



RELIGION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

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"Mipela/We Are" by Michael Quang Nguyen, SVD

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EDITOR'S COLUMN

An Eclectic Research Agenda for Asia

As this issue marks the beginning of the next term for the Journal's Editorial Board, we wish to acknowledge the significant contributions of our members and express our profound gratitude for their invaluable input in guiding the development of the Journal.

We especially extend our sincere thanks to members who have just finished the previous term on the Editorial Board. They are Dr. Gerhold K. Becker, Dr. Paulin Batairwa Kubuya, Dr. Duc Loc Nguyen, Dr. Angela Ann Zukowski, and Dr. Preciosa de Joya. Their dedication and contributions have been instrumental in shaping the direction and quality of the Journal. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with them and welcoming new members to the Editorial Board as we strive to maintain the Journal's commitment to excellence and innovation in scholarly publishing.

Thus, in addition to the existing board members, we have the honor, in this issue, to extend a warm welcome to new members. Firstly, Dr. Keval J. Kumar, an Adjunct Professor at Mudra Institute of Communications, Ahmedabad, India. Formerly, he held the positions of Reader and Chair at Pune University's Department of Communication and Journalism, Professor and Director at Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication (SIMC), and Senior Lecturer in English at Parle College, Mumbai. He has also taught at Ohio State University, Siegen University, Jacobs University Bremen, and Bahrain Technical Institute. Dr. Kumar's research interests encompass communication theory, media education, cultural studies, political communication, and religious communication.

Secondly, Dr. Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology at Saint John's University School of Theology and Seminary in Collegeville, Minnesota, USA. Her published works include: "Evangelization and Catechesis" (2017), "Connected Toward

Communion: The Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age” (2014), and “Daily Prayer” (2013).

The third new member of the Editorial Board is Dr. Phramaha Chakrapol Acharashubho Thepa, an instructor specializing in Buddhist Philosophy at the Faculty of Religion and Philosophy, Mahamakut Buddhist University, Thailand. He is an expert in contemporary Buddhist philosophy, Indianology, Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Buddhology, and meditation, with numerous published articles on these topics.

The fourth new member is Dr. Chaiwat Meesanthan, currently the Director of the Institute of East Asian Studies, Thammasat University, Thailand, and Assistant Professor of Southeast Asian Studies at L’Arts-TU: The Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University.

Fifth is Dr. Roderick Evans M. Bartolome, a faculty member at Far Eastern University, Philippines, where he teaches Communication core subjects, Integrated Marketing Communications, Development Communication, and Thesis Writing classes for the Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Master of Arts in Communication programs.

The sixth addition to the Editorial Board is Dr. Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, currently teaching Post Graduate Studies at the State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN), Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. His research interests include Anthropology of Islamic Culture; Sociology of Religion; Islamic Studies; Islamic Politics in Indonesia and Malaysia; Sufism and Mysticism; Islam in Southeast Asia; Islamic Movement in Southeast Asia; Malay World; and Societies and Cultures of Aceh (Indonesia).

Finally, we welcome Dr. Michael Quang Nguyen, SVD, currently serving as Dean of Studies at Good Shepherd Seminary in Mt. Hagen, Papua New Guinea. Additionally, he teaches Scriptures, Theology, and Anthropology at the Seminary. As a missiologist, he is particularly interested in contextual theology from the Vietnamese perspective.

The diverse expertise, religious affiliations, and cultural backgrounds of these esteemed scholars promise to enrich the breadth and depth of perspectives within our journal. With their varied areas of specialization spanning communication theory, pastoral theology, Buddhist philosophy, Southeast Asian studies, Islamic culture, and contextual theology, among others, our editorial board represents a vibrant mosaic of academic disciplines and cultural insights. In conjunction with our existing esteemed members, this new cohort on the editorial board will form a dynamic team representing a spectrum of expertise, religious beliefs, and cultural perspectives.

Together, they will synergize their knowledge and experiences to steer the journal towards greater academic excellence and inclusivity. Their diverse backgrounds, spanning various disciplines and global regions, will infuse our editorial deliberations with fresh insights and robust scholarly discourse. We anticipate that their collective wisdom will facilitate stimulating dialogues, innovative research, and nuanced understandings, thereby furthering the journal's commitment to promoting interdisciplinary and interreligious discourse and advancing scholarship, especially in the Asian milieu.

This issue rounds out the second installment of volume 22 of the Journal with another set of research articles that reflect an extremely eclectic research agenda, addressing subjects ranging from traditional religious beliefs to digital communication and the role of AI in modern education.

To begin with, Daniella Zsupan-Jerome delves into the intersection of spirituality and communication within the evolving digital landscape in her article "Spirituality of Communication as Foundation for a Missional Approach to Digital Culture." She advocates for a Christian spirituality of communication, emphasizing authentic relationality and proposing a framework for engaging with digital culture in a missional manner.

Moving on to Saw Than Htut Lynn's exploration titled "Embracing Peace Education for Interreligious Awareness in Myanmar: A Case Study of the Judson Research Center," the focus shifts to peace education in Myanmar, where religious conflict persists. Lynn empha-

sizes the importance of interreligious awareness in peacebuilding, drawing from qualitative case studies conducted at the Judson Research Center.

Turning to “Examining Cases Involving Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Philippines” by Kurt Zeus L. Dizon, attention is directed towards the legal challenges faced by Jehovah’s Witnesses (JW) in the Philippines. Dizon analyzes key cases involving JW members, shedding light on the delicate balance between religious freedom and state authority in Philippine jurisprudence.

Next, Benya Lertsuwan and colleagues investigate the transition to web-based education during the pandemic in “A Case Study of Web-Based Communication for Online Teaching and Learning at a Christian University in Buddhist Thailand.” Their study identifies obstacles to effective online learning and teaching, offering insights to navigate digital education post-pandemic.

Shifting focus to “AI in the Academe: Opportunities and Challenges for Religious Education” by Ocampo and Gozum, the authors explore the impact of AI on religious education. They analyze the potential of AI integration in academia while addressing associated challenges and opportunities.

In “Christian Witness and Proclamation through Migration” by vãnThanh Nguyễn, SVD, the spotlight falls on migration’s impact on evangelism. Nguyễn examines how Christian immigrants serve as potential missionaries, enriching host countries’ theology and spirituality while reshaping global perceptions of Christianity.

Moving on to “Sorcery and Witchcraft: A Critical Challenge in Papua New Guinea” by Tuan Viet Cao, the discussion shifts to the persistent issues of sorcery and witchcraft in PNG. Cao highlights the grave consequences of these beliefs and advocates for government and organizational efforts grounded in Christian values to combat these challenges.

Finally, in Brandon Cadingpal’s “*Kasiyana* as Religious Communication among the Kankanaeys in the Philippines,” the focus

returns to indigenous belief systems. Cadingpal explores how *Kasiyana* reflects the Kankanaeys' belief in the divine and serves as a form of religious communication, aligning with Christian teachings.

This set of research articles presents a diverse array of topics, reflecting the multifaceted nature of academic discourse today, especially in the Asian context where the traditional and the modern co-exist in conspicuous ways across its rich landscape. From examining the impact of AI in education to exploring religious beliefs and practices in various cultural contexts, these articles encompass a wide range of subjects that are relevant and timely in today's academic landscape. The inclusion of articles on AI in education and digital communication reflects the increasing integration of technology into various aspects of society, including academia. With the rapid advancements in AI technology, understanding its implications on education and social systems is crucial for educators, policymakers, and researchers alike.

On the other hand, the articles discussing religious beliefs and practices offer insights into the cultural diversity and complexity of religious phenomena. From examining sorcery and witchcraft in Papua New Guinea to exploring religious communication among the Kankanaeys in the Philippines, these articles shed light on how religious traditions intersect with contemporary issues and shape individuals' lives and societies. Other articles in this issue highlight the need for ongoing dialogue among religions and between religion with other secular institutions in order to promote social and religious harmony in Asia. We hope that the research presented in this issue underscores the need to continue delving into pressing subject matters of great relevance to Asian society, contributing to advancing knowledge and understanding in their respective fields.

Anthony Le Duc, SVD
Chief Editor

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Spirituality of Communication as Foundation for a Missional Approach to Digital Culture

*Daniella Zsupan-Jerome*¹

ABSTRACT

The article seeks to make the case for a Christian spirituality of communication, one that especially addresses the communicative and interpersonal dynamics in digital culture and strives to elevate these toward a disposition of authentic relationality. From this foundation in a Christian spirituality of communication, the article proposes several key theological characteristics as fundamental for a missional approach to digital culture, including revelation, incarnation, communion, truth in context, and announcing hope. The article concludes by proposing a framework for a lived, missional spirituality expressing each of these in the digital context. Living out of this framework offers digital culture greater potential toward human flourishing as a whole.

Keywords: *Christian spirituality, digital culture, theology of communication, relationality, mission and evangelization*

¹ **Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, Ph.D.** is assistant professor of pastoral theology at Saint John's University School of Theology and Seminary in Collegeville, Minnesota, USA.

1. Introduction

I really used to love it here.

It felt like a place where I could learn anything, where I could meet anybody. As a kid who hid from bullies and teachers by reading paperbacks all day, the internet felt like an infinite book. Except electric. And so, more exciting. And then, later, even on the social media internet, I was sure I was in a place where I could learn. Provided I was smart, if I was discerning, if I knew how to read it.

This is a conversation about what you do if you're not convinced that's true anymore.²

The internet as a cultural context is evolving once again. Though never a context that was set in stone, present social commentary, such as that of podcaster PJ Vogt above suggests that we are entering an era of critical caution, disillusionment, and even techlash, or backlash against the perceived ethical corruption in the technology industry.³ Once celebrated as a context of global connectivity, this techno-optimism has now subsided and given way to a resistance and refusal of “tech’s dominance of everyday life, particularly the godlike algorithms – their true calculus still proprietary – that rule all digital existence.”⁴ Social commentators like Ezra Klein

² PJ Vogt, “How Do I Use the Internet Now,” The Search Engine with PJ Vogt, October 20, 2023, <https://pjavogt.substack.com/p/how-do-i-use-the-internet-now>.

³ Emma Goldberg, “The Campus ‘Techlash’: [Style Desk],” *New York Times*, Jan 12, 2020, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/campus-techlash/docview/2335780291/se-2>.

⁴ Ross Barkan, “The Zeitgeist is Changing: A Strange Romantic Backlash to the Tech Era Looms,” *The Guardian*, Dec 28, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/dec/28/new-romanticism-technology-backlash>

increasingly point to the need for the retrieval of our sense of agency and intentionality when navigating the digital medium.⁵

In the context of this emerging cultural resistance, Ross Barkan points to a growth in spirituality, loosely termed, and inclusive of interest in astrology, witchcraft, magic, and manifestation. According to Barkan, “online life has catalyzed this spirituality more, with teenage TikTok occultists and ‘manifesting’ influencers racking up even more followers.”⁶ While losing optimism and the trust that once was in the possibility of digital spaces, such influencers are exhibiting a turn toward the spiritual, to transcendence as resistance to the power of the algorithms. Here we see a kind of regard for transcendence, but deeply infused with desire for power and control, implicitly reclaimed from the power of the algorithm.

Tara Isabella Burton cements the connection between the growth of such online esoteric practices and tech culture even more firmly when she explores the origins of digital culture in Silicon Valley tech industry. Burton describes the origins of Silicon Valley culture as follows:

Steeped in mid-20th-century counterculture, the futurists, technologists and inventors who would come to shape Silicon Valley culture shared with their Hermetic forebears an optimistic vision of human self-transcendence through technology. Freed of our biological and geographic constraints, and of repressive social expectations, we could make of cyberspace a new libertarian Jerusalem... Freed of bodily constraints and geographic limitations, the internet could help us at last achieve the magical dream of transcendence.⁷

⁵ Ezra Klein, “The Medium really is the Message,” *New York Times*, Aug 14, 2022, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/medium-really-is-message/docview/2701646322/se-2>.

⁶ Barkan, “The Zeitgeist is Changing.”

⁷ Tara Isabella Burton, “Of Memes and Magick,” *Aeon*, December 14, 2023, https://aeon.co/essays/how-the-internet-became-the-modern-purveyor-of-ancient-magic?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

Burton connects the ethos of Silicon Valley culture to transcendence, becoming as close to the divine as possible, though through increasingly evolving technological progress.⁸ Here too, there is an element of control as integral to technology, and its power to transcend human limitations. For broader culture, inclusive of those not necessarily espousing such transhumanist ideals, the digital experience has still thrust us into such a space where we continually experience the reach beyond our human limitations. Our ability to communicate instantaneously across physical, temporal, and linguistic barriers is one such experience. Our immediate access to unfathomable amounts of information is another. Whether consciously or not, we are living in moments of transcendence where we are experiencing connectivity beyond our natural human limitations. Faced with transcendence, how might we make meaning, and do so in a way that is generative, creative, life-giving, and in the spirit of neighborliness, living well with others in digital spaces? This becomes a timely and relevant question especially from the perspective of faith.

1.1. Seeking a Missional Approach

As “Towards Full Presence,” the 2023 document from the Vatican’s Dicastery for Communication asserts, we are living at a time when “many Christians are asking for inspiration and guidance since [the advent of] social media, which is one expression of digital culture.”⁹ Many people are driven by a missional intent behind this desire, seeking guidance on how to be present and how to encounter others as persons of faith in these public fora. Especially among those in ministerial leadership, there is a persistent question around how to engage in digital culture in a missional way. The desire for a sort of spirituality and transcendence discernible in digital culture offers a concrete opportunity for Christians with a missional intent to engage more intentionally with digital culture around these questions. In this way, interest in spiritual and transcendent realities in digital culture is a convergence point and an opportunity for sharing faith. At the same

⁸ Burton, “Of Memes and Magick.”

⁹ Dicastery for Communication, “Towards Full Presence: A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with SocialMedia,” May 27, 2023, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/dpc/documents/20230528_dpc-verso-piena-presenza_en.html, no. 2.

time, exploring the interest in spirituality and transcendence as a convergence point also calls Christians to discern their aims and methods for missional engagement.

Identifying spiritual or transcendent realities at the core of the profound questions of digital culture is not new. Nearly a decade ago, Sherry Turkle grappled with these deeper questions in *Reclaiming Conversation* (2015), noting the value of authentic self-reflection as essential for meaning making, and how digital culture might compromise or constrain this:

So now consider David, forty-seven, a television producer. “Putting on my earbuds and getting into my iPhone world is my Zen. That’s my retreat.” David says that cycling through his apps is his time for self-reflection: “You flip between your music, your news, your entertainment, your people. You control it. You own it. That’s my zone.” Here the definition of self-reflection has narrowed: it means control over your connections. We’ve seen this before, solitude defined as time with a managed crowd.¹⁰

David’s use of spiritual language for his iPhone experience (i.e., retreat and Zen), along with his desire for control, resonates with the more recent TikTok trend in esoteric practices, magic, and manifestation highlighted by Barkan and Burton. In both cases, we observe a desire to gain control through the transcendent potential of the online or digital experience. Ultimately, both phenomena find their roots in the transhumanist vision of Silicon Valley, as recalled by Burton: transcendence of human limitations through technological progress.

Spiritual practices as connected with online life are likewise not new. Though the digital space affords great access for seekers to spirituality resources, Heidi Campbell and Wendi Bellar also note the impact of convergent practice and the pursuit of self-directed spiritua-

¹⁰ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 85-86.

lity as typical of digital culture.¹¹ Self-directed spirituality emerges out of a multisite experience of “bridging, blending and blurring” embodied and technological experiences, and pursuing meaning making through this in a way apart from the traditional frameworks of religious institutions.¹² Digital culture’s low barriers enable broad access to a vast array of resources and practices, while also offering a space in which to engage and experiment with this as motivated by one’s own interests. Self-directed spirituality, following from the broader historical movement of the twentieth century away from traditional institutional religion toward individualized, lived religion, has found a fertile context in digital culture.¹³ In digital spaces, seekers claim creative freedom and great flexibility to piece together for themselves a personally meaningful devotional reservoir, as well as a space and platform for unique spiritual self-expression.

Self-directed spirituality, self-transcendence, and interest in power and control through magic and manifestation are well beyond the framework of a Christian approach to spirituality. Yet, the current instinct to turn to the transcendent as a critical response to digital culture is at the same time notable. From the perspective of shaping a Christian missional engagement with digital culture, this turn to the transcendent might present a *semen Verbi*, an opportunity from within culture to find convergence points with the Gospel.¹⁴ More broadly than missional practice, the focus on transcendence and spirituality underscores anew the crucial work for theology to continue to engage with digital culture. In this vein, theologian Philip Sheldrake has raised critical questions regarding spirituality and cyberspace. From a spiritual perspective, he notes the transcendence of physical limits as

¹¹ Heidi Campbell and Wendi Bellar, *Digital Religion: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 60-61.

¹² Campbell and Bellar, *Digital Religion*, 61.

¹³ Campbell and Bellar, *Digital Religion*, 80.

