, this should not be a reason for avoidance.

As Jacob’s nocturnal struggle with God is analogous of the wrestle of God’s people, it is also an analogy of the ‘wrestling’ with the things of God – that is a crucial aspect of the Christian journey and includes the difficulties to be found in the Old Testament. Churches of Christ seems to have embraced this ‘wrestle’ as a denomination, evident in the numerous writings on issues by figures such as Gordon Stirling and E.L. Williams.

Yet this struggle to understand has another side. For myself, from my early days as a Sunday School attendee to a middle-aged churchgoer today, stories of Samson’s fatal flaw and sacrifice, the courage of Esther
as she confronted the Persian King, the thrilling test for Gideon, the brutality of Jael and the tent-peg, the grace shown by David to Mephibosheth—just to name a few—cause me to struggle to find the Old Testament boring!

**CONCLUSION**

The Churches of Christ denomination places high value on the Bible. In the movement’s efforts to restore and unite the global Church, and return to the basics of the faith, the emphasis on the New Testament is prominent. There are a wide range of perceptions of the Old Testament – sometimes as useful but inferior, to irrelevant and useless. This wrestle with the biblical canon has roots in the early church days and it is possible that some of these views have influenced Restoration thinking. It is also apparent that there are a variety of voices within the contemporary Stone-Campbell Movement encourage a fresh look at the value of the Old Testament.

For the Churches of Christ in Australia, I recommend strong consideration is given to the Old Testament in preaching and Christian thought. In particular, the value of the Old Testament’s contribution to the story and work of Christ; the depth of understanding of key themes and concepts such as sacrifice and covenant; the capacity for today’s Christian to draw strength from the characters used by God to achieve His purposes; as well as the role played in the unfolding revelation of God’s restorative purpose for the church. All this suggests that embracing the Old Testament is a worthwhile wrestle!

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ENDNOTES
[5] Thomas Campbell, Declaration and Address, 4. See also Gary Holloway’s discussion of Thomas Campbell’s work. Holloway argues that the common saying which originated with Campbell, ‘Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible
is silent, we are silent,’ was closely aligned with the search for restoration. Holloway, ‘Restoration, Unity, and Freedom,’ 169.

[14] Some prefer ‘angel.’ Nevertheless, it is clear he has struggled with the Divine, and the meaning of the name he receives confirms that he has encountered God in a unique way.
ELASTICITY OF CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

Stephen Curkpatrick

Whoever seeks to secure life will lose it …
whoever loses life … will gain it

(1) Identity, loss of loss, Christology and formation

What conditions give the possibility of pliable identity that is sustained through change? Following Hegel, identity is inherently differential in its determination within a movement of encounter, contradiction, assimilation and growth. Identity is elastic, always changing as already mediated by immanent relation with what it is not—by analogy, as the determination left is inhabited by right, yellow by blue or some other colour etc.—identity is, because it is not. Immanent differentiation within human identity invokes dialectical moments of negation (contradiction) and double negation (assimilation) in a movement of elevation (sublation). Accordingly, gain emerges from loss—so experience and finer determinations of identity within encounter and relation. Sublation is a moment of becoming as a dialectical mediation of contradiction (alien) and assimilation (integrated) in incremental change that is intrinsic to formation—in education, maturation and competency—so elasticity of identity and growth in the capacity for relationality and empathy. (With reference to Hegel)

According to the gospels, a certain divestment or loss is gain; there is nothing to lose but a perception of loss—yet real loss necessarily prefaces loss as gain; loss of loss is losing the fear of loss. These dynamics are christological: God relinquishes presumed inviolability as kenotic and is paradoxical in disclosure by divestment within the theological scandal of Christ crucified (loss) that prefaces superlative creativity and gift. Christology represents a radical new possibility for
human subjectivity—as the formation of specifically Christian identity through loss and gain that correlates with death and resurrection. Losing the fear of loss is a freedom to reinterpret perceptions of loss within life. Loss of loss is non-grasping at identity, especially by tribal determinations; human freedom is open to new mediations of self and therefore relationality, with space for (re)formation within the most adventurous narrative of human existence—the unnerving venture of loss (negation) and gain (double negation) in (trans)formation. This impetus is pervasive in Hegel.

By reference to Hegel and Hegel's interpreters, the following aphoristic sequences present (2) tribal scenarios of presumed gain that is loss, (3) peculiar loss that is gain, (4) though recognized retrospectively, even as (5) the truth of predication in dialectical moments and movement is a dynamic site of (6) creativity in (7) continual formation within the elasticity of Christian identity and so human possibility.

(2) Tribal gain without loss
Contrary to asserting and presumably securing determined identity, identity assertion is already implicated in differentiation. Hegel posits identity as identity and non-identity by negation and relation: any entity is by reference to its negation—a is, because there is non-a, so b, c, d, etc.; recognizing this inherent differentiation within identity is also the possibility of relation—that a relates to non-a within self-reflexive determinations of identity. This evaluation contrasts with assertions of identity that demand tribal immunity from any possible negation—a is only a; therefore b, c, d represent potential threat. Tribally, a is invariably amplified to A.

