

Herman Teule

Abstract: In the Middle Eastern societies, Christians traditionally define themselves as religious communities or churches. This is a continuation of the Ottoman millet system, where religion determined the place one had in society and the patriarch was responsible for the insertion of his community into the state. It not only preserves the traditional ecclesiastical divisions based on dogmatic divergences and church politics but also transposes them to the political field. For a few decades, many lay politicians in Syria considered this system as detrimental to Christian interests. They developed the idea of a common ethnic identity for all churches using Syriac. New political circumstances in Iraq made it possible to give a political translation of this idea by the creation of Christian political parties, defending common ethnic minority rights. Despite some positive results, attempts at creating unity failed, not only because a lack of unanimity about certain political choices but also about the idea of ethnic identity itself.

Chandra Mallampalli

Abstract: Since 1950, the Government of India has maintained its policy of denying affirmative-action benefits to Dalit converts to Christianity. Debates about Dalit Christian reservations are most often centered on contemporary political trends. Far less attention is paid to developments during the colonial period, when sharp differences between religious 'communities' were formulated as policy. As much as the colonial state attempted to grapple with ethnographic realities on the ground, it ultimately embraced an idealized notion of a 'casteless Native Christian community'. Against massive data that revealed the persistence of caste among converts, this idea of casteless Christianity was readily appropriated by the postcolonial state, which has been all too eager to use it as the basis for denying affirmative action to Dalit Christians. Dalit Christians seeking a change to this policy must therefore grapple with the past, by refuting assumptions embedded in nineteenth-century missionary rhetoric and state policies.

Shanthini Pillai & Bernardo E Brown

Abstract: This article examines the emergence of the Catholic Church in Malaysia and Singapore in the modern period through an exploration of the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Siam (1841–1888). The establishment of this Catholic institution—a temporary territorial jurisdiction in missionary regions that precedes the creation of new dioceses—was key to advancing the transition of the Church from its older colonial model towards a modern national Church. Focusing on the work conducted by French missionaries of the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) over these five decades, we analyze the process of developing a local clergy and setting up the socio-cultural scaffolding of the contemporary Catholic Church in the Malay Peninsula. We pay special attention to how MEP missionaries skilfully navigated their missionary activities through encounters with Malay rulers and British colonial officers to secure the creation of a Catholic elite independent of the Portuguese Padroado. Our argument suggests that the apostolic vicariate and the dynamism of the French MEP missionaries in colonial Malaya opened up the pathway for the rise of the ethnic Catholic elites in modern-day Malaysia and Singapore.

Namrata Chaturvedi

Abstract: This paper focuses on exploring dhvani as a hermeneutical tool for reading Christian devotional literature. Dhvani is a theory of poetic suggestion proposed by

Ānandavardhana in the eighth century and elaborated upon by Abhinavagupta in the eleventh century that posits layers of semantics in poetic language. By focusing on the devotional poetry of the seventeenth-century religious poets of England, this paper argues for Ānandavardhana's proposed poetics of suggestion as an enabling way of reading and cognizing devotion as a psycho emotive process. In the context of Indian Christianity, dhvani has been suggested by certain scholars as also enriching the possibilities of interfaith dialogue. This paper argues for incorporating poetic frameworks like dhvani as modes of interfaith dialogue, especially when reading Christian texts in India.

Jude Lal Fernando

Abstract: The aim of this article is to identify the glimpses of prophetic imagination amongst the Christian communities in Asia, particularly in Korea and Japan, who are engaged in resisting the new round of militarization in the twenty-first century. This resistance denounces the globalist security complex in the region and announces a nonmilitaristic alternative forming a praxis that is necessary for a new theology of peace in East Asia and in Asia broadly. The political reality of the new round of military empire-building will be discussed with a personal narrative and a political analysis after which the theological meaning of prophetic imagination as opposed to imperial consciousness will be analyzed, correlating the personal and political with the theological. The ways in which the resistance to militarization resonates with the prophetic imagination of an alternative consciousness and community will be examined through an analysis of memories and renunciation of war by the churches. Broad implications of these resonances for a peace theology in Asia will be identified.

John Clammer

Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between the transmission of religion (specifically Christianity) and not texts but visual images, in this instance as embodied in Christian art. The paper is not an exercise in art history as such but an attempt to build a model of the multiple effects of the reception of a new visual culture on a range of cultural dimensions, and in particular the ways in which the new visual discourse transforms ideas about the self, the body, nature, and a wide range of other significant elements of culture. The paper explores the ways in which Christian art transformed subjectivities across wide areas of Asia and contributed in a major way to the establishment of what has become known as modernity. It argues that processes of religious conversion are not only cognitive but also involve the internalization of new forms of representation, ritual, clothing, and other forms of material culture. Studies of the transmission of Buddhism in Asia have suggested that this artistic and material dimension is critical, and the paper raises the question as to what extent the same can be said about the transmission and reception of Christianity. The paper also makes methodological suggestions about fresh ways of linking art history to the analysis of cultural change, especially as it relates to questions of religious transformation.

Andang Binwan

Abstract: Blasphemy charges against Ahok (BasukiTjahajaPurnama), as he contested Jakarta's gubernatorial election, turned into a test of how successful Islamic hardliners can be in exercising influence on the moderate Muslim majority. Ahok was the first Chinese Christian governor of Jakarta in the contemporary times enjoying immense popularity. His

political rivals, who are a group of extreme Muslims, exploited religious sentiment to win the election. This governor election, then, seemingly became a battle between the moderate majority, who mostly support Ahok, and the hardliners, who are clearly outnumbered. This case points to the emergence of an iceberg appearing from the Islamic movement, some seventy years after the political independence of Indonesia. Though it does not indicate whether Indonesia will in the near future become an Islamic state, it is clear that the pendulum is swinging from the middle to the right. Responding to this recent development, minorities, especially Christians including Catholics, should redefine their place in Indonesia.

Julius Bautista

Abstract: The topic of this paper is the dynamics of clerical and public attitudes pertaining to the continued performance of Passion rituals of self-mortification among Roman Catholics in the Philippines. I examine discourses of official clerical disavowal of Passion rituals as well as the seemingly contrasting attitudes of accommodation and tacit encouragement from clerics 'on the ground'. I argue that the diversity of perspectives on Passion rituals are not contradictions per se, but they are facets of the theological notion of inculturation, which espouses cultural porosity and diversity as elements of spiritual formation. In so doing, I discuss how scholars can come to a better appreciation of the analytical utility of inculturation by pursuing the disciplinary convergence between theology and anthropology. I submit that this anthro-theology does not only involve anthropologists expanding their conceptual range to include theological concepts but also making adjustments to the way we think about the epistemological subject positions of clerics and theologians, particularly as they are encountered in the process of ethnographic fieldwork.