¹⁴ Pontifical Council for Culture. “Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture,” June 3, 1999. “The proclamation of Christ «who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of the Revelation» (Ibid.), highlights the *semina Verbi* hidden and sometimes buried in the heart of cultures, and opens them to the infinite capacity He creates and which He fills gradually with the marvelous condescension of eternal wisdom (cf. Dei Verbum, 13), transforming their search for meaning into a quest for transcendence, and these stepping-stones into moorings for the acceptance of the Gospel.” (4)

one of the most challenging limits of the digital experience, especially as this bypasses the essential embodied human experience.¹⁵ Pastoral scholar Kirk Bingaman has likewise called for an even deeper engagement with questions of spirituality as a necessary way to navigate digital culture: “we are learning from contemplative neuroscience that it is spiritual practice more than anything else that has the potential to keep the human brain focused in the midst of the digital tsunami.”¹⁶

This essay aims to elevate this turn to the transcendent in contemporary digital culture and frame it as a missional opportunity for the Christian. Eschewing a proclamatory approach, this missional opportunity is instead built on identifying common digital experiences, and envisioning ways forward that yield a culture of neighborliness inclusive of fostering peaceful, meaningful, and caring relationships through the Christian’s presence in digital environments.¹⁷ Toward this, it is helpful to articulate a specifically Christian spirituality for digital culture, one that responds to the quest for transcendence through emphasis on communication as relational act. “Who is my neighbor?” is a guiding question for this approach.¹⁸ In this vein, while drawing from the Christian spiritual tradition, this approach is also intentional about presenting a spirituality of communication that resists the self-focused desire inherent both to tech’s transhumanist roots and esoteric trends we now observe. Instead, a Christian spirituality of communication for digital culture is a turn to the transcendent toward more authentic human connection and development.

1.2. An Approach Built on the Spirituality of Communication

From a Christian missional perspective, there exists a fundamental connection between spirituality, relationship, and

¹⁵ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History*. 2nd Edition (Newark: Wiley and Sons, 2013), 111-112.

¹⁶ Kirk Bingaman. *Pastoral and Spiritual Care in a Digital Age: The Future is Now* (New York, Lexington, 2018), 94.

¹⁷ “Towards Full Presence,” no. 5.

¹⁸ “Towards Full Presence,” no.5

communication.¹⁹ While other areas of theology continue to offer valuable reflection especially on the moral, ethical, and even pastoral challenges of the digital context, Christian spirituality offers another entry point that is de-facto relational, and thus offers invaluable wisdom toward the practice of communication. This relational focus resonates especially well with the act of communication, as well as the potential to form authentic relationships and communities. These elements are integral to human flourishing, especially in the digital context.

Spirituality in the Christian tradition is the human capacity toward transcendence and ultimate value, coupled with a deliberate way of living.²⁰ Transcendence and ultimate value is relationship with God, more specifically God's self-gift to us and our human response to that of faith. Already, spirituality is thus an experience of communication: that of encountering, receiving, and listening to the Divine Word, and offering one's own word of faith in response. From this, an intimate, life-giving relationship grows and expands onto one's experience of relating with self and others as well. Spirituality in this sense infuses one's ability to relate: to offer hospitality to the Word, to listen, to express authenticity and truth, and to be able to make a gift of oneself to others in the image of God's self-gift offered to us. Significantly, these expressions of spirituality and of relating well are also communicative acts. And these communicative acts, rooted in a relational spirituality, could shape the ethos of digital culture toward greater flourishing therein for all.

¹⁹ Kathleen D. Clark, "Communicating as Though Connected: Conceptualizing Christian Contemplative Conversation." *Journal of Communication & Religion* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 40–54; H.L. Goodall Jr., "Mysteries of the Future Told: Communication as the Material Manifestation of Spirituality," *World Communication* 22, no. 2 (December 1993): 40; John Hochheimer, "Imagination and the Life Force: Toward a Theoretical Foundation for Spirituality and Communication." *Conference Papers -- National Communication Association*, January 2009, 1; East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI), "Theological Foundations of a Christian Spirituality for Communicators," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 18, no. 1 (January 1981): 72-79.

²⁰ Sandra Schneiders, "Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality," *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2005), 15-33, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csbsju/detail.action?docID=4041994>. 16.

Toward articulating a spirituality of communication for digital culture, this essay builds on the fundamental connection between spirituality, relationship, and communication. In digital culture, intentional communication practices that are spiritually rooted can express transcendent meaning and make significant impact in and through the basics of human relationships. How we encounter and engage one another in digital spaces, through for example listening or truthfulness, can express our ultimate values. Along these lines, the essay proposes a framework for a lived spirituality for digital culture that expresses core Christian themes of revelation, incarnation, communion, truthful context, and commitment to announcing hope. The potential for lived spirituality around these themes aims toward self-gift, authentic human connection, and a broader sense of flourishing for all. This approach ultimately guides the Christian missional impetus in digital culture toward building with others a more human and relational space.²¹

2. Spirituality and Communication: What is the Connection?

Spirituality is a large and ambiguous concept, especially when approached from a secular perspective. Broadly, it is a pursuit of meaning beyond oneself, a capacity toward transcendence and ultimate value.²² When the quest involves explicit reference to God, then spirituality takes on an intentionally religious expression. In this same vein, Christian spirituality is ultimate values perceived and pursued in the God disclosed in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit active and present in the community of the church.²³

According to Michael Downey, spirituality carries four strands or levels of meaning within it: 1) the spiritual dimension of any human being, 2) the human capacity to be in relation with another, others, and God, 3) formulation of insight about lived reality, and 4) the scholarly discipline that studies the experience of the spiritual life.²⁴ Among

²¹ "Towards Full Presence," no. 50.

²² Schneiders, "Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality," 16

²³ Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 32.

²⁴ Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 42

these, the first two strands or levels offer the implication that spirituality invites a person beyond themselves, opens a person up to more than what is inherent. While in secular approaches to spirituality, this beyond oneself or more is called ultimate meaning, in Christian spirituality, ultimate meaning is about encounter with the *person* of Jesus Christ, and thus takes on a relational dynamic. In our human capacity to seek ultimate meaning, the Christian encounters the divine through a call to relationship. This divine-human relationship then becomes both edifying for and transformative of the way we experience relating as a whole.

Christian spirituality explores the interior life but does not stop there. It encompasses lived experience – personal, interpersonal, and communal, and brings this lived experience into deep dialogue with ultimate meaning and value found in God. There is an integral relationality at the heart of Christian spirituality. In the pursuit of ultimate meaning and value, the human person enters a “relationship and communion” with God.²⁵ This sense of relationship and communion with God stems from the very being of God as Trinity. As noted by Philip Sheldrake, “Christian spirituality is intimately related to a specific understanding of God and God’s relationship to the world and to humanity. God is understood to be Trinity, a dynamic inter-relationship of ‘persons in communion.’”²⁶ In light of this, the Christian God is one who relates, whose “divine life overflows into an eternal dynamism of creativity.”²⁷ Building on a Trinitarian foundation, Downey asserts that Christian spirituality is fundamentally relational: “A Christian spirituality rooted in the mystery of the Trinity emphasizes community rather than individuality. The goal of the spiritual life entails perfection of one’s relationships with others, rather than an ever more pure gaze of the mind’s eye on some eternal truth ‘out there’ or in one’s interior life.”²⁸

²⁵ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 1992, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html, no. 45.

²⁶ Philip Sheldrake. *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology and Social Practice* (New York: Paulist, 2010), 11.

²⁷ Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality*, 11.

²⁸ Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 45.

3. Communication and Spirituality

Sandra Schneiders defines Christian spirituality as having “the horizon of ultimate value as the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ to whom Scripture normatively witnesses and whose life is communicated to the believer by the Holy Spirit making her or him a child of God.”²⁹ God communicating is integral to Christian spirituality, and this divine communication is both universal and personal. On a universal scale, divine communication is the fundamental theological thesis of divine revelation – the idea that God communicates Godself to humankind. God’s communication is self-communication; in revelation, “God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men.”³⁰ In other words, the Christian understanding of divine revelation is that it is a *relational act* of God, a gift of Godself to humankind, which also generates the *content or deposit of faith* out of this relational gesture.

God’s self-communication is also personal. Divine revelation addresses the human person dialogically; it is engagement that invites forth a response. The theological tradition calls the human person’s unique response to divine revelation *faith*. Claiming and expressing faith therefore is another communicative act, viewed through the dialogical lens of divine and human communication within the context of revelation.

In addition to recognizing revelation and faith as inherently communicative, communication also finds expression in the practice of prayer. Kathleen Clark proposes prayer as human-divine communication that has implications for faith but also for interpersonal communication.³¹ Casting prayer, an expression of spirituality, in communicative terms, Clarke proposes that expanding our model of communication can also broaden our spiritual attentiveness and

²⁹ Schneiders, “Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality,” 3.

³⁰ Pope Paul VI, *Dei Verbum*, 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, no. 6.

³¹ Clark, “Communicating as Though Connected,” 41.

deepen our spiritual experience.³² Clark reflects on spirituality as an experience of connectedness:

A wider angle of vision about communication with and by the connectivity of interbeing suggests that intentional practices can awaken our ability to communicate as though connected, understand that there is an invitation from that mystery, and we have the capacity to participate dialogically with it.³³

Along these lines, experiencing and expressing connectedness with nature, with others, and with the Divine is the basis of spirituality, and it is thoroughly communicative, both in how we enter into the mystery beckoning us, and how we engage and express our experience of the same mystery. Communication is integral to our life of spirit according to this vision.

Clark draws her observations especially from the context of spiritual direction as her ministerial practice. Diane Millis, another practitioner of spiritual direction, likewise assesses the spiritual life in communicative terms:

I believe that God is continually revealing God's self to us. This gift of God's communication occurs through every dimension of our lives. Therefore, it is possible for human communication with God to occur in and through the whole array of words, actions, objects, events and relationship in our daily life. Each and every moment of our lives invites us to appreciate and pay attention to this gift of revelation. This sacred Presence infuses all aspects of our lives and all of our conversations.³⁴

Millis labels conversation as a "sacred art" and encourages an attentiveness to mystery as a basic disposition to bring to everyday conversations. Conversation, a communicative activity, becomes a

³² Clark, "Communicating as Though Connected," 48.

³³ Clark, "Communicating as Though Connected," 49.

³⁴ Diane M. Millis, *Conversation, the Sacred Art: Practicing Presence in an Age of Distraction* (Woodstock, Vermont: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2013), xviii.

ground for spirituality, for connecting beyond oneself with greater meaning. Simply, “our conversations have the potential to nourish our souls.”³⁵

The dialogue between the study of communication and the study of spirituality can yield a number of salient directions, including exploring *communication about spirituality* as well as the *spiritual impact of communication*.³⁶ *Communication about spirituality* brings these two concepts into dialogue around the message or content. Spirituality emerges in the content of communication that is shared or expressed; the content of the message, in other words, is spiritual in theme. In the digital context, this kind of communication about spirituality finds expression in a myriad of ways – in the sharing of postings, videos, images, memes, audios, or the accompanying comment feed.

The intersection of communication and spirituality as content also raises some salient questions: What symbols, metaphors, and language forms make up spiritual self-expression in the digital context? Are any of these unique to the digital context? What do these language forms reveal about digital culture, ultimate meaning, and value? What kinds of communicative ways have spiritual or religious traditions exhorted others to adopt their goals?³⁷ Questions like these reveal that simply focusing on the question of spirituality conveyed in the content of communication already presents a rich reservoir of further exploration. Returning, however, to the current transcendent turn in question, exploring the *spiritual impact of communication* has even greater potential for clarifying a missional approach for digital culture.

³⁵ Millis, *Conversation, the Sacred Art*, xix.

³⁶ William G. Kirkwood, “Studying Communication about Spirituality and the Spiritual Consequences of Communication,” *Journal of Communication & Religion* 17, no. 1 (March 1994): 18.

³⁷ Kirkwood, “Studying Communication about Spirituality,” 19.

4. Spiritual Impact of Communication Practice

This connection explores the spiritual impact of communication practices, whether negative or positive. As Diane Millis proposes, “great conversations lift the veil, inviting us to discover more about ourselves, one another, and the sacred in our midst.”³⁸ In other words, the *experience* of communication can both reveal and at the same time deepen the spiritual sensibility of the human person.

From the perspective of Christian missional practice, communication as an activity of faith is rooted deeply in spirituality. Exploring the spiritual impact of communication in a missional context, the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) reflects along these lines:

The Christian communicator is not one who can fulfill his function using media from outside. He must belong to a group, participating fully in its life. He has first of all to discover God in his life-situation, environment and community and interpret for himself God’s designs. Only then can he share with others from within what he has discovered by observation and involvement, by listening to God’s Word and meditating on it, by his discernment and interpretation. Without this self-evangelization, without this personal meditation, assimilation and interiorization, without personal discovery of God, a Christian communicator cannot fulfill his prophetic mission.³⁹

In other words, the communication of faith is fundamentally a spiritually rooted process, one that emerges from the interior life and finds expression from the discernment of God’s presence and engagement in one’s life and context. When one communicates faith, they do so out of their interior sense of relating to God, self, and others. Franz-Josef Eilers specifies this necessary interiority even further as he emphasizes the essential connection between the Christian communicator and the Holy Spirit: “Whoever wants to talk about Spirituality

³⁸ Millis, *Conversation, the Sacred Art*, 4.

³⁹ East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI), “Theological Foundations,” 75-76.

has to start with the Holy Spirit himself.”⁴⁰ It is the Spirit that binds one to the Word and give one the ability to speak the faith in a way that it is truthful, invitational, and oriented toward communion. Spirit-led communication also bears the fruits enumerated in Scripture (Galatians 5:22-23), which become discernable ways to witness communication’s spiritual impact. The fruits of the Spirit are also inherently relational: love, kindness, generosity, self-control and more presuppose that a person stands in relationship with God and with others in the context and expression of these virtues.

Building on these spiritual foundations raises the question of what a distinctive spirituality of communication may look like, particularly from the Christian perspective. The East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) proposes along these lines that a Christian spirituality of communication is one that is built on five pillars: the theology of revelation (God’s self-communication to humankind, and humankind’s response of faith), Jesus Christ as the Word Incarnate, the aim to build communion, awareness of context, and commitment to announcing a message of hope.⁴¹ A Christian spirituality of communication builds on these pillars to draw and interpret meaning about the divine-human relationship, and live this out in the way the human person relates with self, others, and creation. These five pillars help give shape to “ultimate meaning” in the Christian sense and orient the Christian in a particular way toward forming relationships. As the essay explores below, these pillars also present a transcendent approach to digital culture that is open, life giving, and oriented toward communion.

5. Framing a Lived Spirituality and Digital Culture

Christian spirituality encompasses lived experience. A statement like this, according to Downey, reveals a more holistic understanding of spirituality, one that emphasizes the importance of human experience as the “very stuff” of spirituality.⁴² In this vein, all

⁴⁰ Franz-Josef Eilers. *Communicating in Ministry and Mission*. Third Edition (Manila: Logos/Divine Word Publications, 2009), 33.

⁴¹ EAPI, “Theological Foundations,” 77-79

⁴² Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 91.

that enters our lives, all that shapes our daily response to and engagement with what comes our way touches our spirituality.⁴³ This means that lived experience is integral to our spiritual meaning making, and it also implies that particular experiences or social locations may in fact generate alternative and newly insightful avenues into Christian spirituality itself.⁴⁴

As we have explored in this essay, few experiences may be more impactful on our lives than the present reality of digital culture. Reflecting on the spiritual life vis-à-vis this pervasive socio-cultural reality, it is also helpful to recall Sandra Schneiders' insight that "spirituality is not simply spontaneous experience, however, elevating or illuminating, but *a conscious and deliberate way of living*"⁴⁵ (emph. mine). Considering digital culture as context for a lived spirituality, people of faith are facing then a commitment to a conscious and deliberate way of living in this cultural context. Especially when considering the role of those in ministerial leadership, this conscious and deliberate way also becomes missional. Taking seriously the present critical cultural turn in digital culture as coupled with rising interest in the transcendent, people of faith have the prophetic opportunity to enter this conversation in a radically different way. This radically different way offers a self-giving, relational approach to digital communication, rooted deeply in one's spirituality. Such an approach is countercultural and prophetic, and formative not only for persons but for culture as a whole.⁴⁶

Recalling the EAPI's five pillars for a spirituality of Christian communication, composed in the electronic media era, this essay wishes to bring each of these in dialogue specifically with digital culture. The aim here is to envision how these pillars may generate a pattern for living faith consciously and deliberately in our present context, guiding those with missional impetus toward authentic engagement. This faithful and missional living is characteristically open to transcendence through encounter, presence, and communion, considering as "neighbor" those in the digital context.

⁴³ Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 91.

⁴⁴ Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 91-93.

⁴⁵ Schneiders, "Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality," 2.

⁴⁶ "Towards Full Presence," no. 37.