(2.1) Identity politics and identity reticence
In making an appeal for the inviolability of any tribal identity, identity politics presumably promotes mutual toleration and affirmation of all tribal entities. Yet any tribal assertion of immunity from critique concerning its valuations and practices effectively isolates that tribe from all other tribes and any recognition of our fragile, anxious and invariably fractured humanity. With each tribe claiming priority marginal status and invoking political privilege as imperative, identity politics generates an unexpected nemesis—resentment, even open antagonism.
A paradoxical principle of identity reticence and so continuity with all humanity is here necessary. Christian testimony to fractured human existence, so incomplete identity, articulates the perennial elusiveness of wholly integrated identity, which contemporary identity politics presumes to establish. Contrary to any privileged claim to inviolable tribal identity, this theological recognition is a prerequisite for reticence in tribal assertion. By contrast to the multiplication of tribal identities, each competing for exclusive regard as intrinsic to particular identity, our fractured humanity is potentially kenotic as intentionally self-deferring. This is Christian, following Paul’s rejection of any privileged claim to tribal identity—as neither Jew nor Greek (Žižek). Conferred and received as a gift, identity exhibited within generous self-deference for others is a specifically Christian perspective.

(2.2) Contradiction: with or without formation?
In assertion of identity, negation is immanent within identity (a implies non-a). (Hegel) Derrida suggests that identity is deconstructed, negated by what it excludes in assertion—for example, in assertion of white by exclusion of black, white is nevertheless already defined by black; in deconstructing identity, the derivative entity becomes visible. Tribal assertion exhibits the response of a derivative identity subsequently reversing and repeating the same oppositional posture—therefore invoking negation (deconstruction) without self-reflexive double negation (sublation). Hegel's dialectic of negation and double negation exhibits identity as also non-identity, so movement and growth by contradiction, recognition, assimilation (change) and empathy.

(2.3) Human dignity and identity politics
Desire for integral human dignity as meaningful work, health, education, belonging, positive relationships, recognition and freedom is perennial. Yet this common concept of human dignity has paradoxically, been displaced by contemporary identity politics to the detriment of dignity applicable to all. Consequently, nothing can be critiqued. Any common concept of human dignity is invariably scuttled; if one tribe can decline such dignity, so can another. In Paul’s neither Jew nor Greek, so non-tribal identity, all are equal as to humanity in Christ (Žižek). The realization
of a common concept of universal human dignity was made possible through such Christian influences.

(3) Question and answer, loss and gain

The sustained question concerning human identity (What are we?) implies a substantive answer. Yet every instance of announcing it (We are this!), eventually lapses (as not this either). Presumed substantiations of identity are invariably negated—so precipitating continual crises of seeking identity (Are we this?). The perennial differential between question and answer is crucial to human life as dynamic not static. (Hegel) We do not need to answer the unanswerable identity question (Who are we?). Paradoxically, distinctive identity is received as also pliable in continual transformation by loss and gain within the difference between recurring question and elusive answer.

(3.1) “I am not this either”

Within a sustained encounter with a particular focus as to life's meaning—whether religious, political or traditional—a person may finally respond, “I am not this”; what I am is something else. This can occur several times in a lifetime. Every pursuit of identity in something else—as a modification, supplement or new choice—is eventually recognized too as inadequate. Within every person is a tacit void that is expressed in conceding, “I am not this either”.

Inasmuch as a symbolic order is invested so as to bind or stabilize a composite identity, this is never wholly encompassed by a particular symbolic reality. (Lacan) Crisis occurs in recognizing that identity inscribed in any symbolic reality is finally “not this”.

Recognition—that I am “not this” is an implicit critique of any focus by which I can say, “I am this”.

Within Christian messaging concerning humanity, an essential identity cannot be secured, for human identity is either elusive as continually deferred or clearly fractured. Within Christian faith, my identity is no longer sought, for the human reality of being fractured as consciously “not this”, is intrinsic to specifically Christian identity received as gift. (With reference to Žižek)
(3.2) Loss within peculiar relationality
Force is exhibited by counter-pressure; it is relative to and sustained by resistance. If force prevails, movement occurs; without resistance, force is converted into change, ceasing to be force. Force is a moment mediated by resistance. Force and resistance are dialectically interactive; each is implicated in the other. Actual force is only sustained by not prevailing over resistance. (With reference to Hegel) What implications emerge in identity being mediated dialectically—quintessentially through a peculiar resistance within relation as by experiencing visceral loss in turning the other cheek and by vulnerable relationality with an antagonist (love for enemies)?

(3.3) Identity mediated through loss
What is lost in losing life is a particular grasp on presumed identity that is always already contested. Re-cognizing loss prefaces gain in going beyond self-determination to engage the mediation of loss by reconciliation with the elasticity of human identity—so self-reflexive pliability in personal formation. (With reference to Hegel)

*The next instalment of ‘Elasticity of Christian Identity’ will appear in reo 2019:1*

This article was previously published in Suci Iman Akademis Dan Praktis: Jurnal Teologi, 7.1 (2018); with acknowledgement to Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Jemaat Kristus Indonesia.

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reo is a journal of Stirling Theological College that has been in publication since 1995 and transitioned to an online publication in 2018.

Currently edited by Sarah Bacaller and Sam Curkpatrick, with Stephen Curkpatrick as consulting editor, the journal seeks to foster thoughtful engagement with questions of Christian identity and human experience. reo is specifically designed to encourage students to undertake the venture and discipline of research with a view to publishing.

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2019 Submission policy will be available online at reojournal.com in early 2019.
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