5.1. Revelation and Faith

A spirituality of Christian communication is built on the theological premise that God communicates Godself to humankind and evokes a faith response. God's self-communication, an outpouring of the Trinitarian life, is a gift of the divine self, offered in love, which both engages and transforms the human person in its image.

A conscious and deliberate way of living this out in digital culture considers deeply the interpersonal dynamics of communication and seeks to shape these through the mold of loving self-gift, offered with the aim of forging relationships.

This is a distinctively different assumption about communication than networked individualism, or the transactional and reductive business model of social media platforms. It also resists the inherent distrust and the pursuit of control we observe in the current turn to transcendence. Building on revelation and faith, the Christian is instead called into relationship, willing to experience vulnerability, self-gift, and sacrifice along the way.

One concrete way this pillar finds expression is being attentive to not only the accuracy of Christian content but also the manner of one's communication in digital spaces. How we say something is just as important as what we say.⁴⁷ From a missional and ministerial perspective, whether and how one interacts with comments in a public way is one salient example here. To enter conversation with commenters, to receive critical comments and treat these with respect even if in disagreement, these are all measures of vulnerability and self-gift, and actions that speak loudly and in a missional way.

5.2. Christ the Incarnate Word

A spirituality of Christian communication reveres the incarnation of the Word as the fullness of divine revelation. It looks to Christ as "the Perfect Communicator" who both embodied and articulated the

⁴⁷ "Towards Full Presence," no. 65.

message of divine love for humankind, and did so in intimate and familiar ways, in the mode of the hearer.⁴⁸

A conscious and deliberate way of living this out in digital culture is taking seriously the unique modality of the digital context and discerning the mode of the hearer therein. What is the mode of the hearer in digital culture is an essential question for this incarnational aim. A generous response to this question offers a disposition of accompaniment, presence, listening to and treating with integrity the digital experience, and looking for the *semina Verbi*, seeds of the Word within. It also seeks to avoid the temptation to reduce one's expression of spirituality to the mere sharing of religious content, sidestepping or ignoring the interactive and participatory dynamics of digitality as spiritual ground. As a deep commitment to context, this incarnational aim also seeks to avoid the reduction of spirituality to an exclusively inward, closed, and self-focused experience.

One concrete way this pillar finds expression is through fostering listening and attentiveness when interacting in digital spaces. One cannot discern the mode of the hearer and understand where another person is coming from without the ability to pause, become silent, and bring one's attention fully to that encounter. Practicing the skill of pausing, embracing silence, and listening in a deep way is already a significant spiritual practice, and one that gains even greater value in the constant information flow of digital spaces. From this space of deep listening, asking questions is another essential practice of this pillar. Asking the type of questions that invite one along as opposed to making statements that shut conversation down is an essential incarnational skill.

5.3. Communion

A spirituality of Christian communication aims to build relationships, edify communities, and orient interpersonal and relational dynamics toward communion. It takes seriously the theological

⁴⁸ *Communio et Progressio*, 1971, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pc_cs_doc_23051971_communio_en.html, no. 11.

connection between communication as a gift of self in love that both emerges from and is drawn back toward the eternal communion found in the Trinitarian life of God as Father, Son, and Spirit.

A conscious and deliberate way of living this out in digital culture is through a commitment to authentic encounter with others, and resistance to reifying the dynamic and complex presence of other people into words and images to which we react. A commitment to communion entails resisting reductive assumptions about others, embracing the practice of asking genuine questions, and respecting complexity and mystery in others.

One concrete way that this pillar finds expression is through practices of inclusion. In digital culture where one gains social influence through “likes, follows, and shares” and where one loses influence by being “cancelled,” it is both prophetic and missional to be attentive to who is on the margins of this cultural context. Likewise, social divisions continue to exist along the digital divide. Attentiveness to individuals whose voices are left out, and working to amplify these voices is likewise a prophetic and missional act toward communion.

5.4. Truth in Context

Closely related to both the incarnation and to communion, awareness of context is another distinctive aim of a Christian spirituality of communication. In addition to awareness of the complex situational realities that infuse communication, context is also ultimately a commitment to truth and authenticity. When we reduce or collapse context to a widely share-able bit of data, it radically redefines the narrative or the story that held the original content-piece. Without context, we shift the story and therefore compromise its truthfulness and authenticity. A conscious and deliberate way of living this out in digital culture is resisting conclusions until a full picture emerges, and not sharing false, incomplete, or misleading information. Commitment to context is a deep resistance against the erosion of trust that we observe in digital culture. It also resists the rapid pace of digital culture and insists on silence and space for discernment as integral to digital communication.

One concrete way this pillar finds expression is through embracing a narrative approach in digital communication. Good stories invite us into them, and they also reveal and extend greater hospitality to the truth.⁴⁹ Stories are contextual, and hard to reduce without loss of meaning. Stories also create spaces that can be gathering points for shared meaning making. Especially when it comes to the method of communication toward a missional aim, narrating the truth through a story is often more authentic and relational than a series of propositional statements.

5.6. Announcing Hope

A spirituality of Christian communication is committed to the Good News. This means that although the Christian recognizes the sorrow, brokenness, and despair that pervades the human condition, he or she remains committed to hope, possibility, and life. Announcing hope is speaking in and through the context of brokenness with a message of possibility, healing, and wholeness.

A conscious and deliberate way of living this out in digital culture is through the habit of discerning whether and to what degree one's communication is ultimately edifying, healing, and life-giving to both self and others. This aim is clearly embraced, for example, in the 2023 pastoral reflection on digital culture from the Dicastery for Communication, "Towards Full Presence," which offers the parable of the Good Samaritan as a cipher for bringing a faithful presence to digital contexts.⁵⁰ Along these lines, self-promotion, narcissism, and verbal violence give way to encouragement and building the community up (Rom. 15:2.). This has the potential to shift the tone of vitriolic comment feeds toward civility, *ad hominem* attacks toward respectful, reasoned dialogue.⁵¹ More profoundly, a commitment to announcing hope resists the deep disillusionment emerging in digital culture and its power-laden dynamics. Instead of fighting power with power, a commitment to announcing hope follows Christ's example of self-emptying and self-gift as core spiritual dispositions.

⁴⁹ "Towards Full Presence," no. 69.

⁵⁰ "Towards Full Presence," no. 6.

⁵¹ "Towards Full Presence," no. 16.

One concrete practice emerging from this pillar is the promotion of genuinely life-giving content from others, especially as a curation practice. While much of social media is driven by self-promotion, being an influencer that deliberately lifts the goodness of others can become a digital discipline that radically exemplifies self-gift in this space.

Critical reflection on digital culture highlights the question of how we relate with others through acts of communication and brings to the forefront the need for reflection on what our ultimate values are that shape these interactions. Reflecting critically on digital culture, social commentator Ezra Klein opines:

Attention is contagious. What forms of it, as individuals and as a society, do we want to cultivate? What kinds of mediums would that cultivation require? This is anything but an argument against technology, were such a thing even coherent. It's an argument for taking technology as seriously as it deserves to be taken, for recognizing, as McLuhan's friend and colleague John M. Culkin put it, "we shape our tools, and thereafter, they shape us." There is an optimism in that, a reminder of our own agency. And there are questions posed, ones we should spend much more time and energy trying to answer: How do we want to be shaped? Who do we want to become?⁵²

6. Concluding Remarks

This essay's proposal of a Christian spirituality of communication for digital culture perceives a seed of the Word in astute social commentary like that of Ezra Klein. Christian spirituality has deep resonance with Klein's questions and might consider these a prophetic opening for more intentional and missional engagement with digital culture.

⁵² Ezra Klein, "The Medium Really is the Message."

As an expression of ultimate values that manifests through the way we live and relate with others, these questions are rooted in our spirituality. Christian spirituality has the potential to shape the relational ethos of digital culture, especially as drawing from the theological foundations of revelation, incarnation, communion, truthful context, and commitment to hope. These theological foundations envision a manner of relating that is loving, self-giving, unifying, accompanying, truthful, hopeful, and life-giving. For digital culture, this manner of relating has the potential to re-capture the human element, lived in communion, toward wholeness.

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Embracing Peace Education for Interreligious Awareness in Myanmar: A Case Study of the Judson Research Center

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ABSTRACT

There is limited consideration of the role of interreligious awareness in both preventing violent conflict and integrating it into the curriculum of modern peace education. This paper seeks to address this gap by recognizing the significance of religious awareness in peacebuilding through peace education, focusing on the Judson Research Center of the Myanmar Institute of Theology as a key institution in promoting a peaceful society. Myanmar has been prone to religious conflict for a long time, especially as religion has been used by various groups to gain political advantage, and religion has become a sensitive topic. The research method in this study is a qualitative case study conducted through informal dialogue with two key officials and representatives of the center, a literature review (mainly on peace education to align with the purpose of the article), analysis of documents and research articles, as well as dissertations and journal articles, including studying the practices of the research center itself. As a research article and not merely a desk paper based on existing published articles alone, the findings of this article are

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thus not based on pre-conceived themes. Rather, the themes emerged based on actual field observation, interviews, and contextual analysis. This paper highlights the importance of peace education for peaceful communication among different religious groups and its contribution to improving interreligious awareness for building peace. Ultimately, it emphasizes the critical role of peace education in fostering mutual understanding, respect, and trust for the establishment of a peaceful and harmonious society.

Keywords: *communication, Judson Research Center, peacebuilding, peace education, religion*

1. Introduction

Myanmar has earned the reputation of “the land of crisis” due to its protracted internal conflicts, despite a populace that cherishes peaceful coexistence and adheres to peaceful religion. The political landscape of Myanmar is intricately entwined with the diverse array of ethnic groups inhabiting its territory. Consequently, escalating political and ethnic tensions have emerged between the dominant majority and the various ethnic minority groups over time. Moreover, religion stands out as a pivotal element often exploited for political advantage by different factions, thereby evolving into a contentious issue among the populace. This research attempts to examine peace education as a viable strategy for fostering peacebuilding initiatives in Myanmar, underscoring the need to address the religious dimension with this discourse.

1.1. Problem Statement

There is limited consideration of the role of a harmonious multi-religious society in both the prevention and response to violent conflicts for rebuilding peace in Myanmar. Interfaith studies and communication need to be reconceptualized to integrate into modern peace education.

1.2. Research Questions

This paper answers the following questions:

1. What are the elements of the peace education program in the Judson Research Center?
2. How does the Judson Research Center provide peace education for interreligious awareness?
3. Why does it provide peace education in the ways that it does?

1.3. Research Purpose

This paper aims to explore the importance of peace education for religious awareness in peacebuilding by studying the approaches of the Judson Research Center. To achieve the research purpose, the objectives of this paper are:

1. To explain the elements of the peace education program in Judson Research Center;
2. To discuss how the Judson Research Center delivers Peace Education for interreligious awareness; and
3. To analyze why it provides peace education as it does.

1.4. Rationale of the Study

There were two motivational factors to conduct this study. First, literature on modern Peace Education places greater emphasis on secular ways to respond to peace and conflict issues. Comprehensive peace education is needed to develop a holistic and integrative approach to nurture a culture of peace that connects all components related to educating about peace. Therefore, only focusing on one side will not achieve holistic peace. Religious and spiritual dimensions play a key role in nurturing inner peace, as well as establishing a culture of peace for comprehensive peace education (Jenkins 2019).

The second point is about the context of the country. Religion is deeply rooted in Myanmar's social, political, and economic aspects. The unbalanced population of faiths in the country, especially non-

Buddhist faith groups who are also ethnic minority groups, feel marginalized by the state due to their ethnic and religious identities (Hayward 2021). Consideration of religious differences is a critical part of any peace-building initiative for the country of Myanmar (Pauli 2016). Although religion itself may not be the instigating factor, the manipulation of religion throughout history continues to fuel religious tensions and conflict in the country. Thus, a religious dimension is necessary for peace education in Myanmar. The study of the promotion of inter-religious awareness, mutual understanding, respect, and trust among interfaith groups is quite appropriate to contribute to the country's peacebuilding efforts. This paper describes the contextual struggle in Myanmar and the original struggles to coexist and build harmonious relationships from the Myanmar Christian perspective in order to promote peace, which contributes to the existing literature on peace education.

1.5. Coverage of the Study

1.5.1. Scope

This paper focuses on both formal and informal peace education initiatives provided by the Judson Research Center, as well as research, movements, and the community setting from the time it was established in 2003 to the present. The Judson Research Center was selected for this study because of its well-known dedication to interfaith study for over 20 years. It is one of the academic branches of the highly accredited and reputable Christian institution, Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT), located in Yangon where the author lives. The work of faith-based organizations and NGOs on religions and interfaith activities has some degree of political sensitivity in Myanmar. In general, such organizations dare not disclose their activities to unfamiliar individuals or organizations. Cultural insiders have access to data and their perspectives. It is beneficial to acknowledge potential limitations for further research and researchers.

1.5.2. Limitations

The findings only cover what Judson Research Center is doing through information gained from analyzing secondary research documents and informal dialogue with the officials of the center.

1.5.3. Delimitation

This study does not cover peace education and peace-gearred activities by other religious institutions, non-governmental organizations, or social organizations. It also does not include foreign government-funded organizations that have similar goals and objectives or activities toward interreligious communications among different interfaith groups for peace education.

1.6. Significance of the Study

This article presents the main argument that a comprehensive approach is critical for socially meaningful peace education that integrates religious and spiritual dimensions, by reintegrating the religious dimension of peace education for peacebuilding in Myanmar. The practice-based approach of the Judson Research Center of the Myanmar Institute of Theology as a center for the promotion of interreligious awareness in the religious conflict-prone country of Myanmar is recorded and appreciated academically. This study fills the gap by reintegrating religious aspects into the process of peace education. Furthermore, the findings from the research questions of this study seek to reveal the local wisdom in peace education for religious awareness to respond to violence within the local context.

2. Literature Review

There is a vast body of literature concerning peace education, and this paper will attempt to highlight some notable works of the leading scholars. To synthesize the literature, this section initially reviews the work of some leading scholars of peace education. Joakim Arnøy (2023) argued that peace education has gone through phases in terms of *subject*, *approaches*, *pedagogy*, and *driving forces*, while

another scholar, Kevin Kester (2022), explained the outlines of the conceptual framework of peace education such as objectives, contents, actors, and resources of peace education. Tony Jenkins (2019) also addressed that peace education is an education both *about* and *for* peace.

After reviewing the literature, this study synthesizes it into an integrated topic with the potential to reconceptualize the existing literature in peace education (Torraco 2005). By reviewing and categorizing the literature, this section presents the relevant research about peace education and its components that are fundamental to promoting a more peaceful culture.

2.1. Concepts of Peace Education

The term “Peace Education” refers to the educational policy, planning, pedagogy, and practice that provide learners with the skills and values to work towards comprehensive peace (Bajaj 2008; B. Reardon 1988). Comprehensive peace includes the discussion of both negative peace, comprised of the abolition of direct or physical violence, and positive peace, the abolition of structural violence rising from systematic inequalities that deprive individuals of their basic human rights (Bajaj 2008; Galtung 1969).

By studying this literature and contributions from leading scholars about the concepts of peace education, comprehensive peace education has been scholarly recognized for building peace. However, the actual application of peace education at different levels should be encouraged and promoted for wider acceptance not only through literature but also in real-life situations for the transformation of social change. Regarding this, it is necessary to reconceptualize the components of peace education to guide the practices of teaching and learning.

2.2. Objectives of Peace Education

Since peace education is both about and for peace, it is oriented toward the elimination of all forms of violence and the establishment of a culture of peace. It is also concerned with violence and injustice

(Jenkins 2019). In peace education, the areas of human rights education, development education, environmental education, disarmament education, and conflict resolution education are included as a broader understanding of such multifaceted approaches.

Although there are different approaches, the overall aim of peace education can be understood as the achievement of all human rights for all human beings (Bajaj 2008; Swee-Hin and Toh 2006). This focus also aims to provide students with an accurate understanding of their social and political contexts while simultaneously focusing attention on possibilities for action and change (Bajaj 2008; Freire 1970). Based on the literature review, the objectives of peace education are not only for understanding social and/or political problems but also the soft dimension of the inner minds of the individuals about how they see and think about the issues.

Since the purposes and objectives of peace education may vary among different perspectives and levels, it is necessary to critically analyze to include as many groups as possible. The objective of peace education should be based on the nature of conflict, culture, and the challenges encountered in particular areas, as well as promoting readiness among the citizens and developing the capacities of the actors.

2.3. Actors in Peace Education

The capacities and performance of peace educators are crucial in peace education. Kester (2022) argued that the objective of peace education is to cultivate a culture of peace in schools and other places. Therefore, peace educators need to consider the multiple spaces in which learning can occur such as in schools, homes, communities, etc. Peace education programs reflect an inclusive and comprehensive approach to designing and facilitating holistic education.

Cooperation and collaboration by all stakeholders are required since peace education is a broad concept related to politics, social and cultural norms and expectations, technological advances, and environmental perspectives. In that sense, the stakeholders, or the actors, in peace education would be the government, local businesses,

non-governmental organizations, students, parents, teachers, student councils, and school administrations, as well as community leaders (Kester 2022). In addition, the role of the community and religious leaders, as well as institutions and various organizations are also recognized as valuable actors and leaders for peace education and conflict transformation (Lederach 1997). The roles of these various actors are important in all the various approaches to peace education.

2.4. Contents of Peace Education

Peace education is demanded as a study of attitudes that include love, respect, and empathy, and as a study of behaviors for cooperation, dialogue, and nonviolence to support peaceful societies. The contents should address a range of topics, including environmental issues, conflict resolution and transformation, gender equality, human rights, justice, the inherent challenge of violence to peace, collaborative peace-building visions, the role of media, and diversity (Kester 2022). Related to the contents of peace education, the “Flower-petal” model guides the six categories of a culture of peace that are used to organize the learning topics and materials.

These six topics are comprised of dismantling a culture of war, environmental peace, education for justice and compassion, human rights education, inter-cultural solidarity, and inner peace. Each topic has a specific purpose in peace education to achieve different objectives (Kester 2022). They cover all levels such as individual, interpersonal, and societal (Ty 2023). However, effective integration is still needed to reach individuals who are not, for one reason or another, able to access educational opportunities in society. In that case, an integrative approach by all actors is required, especially regarding policy, otherwise, these peace education topics would be learned only by those who already have access to education and choices.

Religion may have the earliest written guidelines for teaching peace through scripture, but it has an ambivalent nature in that religion can promote peace as well as advocate conflict and violence (Appleby 2000). However, there are many instances in which religion has been manipulated for political advantage or other interests, as an inter-

pretation of religious scriptures may lead to the ambivalent nature of religious understanding. Peace education needs to address such a situation, especially in places where religion plays a crucial role in people's daily lives, specifically in developing and conflict-affected countries, for instance, Myanmar.

In Myanmar, almost every person adheres to a particular religion (Hayward and Naing 2023) and that means everyone is guided by and follows the doctrine of at least one particular religion, presenting the opportunity to integrate religious or interfaith education into the contents of peace education. Peace education should be designed based on the local context and not all peace education programs are created equal (Salomon and Nevo 2002). The effectiveness of peace education needs to be aligned with the appropriate approaches or pedagogies in delivering skills, knowledge, and attitudes to the audience.

2.5. Pedagogy

In education, pedagogy is an approach towards teaching the learners, whether it is the theory or practice of educating, which aims to develop their skills and attitudes (Shirke 2021). Various communication channels can be utilized to disseminate the peace message to specific audiences, including formal education lectures, distribution of pamphlets and books, organization of seminars and conferences, publication of newspaper articles, and writing magazine essays. (Galtung 2008).

Comprehensive peace education is rooted in critical and transformative pedagogies. It generally focuses on the future and looks to nurture those inner peace capacities that are essential to external action necessary for social and political change. This concept promotes peace education as a holistic, transformative, and adaptable approach in different areas (Jenkins 2019). Peace pedagogy is constantly evolving to meet the ever-changing needs of education for democratic societies. As such, reflective inquiry is required for transformative pedagogies (Reardon 2012).

Selecting the appropriate teaching methods by addressing the context of the country plays a critical role in the aspect of pedagogy. The practice of accounting for local vulnerability is valuable in the context of learning about diversity (Brantmeier 2013). To go in-depth, it is necessary to consider the views of local scholars and researchers and related peace education approaches derived from the multi-religious society in that particular country. The interreligious dialogue approach is a crucial tool for building peace in multi-religious societies since it promotes understanding and relationship-building among different faith groups and serves as a catalyst to solve the conflict (Ly 2023).

2.6. Resources in Peace Education

People, materials, and time are three resources in peace education programs (Kester 2022). The role of resource persons is crucial for reconciliation and education for a culture of peace in divided societies by contributing their many pedagogical experiences and diverse approaches to transformative peace learning. The possible contribution of resource persons may motivate others, including the targeted audience of the peace education program, to take transformative action in their schools, neighborhoods, communities, towns, and countries, and connect with others who share the same values for peace (Loukaidis and Jenkins 2020).

Access to a special collection of books, other printed materials, or digital resources also plays an important role in peace education for both faculty and students. The publication of peace-related articles by the institutions would also help establish a culture of peace and increase awareness daily (Navarro-Castro and Nario-Galace 2019).

Time also plays a critical role in peace education such as the length of the program and the evaluation in terms of effectiveness. It is necessary to ensure that the implemented peace education program is properly and continuously evaluated for its effectiveness to meet the objective of the program. Resources come in many forms, but they all have a common purpose to support the effectiveness of learning. The significant purpose of the teaching and learning resources is to make

the subject matter and delivery interesting, making it easy to grasp the concepts (The Open University 2020).

Since this study is trying to explore local peace education based on the local contexts, the previous studies of peace education in Myanmar have been explored.

2.7. Peace Education in Myanmar

While the literature on peace education is abundant, research that focuses on the Myanmar context is inadequate. A long-term combination of political and social oppression led to violent tensions between several ethnic and cultural groups. Education should be delivered as ethnically inclusive and related to peacebuilding (Pauli 2016). Myanmar has challenges ranging from huge social inequalities to conflicts over political autonomy, belief systems, citizenship rights, and natural resources.

There is growing recognition that education plays a crucial role in the context of a fragile state. The 4R framework (redistribution, recognition, representation, and reconciliation) is believed to be the framework for sustainable peacebuilding (Lopes Cardozo and Maber 2019). Myanmar has been following a liberal peacebuilding thesis and presupposing that faith in the state can be restored by redistributing opportunities, for example, improving access to education, to remedy inequalities (Lopes Cardozo and Maber 2019).

The Myanmar Ministry of Education is the central institution responsible for spreading the concept of peace education to empower the population with the required tools. Education policies in Myanmar should integrate peace education because Myanmar is a country full of myriad influences, diversity, and adversities. Through an analysis of education policy utilizing the peace education theory, educational policies that could be related to peace education and the important concepts of peace education were never present in the education system in Myanmar. Peace education in Myanmar remains an unexplored field experiencing a lack of scholars and data (Ferro 2021).

The current national curriculum of Myanmar has not yet integrated the concept of peace education. The current learning content and objectives do not encourage students to learn about human rights or respect diversity, nor do they encourage learning about collaboration, enhancing their problem-solving skills, or promoting social harmony, which are necessary elements for both peace education and peacebuilding (Wong 2022).

The frame of research in Myanmar is rooted in pre-existing assumptions about peace, war, and society from outside Myanmar that are especially influenced by foreign donors. The historical narratives and local context need to be incorporated to develop cultures of peace and more effective peace education in Myanmar (Waters 2022).

In summary, local contexts and narratives must be integrated into the existing ideas of leading scholars. Local ideas about what is needed and how to respond are more relevant in addressing the problem. The religious aspect is not widely covered in much literature or current research on peace education in Myanmar. Some faith-based organizations provide peace education to address the gap left by the government's curriculum, which lacks certain components essential for peace education.

These efforts require academic documentation and recognition. By examining the minority Christian viewpoint in Myanmar, it contributes to the understanding of how peace is advanced through interfaith dialogue within a predominantly Buddhist nation. This analysis adds to the efforts of faith-based organizations in promoting peace education in Myanmar. The conceptual framework of this study is shown below.

2.8. Conceptual Framework

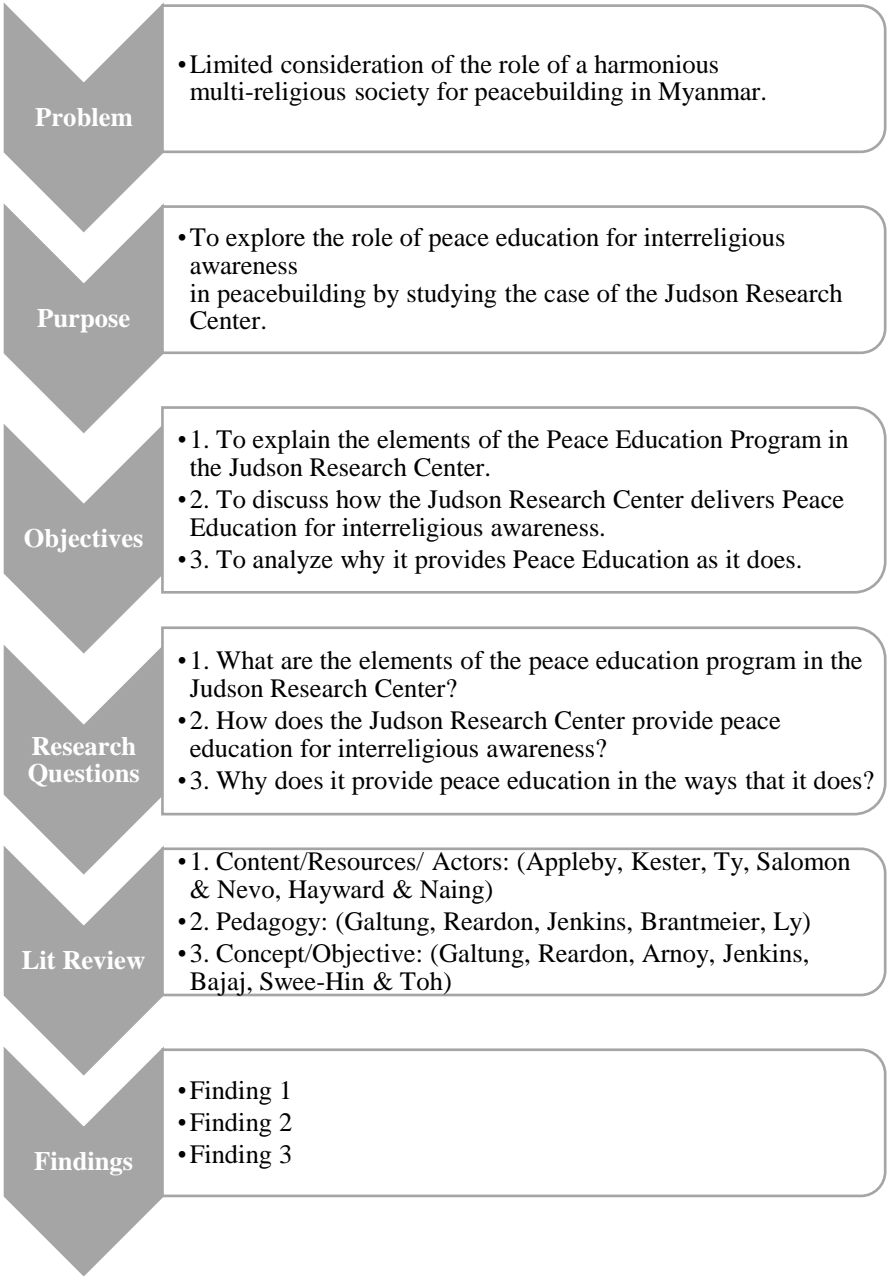


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Author of this paper

3. Methodology

This study employed qualitative case study research as a methodology to explore a real-life case since the research focus and problem required the development of an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases. Judson Research Center (JRC) is the object of this study and the product of the inquiry to explore peace education in Myanmar that is aligned with the research focus to produce an in-depth understanding (Creswell and Poth 2016). In qualitative case study research, the unit of analysis is studying an event, a program, an activity, or more than one individual. The unit of analysis in this paper is the peace education program for interreligious awareness provided by the Judson Research Center of Myanmar Institute of Theology. The forms of data collection in this study are informal dialogue, reviewing literature, analyzing documents, digital information relating to Myanmar issues, and the Judson Research Center. The sources of data are books, journals, dissertations, publications, curricula, and information from social media that includes posts about politics, religion, education, conflict, violence, and peace from Myanmar.

Informal dialogue related to JRC peace movements was held with the two officials from the JRC in November 2023 at Seminary Hill, Insein Township in Yangon, Myanmar where JRC is located. Convenience sampling was applied for the informal dialogue with two officials who represented the center and answered valid findings for this research as well as meeting the purpose of the case study research methodology, based on their convenience and availability among the four numbers of the official population of JRC. Member checking was performed to ensure the accuracy of the findings and to uphold validity, a critical aspect of qualitative research. This involved presenting specific descriptions to participants during informal dialogues to ascertain whether the author's interpretations and writings aligned with their views and opinions. After this process, the paper was revised with more information and appropriate wording. To enhance accuracy, this paper utilized the peer debriefing process with the professors and students of the department to which the author belongs (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

4. Findings

It is necessary to address the local issues when designing and delivering peace education. That will determine the effectiveness of the programs delivered by peace educators or institutions. Judson Research Center (JRC) addressed the contextual issues from both secular and spiritual perspectives in its peace education program. JRC designed and delivered its programs based on the availability of resources, the possibility of achieving programs, and the philosophy derived from the proper research on contextual issues.

4.1. Elements of Peace Education in Judson Research Center

Regarding Research Question 1 (What are the elements of peace education in Judson Research Center?), it is found that JRC provides different academic programs, recruits, and develops the resource persons for those programs, and promotes their interfaith awareness endeavors with publications. Since it was established on July 13, 2003, it has served as a center for the promotion of interfaith studies, dialogue, and current issues, and one of the pioneer organizations dedicated to interfaith communication in Myanmar. With a vision and goal to foster mutual understanding, respect, and trust among various faiths, it seeks to promote cooperation toward creating a peaceful, just, participatory, responsible, and sustainable society. The center educates scholars, religious leaders, theological students, and youth from different faith groups to nurture communication practices and actions to address the issues for the betterment of society.

Since Myanmar is prone to religious conflict, JRC initiated the *Master of Arts in Interfaith Dialogue (MAID)* in 2014 as a postgraduate offering that is now running within the liberal arts program of MIT. The contents of the curriculum contribute to peace education to promote interreligious awareness in Myanmar, respecting all four of the country's major religions and their philosophies. Additionally, the curriculum facilitates the development and communication skills among learners of different faiths. This empowers them to actively engage in community efforts aimed at raising interreligious awareness, thereby preventing violent conflicts, and fostering peacebuilding initiatives.

JRC has established a resource person team comprised of faith leaders from Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam to provide peace education for interfaith awareness and communication. Young leaders from different communities are also recruited to interfaith communication awareness training programs.

JRC has produced some successful initiatives that have contributed to peace education in Myanmar. The center designed and published a *Guidebook for Interfaith Dialogue* in 2017 and a *Faith-Based Community Dialogue Facilitative Training Curriculum* in 2018, based on its rich experience of interfaith dialogue practices in various communities. In 2021, it collaborated with local churches in Kachin state to publish the book *Contextual Resilience Power* under its parent unit, MIT. This publication has provided significant benefits to readers, learners, practitioners, and communities, offering insights into the power of resilience in coping with hardships. These home-grown materials are useful as guidelines and facilitative tools for effective communication in communities (Judson Research Center 2023b).

JRC designed its master's degree program within a sufficient timeframe, as a two-year master's program that requires two to three weeks of intensive in-class teaching every semester. This program is a combination of three semesters of modular-based coursework and one semester of research writing. Regarding the length of time for the entire mission, JRC moves its operations forward to expand the time by stage 1: promotion of the awareness of interfaith dialogue among faith leaders at an academic level (2003-2010); stage 2: Implementing dialogue training and activities through academic programs with young leaders (2010-2017); and stage 3: Conducting dialogue in the community (2017-present). Starting in 2018, JRC initiated the community dialogue program that focuses on Kachin state (Moo 2019).

4.2. The Ways Judson Research Center Provides Peace Education for Interreligious Awareness

Regarding Research Question 2 (How does the Judson Research Center provide peace education for interreligious awareness?), it is found that JRC is a specialized center committed to promoting

peace education along an interfaith trajectory to address contemporary issues in Myanmar. Its approach to peace education is grounded in the principle of “Engagement.” The center focused on broader issues in its early years; however, it is currently sharply focused on the “Engagement” practice in different areas that contribute to peace education in Myanmar.

Interfaith Engagement: The center actively promotes interfaith awareness and builds interfaith capacities. Despite being a Christian faith-based organization in a predominantly Buddhist nation, JRC endeavors to bridge the majority/minority divide by fostering relationships with other faith institutions in the country. Through these efforts, the center nurtures interfaith awareness to address social challenges. JRC spearheads Buddhist-Christian dialogue initiatives and offers dialogue training to improve communication skills among diverse faith communities. It begins by fostering individual understanding of personality and spirituality, gradually fostering constructive relationships among various faith groups. This process enhances the necessary skills and mindset for collective action in addressing societal issues. See Figure 2 below.

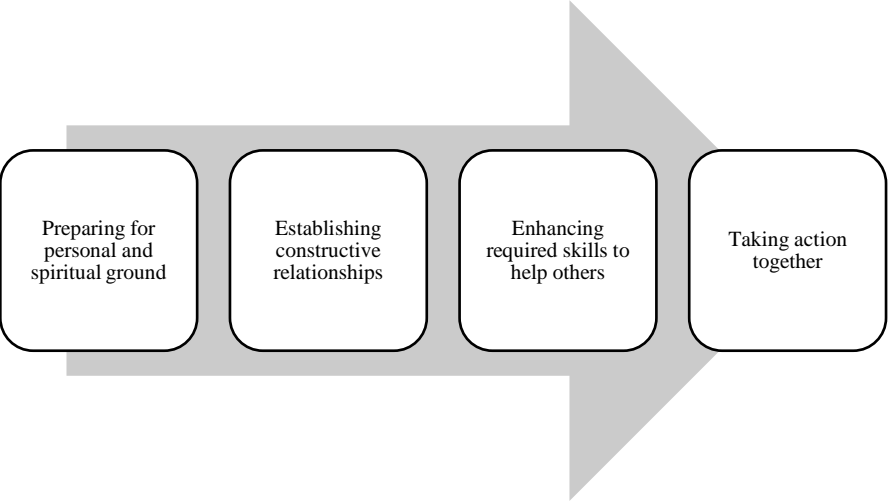


Figure 2: Approach to Promote Dialogue in the Community (Bwa 2021)

The *Master of Arts in Interfaith Dialogue (MAID)* program initiated by JRC is an academic interfaith engagement that covers religious philosophies, theology, research methodology, politics, interfaith dialogue skills and facilitation, community dialogue, and research work. The programs aim to equip students with facilitation skills to cultivate a culture of communication within their communities. In addition to these programs, the center organizes various research initiatives and activities to promote interfaith awareness, including short training, workshops, seminars, and dialogue conferences involving interfaith groups. Furthermore, JRC offers certificate training in interfaith dialogue to foster communication and engagement within communities (Judson Research Center 2023a).

Media Engagement: JRC has recognized the importance of utilizing the media to disseminate information and promote interfaith awareness. However, it also understood the significance of delivering the appropriate message to specific communities and the necessity of journalists to effectively manage conflict and reduce violence. As part of its strategic approach to achieve its interfaith awareness objectives, JRC focuses on enhancing the capacity of journalists and establishing a media monitoring system.

Church Engagement: JRC acknowledges the role of churches within their respective communities. Growing concerns have arisen regarding communal violence in the country, often closely linked with religion, religious leaders, and their followers. In response, JRC has established interfaith groups, networks, and committees in most major cities and towns. Leveraging the influence of churches is a strategic approach to fostering and promoting interfaith awareness. JRC provides support and promotes dialogue skills within churches, empowering them to actively engage in interfaith awareness efforts within their communities. Engagement between the mission of churches and interfaith awareness enhances the effectiveness of JRC's interfaith communication endeavors.

The center focuses on peace education for interfaith awareness through peace initiatives involving faith leaders, which include seminars, conferences, consultations, and workshops. JRC emphasizes this method of engagement in implementing its peace education pro-

gram, exemplified by the publication of a journal titled “Engagement” (Judson Research Center 2023b). Additionally, the center has published a dialogue handbook based on its extensive experience in dialogue activities and findings. Most recently, the center released a book entitled “Contextual Resilience Power,” aimed at empowering the people of Kachin state to voice their concerns and enhance communal resilience. Renowned peace education scholar Johan Galtung has also suggested various communication options, such as lectures through formal education, pamphlets and books, seminars and conferences, and newspaper articles and magazine essays, to convey the message of peace to the target audience (Galtung 2008). Presently, JRC acknowledges paradigm shifts and endeavors to extend its efforts to the wider community through Community Engagement, aiming to strengthen mutual understanding, trust, and respect through an inclusive and comprehensive integrative approach (Shaw and Moo 2023).

4.3. Reasons that Judson Research Center Provides Peace Education in Its Ways

Regarding Research Question 3 (Why does it provide peace education in the ways that it does?), it is found that the reason and the selected way of providing peace education by JRC are derived from the contextual issues of the country and the core values of JRC in promoting interfaith relations.

JRC’s slogan, “Community Dialogue for Peaceful Co-existence,” reflects its vision and aims to improve interfaith relations by providing peace education. The center facilitates communication between people of different faiths and promotes interreligious awareness and cooperative action in community issues. Behind these endeavors, there are rationale and issues that the center addresses.

Rationale: The reason that the center provides peace education derives from the situation of the country. Myanmar is a pluralistic society of over fifty million people with hundreds of different languages and dialects. Christianity constitutes a minority religion in the country, comprising approximately 8.2 percent of the population. Within this demographic, around 5.5 percent identify as Protestant, 1.3 percent as Roman Catholic, with the remainder belonging to independ-

ent churches (Harvard Divinity School 2023b). Many people in Myanmar perceive Christianity as a colonial religion. This perception has resulted in Christians being hesitant to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Buddhist majority, which comprises nearly 90 percent of the population (Harvard Divinity School 2023a), as well as with adherents of other indigenous religions. Poor communication among the different faith groups in the past led to communal conflict associated with religion. As such, there is a vital need for Buddhist-Christian dialogue and study of the primal religions of the people of Myanmar. Clear and effective communication between various faith groups also serves to prevent conflicts stemming from misunderstandings and external factors like political tensions. This circumstance has prompted JRC to develop initiatives focused on providing peace education tailored to the contextual issues in Myanmar.

Issues addressed by JRC: JRC analyzed contextual issues through the lens of interfaith relations, identifying theological issues based on conservatism and exclusivism prevalent among people of various faiths in Myanmar. These issues breed arrogance, hatred, misunderstanding, mistrust, and self-righteousness, stemming from limited knowledge of one's own faith and misconceptions about others. Such negative outcomes are fueled by uncritical cultural attitudes shaped by traditional stereotypes, hindering open and critical communication. This fragmented social structure fosters isolation and perpetuates intergenerational trauma, particularly between Burmese Buddhists and other ethnic groups, fueling fear and impeding genuine dialogue. Given these challenges, JRC framed its approach within its strengths, capabilities, and the specific circumstances of the time (Ngun Ling et al. 2011).

In addressing the identified issues, JRC opted to offer peace education aimed at fostering interreligious awareness, aligning with its core values of nurturing, and reconciling relationships through dialogue. This approach emphasizes mutual understanding, respect, and acceptance, as well as openness, honesty, equality, tolerance, appreciation for diversity, and fostering trust within relationships through dialogical practices.

5. Summary, Challenges, Recommendations, Conclusion

5.1. Summary

To address Research Question 1, JRC relies on resource persons representing diverse faith groups and communities, along with academic content, materials, publications, and research works. For Research Question 2, JRC implements peace education through a dialogue-based pathway for interreligious awareness, emphasizing “Engagement” approaches. In response to Research Question 3, JRC explores the concept and underlying reasons stemming from a pluralistic society entrenched in conservatism and exclusivism within the country.

Table 1 shows the summary of the findings on the peace education program provided by JRC, see the table below.

Reasons to promote interfaith relations	<div>1. Pluralist society</div> <div>2. Conservative</div> <div>3. Exclusive</div> <div>4. Misunderstanding</div> <div>5. Mistrust</div> <div>6. Hatred</div>
Objective of JRC	To promote interreligious awareness for peaceful co-existence
Actors in JRC’s activities	<div>1. Faith leaders from different faiths.</div> <div>2. Young leaders in different communities</div> <div>3. Community practitioners</div>
Contents in JRC’s peace education	<div>1. Different religions and their philosophy and theology</div> <div>2. Politics</div> <div>3. Interfaith Dialogue</div> <div>4. Community Dialogue</div> <div>5. Research Methodology</div>
Pedagogy for implementing programs	<div>1. Interfaith Engagement</div> <div>2. Church Engagement</div> <div>3. Media Engagement</div> <div>4. Community Engagement</div> <div>5. Integrative approach</div>

Resources in delivering programs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resource person teams 2. Curriculum on interreligious dialogue 3. Publications (Bulletins, Journals, Guide books) 4. Sufficient timeframe for the academic program and interfaith and community dialogue program
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Table 1: Summary of the findings on the peace education of JRC
Source: Author of this paper

However, there are several challenges that JRC is facing. The following sections explore the challenges that JRC currently faces.

5.2. Challenges Faced by the Judson Research Center

The challenges that JRC faces can be categorized under four broad categories: financial resources, human resources, physical resources, and political issues (Ling 2023).

Financial resources: Financial projection for the projects of JRC is a major challenge for the center. JRC is financially independent from MIT. Some funding comes from outside as a project grant, but the center still has a challenge to be financially independent. Financial challenges create other challenges for effectively implementing the activities of the center.

Human resources: JRC encounters challenges in sourcing a sufficient number of experts or research scholars in the field of interfaith dialogue, specifically in the context of Myanmar. In addition, the number of staff and growing activities of the center lead to an unbalanced workload and it limits the expansion of activities at the center.

Physical resources: The availability of educational resources poses significant challenges for JRC. Establishing a comprehensive website to showcase the center's programs and activities could offer numerous benefits, including attracting potential donors, partners, and other stakeholders who could contribute to the center's mission.

However, creating and maintaining a website may still present challenges for various reasons. Additionally, setting up a dedicated research library is another hurdle for the center, as it aims to provide research materials and study resources in interfaith communication to interested learners and communities.

Politics: Restrictions and limitations of religious freedom and publications in Myanmar are challenges for JRC. Unpredictable policies and decisions regarding minority religions may stem from deeply entrenched conservatism and exclusivism. These factors could result in failures or delays in distributing published materials to wider communities, thereby undermining the effectiveness of the center's efforts in terms of both resource allocation and time management.

5.3. Recommendations

Recommendations for the improvement of JRC range from financial to technical aspects. To ensure financial sustainability, it is advisable to expand networks by establishing more connections with overseas research centers and academic institutions. This facilitates mutual learning, particularly in maintaining financial stability. Maintaining open lines of communication both domestically and internationally, especially with JRC and MIT alumni, can serve as a valuable means of financial support. Furthermore, adopting a “Center to Center” approach is recommended. JRC should seek partnerships with other research organizations sharing similar objectives, such as the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice at the University of Western Cape, South Africa, and the Religion, Culture, and Peace Laboratory at Payap University, Thailand. Collaborating with such institutions can also address other challenges faced by JRC.

It is recommended that JRC develop the capacity and knowledge of local resource people with additional skills and awareness of local issues. Inviting visiting scholars and experts from similar or alliance organizations is another way to expand the scope of knowledge and capacity of individuals. For instance, the Desmond Tutu Centre supports researchers and academicians from their alliance institutions in various ways. Recruiting more staff is necessary as the activities of JRC have been growing at the community level. Training

future researchers from among current students or alumni is recommended to respond to that challenge.

The website of JRC needs to be developed to expand the international network for various collaborations. The website could help engage various communities. Upgrading the research library to provide research studies and materials can strengthen the activities of JRC. Building a cost-effective digital library as an initial stage could also be a solution to respond to the requirement of educational resources for targeted audiences.

Political concerns, however, remain sensitive as authorities might not want to support or if they misunderstand the efforts of peace educators. It is recommended to approach relevant authorities to collaborate in providing peace education to fill the gap while the state curriculum does not address peace components when the situation demands. That could improve the awareness and appreciation of authorities over the work of JRC.

These potential actions would help the future endeavors of JRC to be more successful and sustainable in providing peace education-related programs and events in Myanmar.

5.4. Conclusion

Insufficient knowledge and understanding of one's religion and others often breed conflict in multi-religious societies. Addressing these root causes and critically assessing responses is crucial. In the case of JRC, recognizing the isolated nature of each religion led to the selection of an educational pathway as a response. As a research center under an academic institution, JRC focuses on facilitating communication between religious groups to remedy this lack of understanding. Their approach, known as peace education through engagement, aims to tackle local issues by nurturing individual knowledge and skills, developing networks, and broadening engagement efforts from faith groups to the wider community. By educating and engaging together, JRC seeks to foster interreligious awareness and peace. While JRC has achieved milestones in producing educational materials for conflicted communities, further research is needed to explore the impacts and

outcomes of this communication and dialogue approach. This paper contributes significantly by describing JRC's engagement approach in interfaith awareness programs for peace education, shedding light on its unique role as a Christian institution and its contributions to interfaith education and peacebuilding. However, additional research is necessary to delve deeper into JRC's impacts and outcomes, its stance on sensitive issues in Myanmar, and the perspectives of other religious followers and specific Non-governmental Organizations benefiting from peace education in the interreligious field.

Statements and Declarations: From the ethical perspective, this paper followed and did not violate the ethical guidelines throughout the process of research in each stage, such as before conducting research, beginning of the research, collecting, and analyzing data, and in reporting, sharing, and keeping of the data (Creswell & Creswell 2018, 145). The author also got informed consent from both Judson Research Center and the interviewees about the entire research objectives and questions, as well as the publication of this article. Lastly, this paper is free of any financial dependencies from the Judson Research Center.

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Examining the Cases Involving Jehovah's Witnesses in the Philippines: An Insight for Religious Freedom and Church-State Relations

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ABSTRACT

Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) are well-known for their refusal to engage in various political activities. Hence, the JW were involved in the Philippines' Supreme Court landmark case of Ebralinag vs. Division, which revolves around religious freedom. Although Ebralinag provides a bountiful discussion on religious freedom and church-state relations, there needs to be more clarity regarding JW's legal experiences and challenges in the Philippines. Limited attention has been given to reviewing the cases involving this religious group and the policies that affect them. Thus, in this context, the paper compiled and discussed cases where several Philippine laws and policies challenged the JW. The paper identified and looked into six cases wherein the members of the JW and the organization were involved. These cases touch on five policies: flag ceremonies, police power, military service, use of public property for religious purposes, and marriage. the JW used the clause on freedom of religion, right to public education, and freedom of speech as legal vanguards. Examining the cases and policies affecting the JW has presented how the courts weigh religious freedom and state authority and ensure a balance

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between the two. Moreover, JW cases validate the usual behavior in Philippine jurisprudence concerning religious freedom and church-state relations as both progressive and traditional.

Keywords: *Jehovah's Witnesses, religious freedom, secularism, church-state, Philippines*

1. Introduction

Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) is a millenarian Christian religion that differs from mainstream Christianity in its non-trinitarian views (James 2005). The denomination considers itself to be a restoration of first-century Christianity. JW emphasize using God's name and favor the form "Jehovah" (Holden 2002). A remarkable belief among JW is that they do not observe holidays such as Christmas. Furthermore, the JW is known for some peculiar political beliefs and a unique political socialization that engenders distinct political behavior. One such belief is the members' objection to military service and refusal to participate in flag ceremonies, which have brought them into conflicts with governments.

Such conflict was evident in the Philippines. The JW has been embroiled in a legal conflict against the Philippine government in the landmark case of *Ebralinag vs Division*.² *Ebralinag* is one of the renowned cases revolving around the Philippines' religious freedom and church-state relationship. While existing literature on religious freedom and church-state relations provides a general understanding of these concepts, more research should be done on JW's specific experiences and challenges in the Philippines. More attention should be given to analyzing the cases involving this religious group and the policies that affect them.

Moreover, even though *Ebralinag* is a landmark case and JW is renowned for its persistent legal challenges globally, there is a scarce

² *Ebralinag v. Division*, 219 SCRA 256 (1993),
https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1993/mar1993/gr_95770_1993.html.

source of literature depicting their legal and political role in the Philippines since the majority of literature would focus on the dominant groups, such as the Roman Catholic, *Iglesia ni Cristo* (INC), and Islam. Thus, in this context, the paper compiles and discusses cases where several Philippine laws and policies challenged the JW. This paper intends to provide a comprehensive understanding of JW's interactions with laws and policies, as well as the implications for religious freedom and minority rights. Lastly, the outcome of this study aims to deepen knowledge and awareness of the challenges faced by religious minorities like JW in the Philippines, while also offering insights into broader issues of legal and political dynamics in the country.

2. Literature Review

Few studies provided insights into the group's political preference and neutrality. A survey showed that 75 percent of JW identified themselves as independents who do not lean toward the two dominant American political parties (Lipka 2016). According to Relman (2020), 1.3 million JW in the United States (US) remained apolitical and refused to join political activities. Similar studies in Canada (Penton 2007) and Russia (Vagramenko and Arqueros 2023) exhibited that JW declined to partake in political events in their countries. These studies also revealed different and distinctive political stances of JW compared to other religious groups.

JW's unusual political stance of neutrality created a legal spotlight in various countries, creating this historical narrative of how countries tolerate and integrate JW into society (Beiser and Stoklosa 2016). In other countries, the JW's religious freedom was restricted. Some governments would consider their beliefs aberrant, deviant, and anti-government, leading to the group facing legal and political dilemmas. For instance, Germany's 1997 Constitutional Court refused legal status to the JW for their political behaviors (Luca 2004, 46-48). The 1996 French Parliament's inter-ministerial policy called Mission to Combat Sect included the JW as a dangerous cult (Introvigne 2004, 81). The Russian Government banned the JW, maintaining that their literature incites extremism (Beard 2015).

In the US, several cases involve JW and their religious community. These cases are recognized as landmark civil rights cases (Gordon 2011). American law schools recognize the contributions made by the group to the defense of civil rights and shaping constitutional law in the US. Recently, even the Supreme Court Chief Justice recognized the role of JW in protecting religious freedom in the *Barnette*³ case (Roberts 2018).

In the Philippines, there is a scarcity of academic literature studying and depicting the political preferences and neutrality of the JW. The only well-known source that offers a snapshot was the legal case of *Ebralinag vs. Division*. *Ebralinag* brought public attention to the JW's political neutrality stance and their dissent on political activities such as flag ceremonies.

In brief, the Philippines' population is predominantly Roman Catholic. Filipinos initially practiced indigenous religions, but over 300 years of Spanish control instilled Catholicism in the nation. Though the US administration for half a century introduced Filipinos to different religions, the prevailing belief remains Catholicism, and the majority of people are Roman Catholics. The JW are considered to be part of the religious minorities in the Philippines, which accounts for 0.4% (PSA 2023).

3. Constitutionalism and Religious Freedom

Since the paper covers two institutions, namely, the state as a political institution and the JW as a religious institution, one of the main theories utilized is the principle of institutionalism. Institutionalism is a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the significance of institutions in shaping social behavior. Carl Friedrich introduced institutionalism to political science in the mid-twentieth century, arguing that constitutionalism was represented by a concern for individual liberty and institutional arrangements to avoid power accumulation (Sanders 2002, 53).

³ *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624 (1943), <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/319/624/>.

The Constitution primarily prescribes and dictates the Philippines' legal structure. The Philippines is known to incorporate the principle of liberalism in its constitutions. This tradition can be traced back to when the Americans introduced democracy to the country (Agpalo 1976, 140). The recent Constitution (1987) tends to be more liberal and progressive than its predecessors as a reaction to the former's authoritarian past. The 1987 Constitution intended to rebuild democratic institutions and design a 'freedom' and 'right-based' constitution (Bacanim 2018).

With the new constitution, liberal principles also exhibited how Philippine Courts handle and interpret cases. Chopra (2021) elucidated that there was a shift in the 'transformative' constitutional interpretation of the courts during the democratic transition in the Philippines in the 1980s. Pangalangan (2003, 18) argued that the 1987 Constitution encourages judicial activism, which "resulted in the relaxation of doctrines, for example, in liberalized rules of standing and justiciability."

Concerning liberalism, the Philippine Constitution offers the principles of secularism and pluralism in governing the relationship between the church and the state. The relationship became one of the significant issues in crafting the Philippine Constitutions of 1898, 1935, 1972, and 1987. The crafters affirmed the church-state separation in establishing the Philippines as a secular and democratic state.

Secularism states that the "Church should not intervene in purely political or temporal areas of man's life and the State, in questions of religion and morals, which are the sole concerns of the other" (Bernas 2009; De Leon 2014). One manifestation of secularism is stressing that the public sphere should be free from religious rules and teachings. On the one hand, the state is declared neutral on matters of spiritual belief and must neither directly support any religion nor impose religious practices upon its people (Bernas 2007). Another notion of secularism is that religious beliefs or practices should not affect public actions and decisions, particularly political ones (Kosmin and Hartford 2007, 25).

In the present Constitution, the principle of secularism is embodied in Article II, Section 6, which states, “The separation of Church and State shall be inviolable.” De Leon (2014) explains that the constitutional prohibition implies that “no law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion” (Article III, Section 5) and that “no public money or property shall ever be appropriated, applied, paid, or employed, directly or indirectly, for the use, benefit, or support of any sect, church, denomination, sectarian institution or system of religion” (Article VI, Section 29 [2]). The term “Church” in the Constitution covers all religious institutions or faiths.

The phrase “no law respecting an establishment of religion” has been called the “establishment of religion clause.” De Leon (2014) and Defensor-Santiago (2015) enumerates the following meanings of the clause:

- (1) The State shall have no official religion; (2) The State cannot set up a church, whether or not supported by public funds, nor aid one religion, aid all religions or prefer one religion over another; (3) Every person is free to profess belief or disbelief in any religion; (4) Every religious minister is free to practice his calling; and (5) The State cannot punish a person for entertaining or professing religious belief or disbeliefs.

Furthermore, to confirm with modern, secular, and democratic states, the Philippines exhibits a pluralist democracy. Newton and Van Deth (2008) define pluralism as a situation where power is dispersed among many groups and organizations that openly compete with one another in different political arenas, while a pluralist democracy is a theory in modern democracy arguing that political decisions are the outcomes of the conflict and competition between many other social movements, interest groups and organizations representing various interests.

Pluralist democracy thus encourages the political participation of many groups. The churches and religious groups find political involvement and influence under the church and state separation principle. Rebullida (2006, 76) stated in the framework of democracy and pluralism that these churches exercise rights derived from the

Philippine Constitution to function as organizations and groups and opt to participate (or not to participate) in elections, interest articulation, legislation, and policy formulation.

Secularism also embeds the principle of political neutrality. Kuru (2009) states that state neutrality towards religions can be divided into strict and benevolent neutrality. Strict or assertive neutrality attempts to exclude religion in public life, while benevolent or passive neutrality requires the state to have a passive role that allows public visibility of religion. As expounded by Dy (2008), strict neutrality suggests an absolute separation where both institutions must not cross with each other, while benevolent neutrality suggests that both institutions accommodate one another. The Philippine Constitution manifests benevolent neutrality (David 2015; *Estrada* 2006). With a flexible reading of principles, benevolent neutrality respects religious facts, traditions, and established practices. Consistent with the sociological notion that religion performs a crucial function in the survival of society.

The Constitution guarantees religious freedom, which is exhibited in Article III, Section 5, about secularism and benevolent neutrality. The constitutional provision provides three clauses: non-establishment of religion, free exercise, and no religious test. The first clause, “no law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion,” aligns with the principle of secularism. The second clause pertains to the free exercise phrase. Bernas (2009) and De Leon (2014) mentioned that religious freedom has two aspects. The first pertains to the freedom to believe in a religion. Everyone has the unalienable right to believe whatever he wants. A state may not compel religious belief or deny any person any right or benefit based on their religious views or lack thereof. The second refers to the freedom to act on such beliefs. The right to act based on one’s beliefs is not and cannot be absolute. De Leon (2014) elaborated that “conduct remains subject to regulation and even prohibition for the protection of society.” In *Cantwell vs. Connecticut* (1940),⁴ a case JW were involved, as cited by Bernas (2009), the free exercise of religion provides:

⁴ *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 U.S. 296 (1940),
<https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/310us296>.

The constitutional inhibition on legislation on the subject of religion has a double aspect. On the other hand, it forestalls compulsion by law of the acceptance of any creed or the practice of any form of worship. Freedom of conscience and freedom to adhere to such religion organization or form of worship as the individual may choose cannot be restricted by law. On the other hand, it safeguards the free exercise of the chosen form of religion. Thus the amendment embraces two concepts – freedom to believe and freedom to act. The first is absolute, but in the nature of things, the second cannot be. (304)

Adhering with Bernas (2009), De Leon (2014, 149) expounded that these two notions of “religious freedom and belief demonstrate and convey that religion may not be used to explain actions or refusals to act that is inconsistent with public safety, morals, or the general welfare of society, or that contravene public criminal law.” As a result, no one has the right to refuse to defend the country during times of war, to refuse to pay taxes, to practice polygamy, or to violate the rights of others in the name of religion.

Through the provided structures, the Constitution guarantees religious liberty and freedom for religious groups, such as the JW, but under constitutional boundaries. This requires and challenges state actors, particularly the courts, to manage religious freedom issues and balance church-state relations. Moreover, former Supreme Court Chief Justice Hilario David Jr., expounded those cases revolving around religious freedom “articulate progressive social and global understandings in religious affairs and yet remains steadfastly faithful to traditional, formalist, and originalist notions of religious freedom and separation of church and state” (David 2014, 2). As the author argues, this behavior is observable in the cases involving JW.

4. Method

Inspired by the *Ebralinag* case, the paper explored other cases where the members of the JW and the organization were involved. Through archival research, and documentary analysis, the paper identified six cases that reached the Appellate Courts. Various

government and academic websites, and books were utilized to search for the JW cases. In terms of the documentary analysis, government and legal sources that were utilized are the provisions of the 1935 and 1987 Philippine Constitutions, specific national laws and policies, and several jurisprudences which has been laid down by Appellate Courts, particularly the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals. Foreign jurisprudence, particularly US cases involving JW, was also utilized in this paper since the Philippine Supreme Court employed and cited US cases in aiding their decisions. Although US jurisprudence is not binding, it is commonly employed, cited, and shaped the Philippine legal jurisdiction (Santiago 2011; David 2014).

5. Cases Involving Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Philippines

In the Philippines, various laws and policies challenged the JW which resulted in court cases. These policies are grouped into five themes, namely: Flag Ceremonies; Police Power; Military Service; Use of Public Property for Religious Purposes; and Marriage. The clause on freedom of religion, right of public education, and freedom of speech were used as legal vanguards by the JW. Table 1 provides a summary of the JW cases in the Philippines.

Table 1. Cases Involving Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Philippines

Affected Laws and Policies	Cases	Legal Vanguard used by the JW	Verdict of the Courts towards the JW
A.Flag Ceremonies	• <i>Gerona, et al. vs. Secretary of Education</i> , et al., 106 Phil. 2 (1959)	Religious Freedom; and right of public education (Article III, Section 5; and Article XIV Section 1, 1987 Philippine Constitution)	Not in favour
• Flag Salute Law (Republic Act No 1265)	• <i>Balbuna, et al., vs. Secretary of Education</i> , 110 Phil. 150 (1960)		
• Flag and Heraldic Code of the Philippines (Republic Act No. 8491)	• <i>Ebralinag vs. Division Superintendent of Schools of Cebu</i> , 219 SCRA 256 (1993)		In favour
• Department Order No. 8 of July 21, 1955			
• Administrative Code of 1987 (Executive Order No. 292)			

Affected Laws and Policies	Cases	Legal Vanguard used by the JW	Verdict of the Courts towards the JW
B. Exercise of police power (Section 2194, paragraph c, Revised Administrative Code)	<i>Ignacio vs. Ela</i> , 99 Phil. 346 (1956)	Freedom of speech and right of the people peaceably to assemble [Article III, Section 1 (8) – 1935 Phil. Constitution]	Not in favour
C. Military Service National Defense Act (Commonwealth Act No. 1)	Valid Secular Policy vs. Freedom of Religion [Annotation from <i>Ebralinag vs. Division</i> (1993)]	Freedom of Religion (Article III, Section 5, 1987 Philippine Constitution)	Not in favour
D. Use of Public Property for Religious Purposes [Article VI, Section 13 (3) – 1935 Phil. Constitution]	<i>People vs. Fernandez, et al.</i> , C.A.-G.R. No. 1128-R, (1948)	Use of Public Property for Religious Purposes [Article VI, Section 13 (3) – 1935 Phil. Constitution]	In favour
E. Marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revised Administrative Code - Book V, Title I, Chapter VI, Sec. 46(b)(5)• The Family Code of the Philippines - Article 1• Revised Penal Code-Article 334	<i>Estrada vs. Escritor</i> , SCRA 492, (2006)	Freedom of Religion (Article III, Section 5, 1987 Philippine Constitution)	In favour

5.1. Flag Ceremonies

The Flag Salute Law (Republic Act No 1265),⁵ Flag and Heraldic Code of the Philippines (Republic Act No. 8491),⁶

⁵ Republic Act No. 1265, An Act of Making Flag Ceremony Compulsory in All Educational Institutions, https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra1955/ra_1265_1955.html.
⁶ Republic Act No. 8491, Flag and Heraldic Code of the Philippines, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1998/02/12/republic-act-no-8491/>.

Department Order No. 8 of July 21, 1955, and Administrative Code of 1987⁷ governs the proper decorum during flag ceremonies.

Two notable 1993 cases, namely, *Ebralinag vs. Division and Amolo vs. Division*, involved 43 high school and elementary students (*Ebralinag*) and 25 high school and elementary students (*Amolo*), all are JW members. Cebu Authorities dismissed the JW pupils from their various public schools for refusing to salute the flag, sing the national anthem, or repeat the patriotic pledge which is required by Republic Act (RA) No. 1265 and Department Order No. 8 of July 21, 1955 of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS). Section 1 and 3 of RA No. 1265 provides:

Sec. 1. All educational institutions shall henceforth observe flag ceremony, which shall be simple and dignified and shall include the playing or singing of the Philippine National Anthem...

Sec. 3. Failure or refusal to observe the flag ceremony provided by this Act and in accordance with rules and regulations issued by the Secretary of Education, after proper notice and hearing, shall subject the educational institution concerned and its head to public censure as an administrative punishment which shall be published at least once in a newspaper of general circulation.

There are also previous cases before *Ebralinag* and *Amolo* (decision internalized in *Ebralinag*) that have been raised among JW students for violating flag ceremony laws. These are raised in *Gerona et al. vs. Secretary of Education*⁸ (1959) and *Balbuna et al., vs. Secretary of Education* (1960).⁹

These cases basically raise one issue: “Whether school children who are members of a religious sect known as JW may be

⁷ Executive Order No. 292, s. 1987, Administrative Code of 1987, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1987/07/25/executive-order-no-292-s-1987/>.

⁸ *Gerona et al. vs. Secretary of Education*, et al., 106 Phil. 2 (1959), https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1959/aug1959/gr_1-13954_1959.html.

⁹ *Balbuna et al. vs. Secretary of Education*, 110 Phil. 150 (1960), https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1960/nov1960/gr_1-14283_1960.html.

expelled from school (both private and public) for refusing, on account of their religious beliefs, to take part in the flag ceremony which includes playing or singing the Philippine national anthem, saluting the Philippine flag and reciting the patriotic pledge” (*Ebralinag* 1993).

In the early cases, the Supreme Court in the *Gerona* (1959) and *Balbuna* (1960) cases upheld the expulsion of the students. The Court in *Balbuna* as cited in *Ebralinag* (1993) reiterated that:

The flag is not an image but a symbol of the Republic of the Philippines... Under a system of complete separation of church and state in the government, the flag is utterly devoid of religious significance. Saluting the flag does not involve any religious ceremony. The children of Jehovah’s Witnesses cannot be exempted from participating in the flag ceremony. They have no valid right to such exemption. Moreover, exemption to the requirement will disrupt school discipline and demoralize the rest of the school population which by far constitutes the great majority. (para. 3 – 4)

Section 28, Chapter 9 of the Administrative Code of 1987 (Executive Order No. 292), which took effect on September 21, 1988, in respect to RA No. 1265 and the *Gerona* judgment. Section 28, paragraph 5 accords legislative weight to *Gerona*’s decision: “(5) After an investigation, any instructor, student, or learner who refuses to join or participate in the flag ceremony may be terminated.”

Thirty years later, RA No. 1265, Department Order No. 8, series of 1955, and the ruling in the *Gerona* and *Balbuna* were challenged. The Supreme Court in the *Ebralinag* case believed that the verdict in *Gerona* should be re-examined. The idea that one may be compelled to obey RA No. 1265 on “fear of being expelled from school or dismissed from one’s job or, is unfamiliar to the conscience of the present-day generation of Filipinos who asserts the Bill of Rights which guarantees freedom of speech and exercise of religious profession and worship” (Bernas 2007; *Ebralinag vs. Division* 1993).

In *German vs. Barangan*,¹⁰ Chief Justice Enrique Fernando in his separate opinion stated, “Religious freedom is a fundamental right which is entitled to the highest priority and the amplest protection among human rights, for it involves the relationship of man to his Creator” (*Ebralinag* 1993).

Justice Aquino, the ponente of the Court, elaborated the principle of religious freedom. Aquino as cited by Cruz (2007, 25) quoted:

The right to religious profession and worship has two-fold aspect, vis., freedom to believe and freedom to act on one’s belief. The first is absolute as long as the belief is confined within the realm of thought. The second is subject to regulation where the belief is translated into external acts that affect the public welfare. (*Ebralinag* 1993)

The Supreme Court in the end unanimously ruled (13 voted for it, 1 abstained and 1 was on leave) in favor of the Witnesses and annulled the expulsion. The Court followed the doctrine laid down in *West Virginia vs. Barnette* of the US Supreme Court, which the ponente has quoted, as cited by Bernas (2007):

To believe that patriotism will not flourish if patriotic ceremonies are voluntary and spontaneous instead of a compulsory routine is to make an unflattering estimate of the appeal of our institutions to free minds... When they are so harmless to others or to the State as those we deal with here, the price is not too great. But freedom to differ is not limited to things that do not matter such. That would be a mere shadow of freedom. The test of its substance is the right to differ as to things touch the heart of the existing order. (*Ebralinag* 1993)

5.2. Exercise of Police Power

The principle of freedom of speech has been a vanguard of the propagation activities of the JW. Concerning Article III, Section 5, or

¹⁰ *German v. Barangan*, 135 SCRA 515 (1985),
<https://www.chanrobles.com/cralaw/1985marchdecisions.php?id=121>.

the principle of religious freedom, JW has the constitutional guarantee to disseminate its religious beliefs. Since JW are widely known for their religious propagation through preaching or proselytizing, Bible studies, and assemblies, the provision allows them to share their beliefs with others and to seek to entice them to their faith.

However, there are some limitations to Section 5. De Leon (2014, 149) argued that “any restraint on the right to proselytize religious ideas and information can only be justified (like other restraints on freedom of expression) on the ground that there should be clear and eminent danger of any substantial evil that the State has the right to prevent.” The freedom of expression is still subjected to the regulation by the State. To an extent, the right may be detrimental to an individual or group or clear and present danger when abused. The constitution, therefore, states that freedom of expression is not absolute.

It must be noted that the provision about freedom of speech and religious freedom in the Philippine Constitution has been adopted from the First and Fourth Amendments of the US Constitution. In fact, some cases in the US ruled on these rights, which the Philippine Court noted (*Ignacio* 1956).

In *Fowler vs. State of Rhode Island* (1953),¹¹ a municipal ordinance was created, making it a criminal offense to address a religious meeting in a public park. In *Jamison vs. Texas* (1943),¹² the Texas Court prohibited the distribution of religious pamphlets. As a response, JW in both cases insisted that their guarantee of religious freedom and freedom of speech had been violated. Both courts favored the Witnesses. The courts emphasized that the State may not intervene in the religious activities of the JW. The US Supreme Court declared in *Fowler* a violation of the First and Fourteenth Amendments that a municipal ordinance was created, making it a criminal offense to address a religious meeting in a public park. In *Jamison*, the Court

¹¹ *Fowler v. Rhode Island*, 345 U.S. 67 (1953),
<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/345/67/>.

¹² *Jamison v. Texas*, 318 U.S. 413 (1943),
<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/318/413/>.

insisted that the State may not prohibit the distribution of any religious material in pursuing religious activities (Coquiao 2007).

However, in the Philippines, cases involving their exercise of freedom of speech were decided differently. The Supreme Court held that the right to freedom of speech and religion is not absolute. In *Ignacio vs. Ela* (1956),¹³ JW petitioners Fernando Ignacio and Simeon de la Cruz applied and got a permit to use the kiosk of the plaza in Sta. Cruz, Zambales, for their religious meeting and propagation. But the respondent, Municipal Mayor Norberto Ela, permitted them to use a part of the plaza. In response, the petitioners argued that they should be permitted to utilize the town plaza itself, including the kiosk, because it allegedly violated their constitutionally granted rights to free speech, assembly, and religion.

Based on the facts, the mayor argued that he did not violate their constitutional rights and even offered to utilize a portion of the town plaza. The mayor further maintained that he was only employing his police authority to manage the meeting in order to maintain public order and safety and avoid any incidents because the plaza was near the Roman Catholic Church.

In support of the mayor's action, the Supreme Court concluded that the right to free speech, assembly, and religion may be controlled to protect the rights of individuals, the community, or society by using the State's police power (Coquiao 2007). The Court in *Ignacio* asserted that the right to preserve one's life by exerting police power to regulate public order and safety weighs more than the right to freedom of speech and religion of the JW petitioners.

5.3. Military Service

After the *Ebralinag* case, the Supreme Court began revisiting the laws and policies that could affect religious sects such as the JW. The Philippine Supreme Court studied Conscientious Objector cases (mostly JW) in the US. This would provide insights into when the

¹³ *Ignacio vs. Ela*, 99 Phil. 346 (1956),
https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1956/may1956/gr_1-6858_1956.html.

Court will encounter such cases in the future. Such reviews were annotated in *Ebralinag*.

From the Court's annotations in *Ebralinag*, a series of cases were filed against several members of the JW in the US. As a response, JW members countered the cases by exhausting all legal means. In *Buttecali vs. United States* (1943),¹⁴ JW claimed that they were entitled to exemption from military training and service of duty since they were ministers of religion as provided by the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940¹⁵. The JW argued they were "ministers of religion" as to what the Act meant. They all claimed that they were ministers of religion by distributing religious pamphlets.

However, the Federal Court decision defined a "minister of religion" to be one whom, as cited in Coquiao (2007):

First, finished a prescribed course of the study of religion;
Second, consecrated to the service of living and teaching
that religion through an ordination ceremony under the
auspices of an established Church;

Third, has been commissioned by that Church as its
minister; and

Fourth, is subjected to control or discipline by the council of
that Church (pp.343-344).

The Federal Court in *Rase vs. United States* (1942),¹⁶ and *Checinski vs. United States* (1942)¹⁷ refused to exempt them since it appeared that the "defendants used only a portion of their time in religious activities such as distributing religious literature and devoting much of their time as to other activities such as working on farms, storekeepers, and carpentry." In most cases, JW members' classification as ministers of religion was denied (Coquiao 2007).

¹⁴ *Buttecali vs United States* (1943), <https://case-law.vlex.com/vid/united-states-v-buttecali-886411126>.

¹⁵ Selective Training and Service Act of 1940. 50 U.S.C. 301 (1940), <https://www.loc.gov/item/uscode1940-005050a003/>.

¹⁶ *Rase v. United States*, 6 Cir., 129 F.2d 204, 209 (1942), <https://casetext.com/case/rase-v-united-states>.

¹⁷ *Checinski v. United States*, 129 F.2d 461 (1942), <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/F2/129/461/1483606/>.

Although the JW are the most known conscientious objectors worldwide, there are still no cases from religious groups regarding compulsory military service in the Philippines. However, a similar religious sect claimed exemption from mandatory military training under the National Defense Act¹⁸ on religious grounds. This is the Seventh-Day Adventist. In an opinion rendered by the Secretary of Justice, as cited by Coquiao (2007, 621), it was held for the following conscientious objectors:

Religious freedom may be limited by a reasonable exercise of police power. Compulsory military service under the National Defense Act is intended to advance public welfare in accordance with Article II, Section 4 of the Constitution of the Philippines to the effect that “the defense of the State is the prime duty of government, and in fulfilment of this duty all citizens may be required by law to render personal military or civil service.

Furthermore, the Court conclude that religious freedom may be held limited by reasonable exercise of police power for the survival of the state. Annotated in the *Ebralinag* case, in *Hamilton vs. Board of Regents* (1934),¹⁹ the Court significantly concluded:

We are a Christian people according to one another the equal right of religious freedom and acknowledging with reverence the duty of obedience to the will of God. But, also, we are a nation with the duty to survive; a Nation whose Constitution contemplates war as well as peace, whose government must go forward upon the assumption, and safely can proceed upon no other, that unqualified allegiance to the Nation and submission and obedience to the laws of the land, as well as those made for war as those made for peace, are not inconsistent with the will of God. (289)

¹⁸ Commonwealth Act No. 1. National Defense Act of 1935, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1935/12/21/commonwealth-act-no-1/>.

¹⁹ *Hamilton v. Board of Regents*, 293 U.S. 245 (1934), <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/293/245/>.

Thus, the Court imposes that regardless of religious beliefs and convictions, one must render military service when the State calls upon so.

5.4. Use of Public Property for Religious Purposes

Under policies related to appropriation, Article V, Section 13 of the 1935 Philippine Constitution provides that “the State does not inhibit the use of the public property when the religious character of such use is merely incidental to temporary use, available indiscriminately to the public in general.” JW is known for assemblies or gatherings requiring large facilities to house their members. In some options, the religious organization opted to use government facilities as a venue for their assemblies, leading to a question of law regarding the usage of public property for religious purposes.

In *People vs. Fernandez et al.* (1948),²⁰ the JW leased a public auditorium for a three-day convention. On the ground that the convention was purely a religious activity and as public property could not be lawfully used for such purpose under the Constitution, the governor of the province, Enrique Braganza, ordered the JW to vacate the premises. Despite this order, the JW continued its convention (Coquiao 2007). In reversing the trial court conviction, the Court of Appeals ruled:

The use of the public building by a religious sect is not inhibited by the Constitution when it is opened for lease to the public... that the Province of Pangasinan allowed the Jehovah's Witnesses to use the premises, not because they presumably constituted a religious organization or intended to hold a convention allegedly of a religious nature, but on consideration of the fees by said organization. (*People vs. Fernandez* 1948)

Article VI, Section 13 also provides that the prohibition is not violated based on the following grounds. First, “when the use of public property for religious purposes is incidental and temporary and is

²⁰ *People vs. Fernandez*, et al., C.A.-G.R. No. 1128-R, May, 1948; XIII Lawyers' J. 295,

compatible with the use to which other community members are entitled or may be authorized to make”²¹ (*Aglipay* 1937). Second, when the payment is based on a contract. In *Millard vs. Board of Education*²² (1886), as expounded by Cruz (2007) and De Leon (2014), rents paid by churches or sectarian institutions for the use of public property do not violate the constitutional provision since the public receives the full benefit of its contract.

5.5. Marriage Vows

Another case revolving around the State and the JW focuses on the institution of family and marriage. The case involved Soledad Escritor, a member of the JW.²³ Escritor met Luciano Quilapio Jr. in the late 1970’s. At that time, both were in floundering marriages. Eventually, both separated from their spouses. In 1980, they decided to live together without having their previous marriages annulled. In 1991, the couple decided to formalize their union (Vitug 2011).

With both of them still roped to their marriages, they opted to sign a “Declaration of Pledging Faithfulness,” similar to a wedding ceremony. It is unique to the JW and is used only in countries where divorce is prohibited. The couple’s record has been inscribed in the JW’s Philippine central office (Vitug 2011).

In *Estrada vs. Escritor* (2006), the following are manifested:

Declaration of Pledging Faithfulness

I, Soledad S. Escritor, do hereby declare that I have accepted Luciano D. Quilapio, Jr., as my mate in marital relationship; that have done all within my ability to obtain legal recognition of this relationship by the proper public authorities and that it is because of having been unable to do

²¹ See *Aglipay vs Ruiz*, 64 PHIL 201 (1937), https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1937/mar1937/gr_1-45459_1937.html.

²² *Millard v. Board of Education*, 19 Ill. App. 48 (1886), <https://cite.case.law/ill-app/19/48/>.

²³ See *Estrada vs. Escritor*, SCRA 492 (2006), <https://www.chanrobles.com/cralaw/2006junedecisions.php?id=614>.

so that I therefore make this public declaration pledging faithfulness in this marital relationship.

I recognize this relationship as a binding tie before ‘Jehovah’ God and before all persons to be held to and honoured in full accord with the principles of God’s Word. I will continue to seek the means to obtain legal recognition of this relationship by the civil authorities and if at any future time a change in circumstances make this possible, I promise to legalize this union.

Signed this 28th day of July 1991

The JW viewed the declaration as “a putting of oneself on record before God and man that the signer will be just as faithful to his or her existing marital relationship as he or she would be if the union were one validated by civil authorities” (*The Watchtower* 1977, 17).

After marriage, Escritor joined the judiciary and worked as a regional trial court interpreter in Las Pinas. The complainant, Alejandro Estrada, knowing that the couple lived together without having their previous marriages annulled, protested that Escritor “should not be allowed to remain employed in the judiciary for gross, disgraceful, and immoral conduct” (*Estrada* 2006). The ground of the complaint is based on Book V, Title I, Chapter VI, Sec. 46(b)(5) of the Revised Administrative Code supplements The Family Code of the Philippines,²⁴ Article 1, the provision about marriage, and Article 334 of the Revised Penal Code²⁵ outlawing concubinage.

Escritor attested that she was already a widow when she entered the judiciary in 1999 (Vitug 2011). Her husband passed away in 1988. She acknowledged that she began living with Quilapio more than two decades ago, without the benefit of marriage, when her husband was still alive but living with another lady (Vitug 2011). She also said that she and Quilapio have a child. However, as a JW, Escritor claims that their conjugal arrangement is by their religious

²⁴ Executive Order No. 209, s. 1987. Family Code of the Philippines.
<https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1987/07/06/executive-order-no-209-s-1987/>,

²⁵ Act No. 3815. Revised Penal Code,
https://lawphil.net/statutes/acts/act_3815_1930.html.

convictions and has the support of her community. She offered her Declaration of Pledging Faithfulness as evidence. The marital arrangement between Escritor and Quilapio is not immoral in the eyes of the congregation (*Estrada* 2006).

The Court had to assess the principle of religious freedom under Article III, Section 5 of the Constitution by referencing the congregation's religious beliefs and practices, stating that her marriage arrangement does not constitute disgraceful and immoral conduct (*Estrada* 2006).

In the rulings of *Estrada*, the Court provided a distinction between secular morality and religious morality. The Court only extends to secular morality. Furthermore, the case provided two compelling interests, the individual's interest in religious freedom and the state's interest in protecting marriage and family as basic institutions and preserving the integrity of workers of the judiciary.

The Court states that the Philippine Constitution adheres to benevolent neutrality. The Court in *Estrada* (2006) ruled in this manner:

The Court states that our Constitution adheres to benevolent neutrality approach that gives room for accommodation of religious exercises as required by the Free Exercise Clause. This benevolent neutrality could "allow for accommodation of morality based on religion, provided it does not offend compelling state interests. (*Estrada* 2006)

Benevolent neutrality, as demonstrated in numerous cases involving religion, safeguards religious realities, traditions, and established practices through a flexible reading of principles. Consistent with the sociological notion that religion performs a crucial function in the survival of civilization. This approach is used in the Philippine Constitution to preserve religious liberty (*Estrada* 2006).

The Supreme Court handed down its judgment in favor of Escritor in its second proceedings in 2006. However, Justice Carpio, in favor of Escritor, looked at the issue from a different standpoint. For Carpio, as cited in *Estrada* (2006), in the past proceeding, it was plain

that Escritor's conduct was "that of a concubine under Article 334 of the Revised Penal Code. Escritor may now be subjected to disciplinary sanction for conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service."

In a favorable response, Carpio in his dissenting opinion, found Escritor's conduct as "neither disgraceful nor immoral" since she and Quilapio were fully accepted by their religious and social community and their arrangement had "not created any scandal, moral outrage or malicious gossip in their congregation and community" (*Estrada* 2006). But Carpio also said:

The Court cannot simply turn a blind eye to the conduct of a court employee, by the employee's own admission, violates our criminal statutes. Such conduct is prejudicial to the best interest of the administration of justice. The courts of justice cannot harbour those who openly and knowingly commit a crime. Courts of justice would lose their moral authority and credibility if they condone violators of law. (*Estrada* 2006)

Furthermore, the Court accepts that "Escritor's conjugal arrangement cannot be penalized because she has presented a case for legal exemption based on her fundamental right to religious freedom" (*Estrada* 2006). Justice Puno said that "the free exercise of religion is a fundamental right that enjoys a preferred position in the hierarchy of rights." He also captured the essence of the majority decision in 2006, stating that:

The Court recognizes that state interests must be upheld to that freedoms – including religious freedom – may be enjoyed. In the area of religious exercise as preferred freedom, in the absence of a showing that such state interest exists, man must be allowed to subscribe to the infinite. (*Estrada* 2006)

6. Conclusion

By identifying and compiling the cases involving JW, this paper supplements an additional picture of church-state relations in the

Philippines, overshadowed by religious organizations such as the Roman Catholic Church, INC, and Islam. Moreover, this paper presents a comprehensive understanding of the cases faced by JW and shows the effect of such government laws and policies on their religious practice and beliefs.

These legal embattlements of the JW revolve around policies related to flag ceremonies, police power, military service, use of public property for religious purposes, and marriage. As a constitutional guarantee, the JW primarily utilized religious freedom to defend themselves. Other clauses, such as the right to public education and freedom of speech, were also used to protect their members.

Moreover, examining the policies affecting the JW has presented how the courts weigh religious freedom and state authority and ensure a balance between the two. The JW cases also confirm how Chief Justice David describes Philippine jurisprudence and state actors regarding religious freedom and separation of church and state as “progressive and yet traditionalist, as well as comparative and dialogic” (David 2014, 2). Specifically, the results of the majority of their legal cases present that the state, particularly the Court, has shifted and shown a liberal attitude as manifested due to religious freedom and adopts the principle of benevolent neutrality towards the JW as long as it provides that it does not contradict public safety and interests.

7. Recommendations

Given the legal experiences of JW in the Philippines, legal practitioners, policymakers, and religious freedom advocates should deepen their understanding of the specific challenges faced by the JW. This can be accomplished through awareness campaigns and seminar workshops focusing on the interaction of law, religion, and human rights. For the academe, these topics, together with the JW cases, can be integrated into the curriculum of social sciences, religion, philosophy, and law courses.

Moreover, religious freedom advocates should propose policy reforms to safeguard the religious freedom of all individuals and communities, including JW. This could involve reviewing existing laws to ensure it uphold religious freedom, non-discrimination, and the separation of church and state. Alternative policies that would be constructive for both the state and JW can also be proposed.

Lastly, initiatives conducted should encourage interfaith dialogue and collaboration among JW and government agencies to promote mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation. Opportunities for addressing common challenges and advancing shared values can be identified and pursued by fostering constructive engagement. This can be achieved through roundtable discussions comprising representatives from each group, which will tackle issues related to religious freedom or even conduct joint initiatives on shared values, such as community services, donation drives, and disaster relief operations.

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A Case Study of Web-Based Communication for Online Teaching and Learning at a Christian University in Buddhist Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Quality education, which is the fourth element of the sustainable development goals of the United Nations, suffered dramatically in the time of the pandemic. Unprepared, most academic institutions started to embark on web-based education. This research addressed the most and least effective learning experiences for both students and instructors in online learning and teaching. This case study employed both descriptive statistical data and qualitative information to have a well-rounded understanding of the

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phenomenon of digital education. This study used non-random, purposive, convenience, snowball, and quota sampling methods to invite research collaborators. Thematic analysis was employed to obtain rich qualitative insights that supplement the quantitative data. The raw data was collected from both instructors and students who were engaged in online education during the pandemic. The findings revealed that both instructors and students complained that the least effective learning experiences is the poor internet connectivity, as it is an obstacle that interrupted smooth flowing online learning and teaching. By presenting real-world insights, stressing significant findings, and offering recommendations, this article contributes to a more profound comprehension of web-based classroom. In this period of re-globalization after the end of the pandemic, online education is now mainstream.

Keywords: *communication, education, feedback, online learning, online teaching*

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The world of education has changed drastically in the past two years. Online education has become increasingly prevalent in present-day education because of necessary improvements in digital knowledge. Thanks to the pandemic, the world has experienced a revolution in online teaching and learning, which was able to disrupt divides in geography. This paper offers an exploration of the nuanced adaptation of learners and instructors in the newly mainstreamed mode of online education in which communication plays a critical role. Both challenges and opportunities have shaped the development of online education since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic, which reached its height in 2020, has negatively affected education as we know it (Aristovnik et al. 2023). Education was disrupted on a global scale due to the health crisis that affected the whole world. Schools and universities had to shift from onsite classes to an alternative mode so that schooling would continue in the midst of local, national, and global quarantines and shutdowns. The COVID-19 pandemic abruptly forced academic institutions worldwide to transition to online education without prior planning. This movement from in-class teaching and learning to off-site, online teaching and learning was unexpected and hasty, with neither preparations nor transition. For this reason, there were challenges that had to be surmounted (Zheng, Bender, and Lyon 2021). As a result, the quality of the educational life of both teachers and students have suffered immensely, what with the general lack of skills of almost all teachers and learners in both online instruction and learning, respectively (Fernández-Batanero et al. 2022).

The digital divide is real, and not only to be considered just “bad internet connection.” Using intersectional lenses, social class, ethnicity, and geographic locations are important to consider in the use of online education. The global health crisis intensified the technological gap between the haves and the have nots, as a result of which it adversely affected the already poorer students in both urban and remote rural areas, which further impacted their academic performance (Golden et al. 2023). Geographic locations of the rich, middle class, and the poor in both the richer countries of the Global North and the poorer countries in the Global South also reveals unevenness in availability, affordability, internet access, and internet speed (Aristovnik et al. 2023). Hence, this article fills the research gap by investigating the insufficient examination of online and blended education.

Information and communications technology (ICT) is vital for online education to work well. There are both benefits and perils in online learning and teaching, for which the pandemic provided opportunities for research. Of necessity, there is now a rising interest in online education, especially as hybrid education becomes the norm. Thus, there is a need to understand the impact of online education as a major element of sustainable development. Online education as well

as hybrid onsite and online education are now not only a normal or standard part of education but also a requirement in the aftermath of the pandemic (Dos Santos 2022). For this reason, there is a need to investigate online education during the pandemic, its challenges, and its potentials (Marcus 2022). The researchers in this paper listened to both students and teachers, investigating the ways in which they experienced online education as well as shared their recommendations.

1.2. Rationale

The qualitative case study approach is indispensable to have a deeper understanding of online teaching and learning. Conducting qualitative research gave the researchers the opportunity to explore the personal experiences and perspectives of individuals involved in online education. No attempts are made to generalize the findings of this specific case study to the larger context of online education in general.

1.3. Research Questions

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are the demographics of the research collaborators in the study?
2. What are the personal preferences of students in learning that yields most effective learning outcomes?
3. In what manner do students exhibit less effective learning?
4. What are the personal preferences of instructors in their teaching strategies that yield most effective teaching outcomes?
5. Which teaching strategies do educators believe are least effective?

1.4. Significance of the Study

The above research questions contribute to addressing the gap in the literature, especially as the whole world was forced to transition to online education mode at the height of the pandemic. Most educators and students in the world did not have any experience in

online teaching and online learning, respectively. But for education to continue, going online was the band-aid solution at that time, as all places were quarantined or shut down and people were told not to have contact with anyone else. At that time, online was a hit-or-miss but necessary experiment to keep education alive. Thus, the research questions of this article inquired about the experiences of instructors and students who went through this phase in online education. Studies have shown that there is a lack of research on the ways in which to integrate technology effectively into online teaching and learning (Al-Fraihat et al. 2020). Online education gives educators and students the opportunity to continue and engage in teaching and learning in a whole range of courses, and in the event of an emergency, such as a pandemic and other emergency. Online education affords flexibility and accessibility in terms of time and space. In fact, online education, at least hybrid onsite in combination with online education, is here to stay.

1.5. Aim of the Study

The goal of this research is to explore and understand the most favorable and unfavorable learning experiences for students, as well as the most effective and ineffective teaching experiences for instructors, in the context of online teaching and learning. The study aims to inform educational practice, policy-making, and future research in online education.

1.6. Teaching Objectives

The teaching objectives of this case study are the following:

1. To identify the participants of this case study;
2. To find out how students learn most effectively, based on their own personal preferences;
3. To find out how students learn least effectively, based on their own personal preferences;
4. To discover the ways in which instructors teach most effectively, based on their own personal preferences; and,
5. To find out the ways in which instructors teach least effectively, based on their own personal preferences

1.7. Limitations of This Research

This article has several limitations. Most importantly, it does not claim to have findings that are generalizable due to the following factors. To begin with, the sample size is limited, far from being able to pinpoint an emerging global trend. In addition, time constraint and number of researchers involved in the implementation of this research are additional limitations of the study. Another limitation is the Hawthorne Effect, according to which people who are being studied behave, narrate, or reveal things based on what they believe the researchers want to hear (Gillespie 1993). In this way, the research collaborations neither behave nor respond as they normally would but choose to gauge what the researchers expect their behaviors or responses to be.

2. Literature Review

The key terms of this research are education, communication, feedback, online teaching, and online learning. Education refers to the purposeful process whereby students learn new mental knowledge, physical skills, and ethical attitudes (Noddings 2005). Education manifests in various forms. It encompasses formal education, such as classroom-based learning (UNESCO 1997), as well as non-formal avenues like seminars, workshops, and conferences. Additionally, education extends to informal settings, encompassing learning experiences embedded within regular daily life.

Communication theory is the field of study, which explores the ways in which knowledge, information, ideas, and thoughts among individuals or groups are transmitted through written language, verbal language, non-verbal means, and symbols (Castells 2000; Gomez and Ballard 2013). There are many elements of communication, among which are feedback, two-way communication, face-to-face communication, and non-verbal communication (Ziemer and Tranter 2015).

Two-way communication allows us to exchange ideas, thoughts, and feelings. It is important because it helps to ensure that

the message is understood, and the intended meaning is delivered. Two-way communication can help to identify areas for improvement and can help to ensure that both parties are on the same page. It can also help to build stronger relationships between individuals and can lead to more effective communication overall.

Face-to-face communication allows people to exchange information through spoken words, facial expressions, and body language. It is often more personal and intimate than other forms of communication because it allows for immediate feedback and interaction. Mediated communication is often more convenient than face-to-face communication because it allows people to communicate from different locations and at different times. However, it can also be less personal and less effective than face-to-face communication because it lacks the immediacy and intimacy of in-person interaction.

Nonverbal communication is important because it can lead to valuable information, reinforce the meaning of spoken words, and add clarity to the message. Nonverbal signals that match up with spoken words can build trust, understanding, and empathy.

Feedback is an essential component of communication because it allows for the exchange of information between two parties (Ilnicki 2023). Feedback can be both positive and negative and can help to improve communication by providing insight into how the message was received. Positive feedback can help to reinforce good communication practices, while negative feedback can help to identify areas for improvement. Feedback is important because it helps to ensure that the message is understood and that the intended meaning is conveyed. It also builds relationships by establishing trust and respect.

Online teaching and online learning are interconnected, representing two facets of the same phenomenon. Online teaching involves the delivery of instruction via the internet, encompassing both synchronous, or real-time, delivery, and asynchronous, or self-paced, formats (Garrison, and Anderson 2003). On the other hand, online learning is defined as the process of acquiring new knowledge, skills, or attitudes through electronic devices, which could be formal, non-

formal, or incidental (Bates 2019; Dhawan 2020). In addition, online learning and teaching appear to include face-to-face communication, non-verbal communication, two-way communication, and feedback. However, if students or instructors, on the one hand, turn off their camera while in the online classroom, the pedagogical experience cannot be considered as face-to-face communication and non-verbal communication. On the other hand, if both instructors and students, during online classes, activate their microphones, the online experience still has two-way communication and feedback in the online classroom, but does not have non-verbal communication, if the video cameras are turned off, as there is no visual contact.

A literature review serves various purposes. Firstly, it has been utilized to review foundational concepts for this study, which were then employed to construct the theoretical framework. Secondly, this literature review addresses a gap by examining the most and least effective teaching and learning experiences in communication related to online teaching and learning. The goal is to reintegrate into a normal life post-pandemic and advance sustainable development in education. All the key concepts in this literature review are tied together to form the theoretical framework of this research. See Figure 1 below for the conceptual framework.

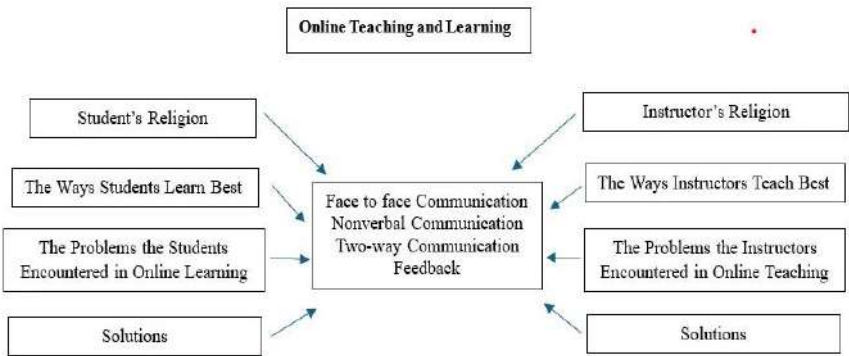


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Authors of This Article

3. Methodology

3.1. Qualitative Case Study Research Design

The case study research design was selected so that a thorough, detailed investigation of a group of instructors and students can be provided. The case study design provided room to discover the phenomena of online teaching and online learning within their real-life settings. Thus, it provides deep understanding and rich insights of their unique circumstances.

The case study research design was employed in this study for various reasons. Firstly, this research sought to gain insights into a limited number of respondents only, unlike in metadata studies which aim to establish generalizable patterns. Secondly, it searched for insights based on the context that matters, unlike in metadata research which seeks generalizable findings based on large statistical data sets. Thirdly, this research sought not only to ask closed-ended questions which produce quantitative responses as in metadata research, but sought to get holistic answers, by also posing open-ended questions which produced qualitative responses and obtain different viewpoints from each respondent. Fourthly, this research pursued collecting rich qualitative data, as opposed to metadata studies, whose concern is the search for patterns, omitting individual preferences, which can only be secured through open-ended qualitative answers, which this case study research needed.

3.2. Research Paradigm

The paradigm utilized in this research was interactionism, specifically social phenomenology according to which individuals have their own perspectives of their lived experiences in social contexts (Merleau-Ponty 2012). Here, the phenomenon under investigation was digital education. The purpose was to study the intersubjective and social factors of experience, underscoring the importance of interpersonal communication and interactions in the face of structural constraints. In this case, most and least effective learning and teaching experiences in the interaction between learner

and teacher is the phenomenon. Virtual education is a structural constraint.

Phenomenology treats objective reality as lived experiences where meaning-making and perceptions are crucial (Merleau-Ponty 2018). Merleau-Ponty developed his phenomenology as a philosophy of science which provides an account of history, context, and experiences of people, by providing the structure of perception (Merleau-Ponty 2012). For him, perception and language are primary, as opposed to reliance on mere objective material facts traditionally considered the most important part of social analysis (Apostolópoulos 2019). Phenomenology was used in this study to understand and respond to the problems related to online teaching and online learning, especially as a result of en masse adoption of both online and hybrid modes in educational institutions in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3. Mixed Methods Questionnaire

The mixed methods methodology used in this paper responded to the teaching objectives, including identification of the research participants of this case study (Research Question 1), determining the most effective (Research Question 2) and least effective (Research Question 3) learning experiences of students, as well as the most effective (Research Question 4) and least effective (Research Question 5) teaching strategies of instructors. The questionnaire is mixed methods, as responses are both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative responses were based on fixed choices on one's profile as well as selection of best responses along a continuum in a Likert scale for preferences from most effective to least effective. Qualitative responses were additional information that research respondents provided in short paragraphs. The qualitative responses to the open-ended question items provide rich, in-depth insights and contextual understanding to the quantitative responses in a Likert scale. Thus, in this mixed methods research, rigor and transparency are provided through the combination of quantitative closed-ended responses in Likert scale format and qualitative open-ended responses in short paragraphs to the same questions. In this way, an exhaustive comprehension of the views of the participants is given in quantitative

data through descriptive statistics and qualitative data for deeper insights. Through the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, the research team was able to triangulate the answers, validate the results, and provide a more vigorous explanation of the outcomes.

See Table 1 below for the questions asked in the questionnaire, with both quantitative closed-ended question items and qualitative open-ended question items, all of which correspond to the five main research questions.

Table 1: Mixed Methods Questionnaire on Online Learning and Online Teaching
Source: Authors of This Article

Questionnaire Corresponding to Research Questions	
For Student Learnings: Indicators of Online Learning	For Faculty Teaching: Indicators of Online Teaching
<u>Research Question 1:</u> Profiles (Quantitative closed-ended responses): Sex, Age, Religion Personal Allowance, Family Income, Nationality, First Language, College, Current College Level	<u>Research Question 1:</u> Profiles (Quantitative closed-ended responses): Sex, Age, Religion Personal Allowance, Family Income, Nationality, First Language, College
<u>Research Question 2: Most Effective Learning</u> (Likert scale for quantitative closed ended; short answers for qualitative open-ended responses) Your most effective learning: I can learn from anywhere; I can access materials instructors provide; online is highly flexible for me; I feel more autonomous in online learning; I can save traveling expenses.	<u>Research Question 4: Most Effective Teaching</u> (Likert scale for quantitative closed ended; short answers for qualitative open-ended responses) Your most effective teaching: I can teach from anywhere; I provide materials to students before class; online teaching is highly flexible for me; I can use various techniques to teach online;
<u>Research Question 3: Least Effective Learning</u> (Likert scale for quantitative closed ended; short	<u>Research Question 5: Least Effective Teaching</u> (Likert scale for quantitative closed ended; short

<p>answers for qualitative open-ended responses)</p> <p>Your least effective learning: I have poor Internet connectivity; I lack technical support; I have less opportunity for interaction; I lack opportunities for clarification of doubts and queries; I lack supportive materials; I don't understand concepts; Online learning is one-way communication; I feel stressful and lack communication with instructors; online learning is easy to exchange and share information; I lose self-regulation and motivation when online learning; online learning is only instructor directed; I am comfortable with online learning; I prefer online to onsite learning; I'm happy with my grades learning online; I always turn on the videocam when online learning.</p>	<p>answers for qualitative open-ended responses)</p> <p>Your least effective teaching: I have poor Internet connectivity; I lack technical support; I have less opportunity for interaction; I lack opportunities for clarification of doubts and queries; I lack supportive materials; I can't tell if students understand concepts; Online teaching is one-way communication; I feel stressful and lack communication with students; Online teaching is easy to exchange and share information; I have more workload to prepare for online teaching; Online teaching is hard for me to handle class; I am comfortable with online teaching; I prefer online to onsite teaching; Online is easy for me to evaluate student learning; I turn on the videocam when I teach online; students do not turn on their videocam; Students do not ask questions during online class; teaching online makes me feel like I am talking alone; I have difficulties encouraging students to engage in group work</p>
<p><u>Qualitative Open-Ended Responses:</u> What problems do you encounter in online learning; Why? Recommended solution?</p>	<p><u>Qualitative Open-Ended Responses:</u> What problems do you encounter in online teaching; Why? Recommended solution?</p>
<p><u>Quantitative Closed-Ended Responses:</u> Do you agree to be contacted, if we have further questions to ask you?</p>	<p><u>Quantitative Closed-Ended Responses:</u> Do you agree to be contacted, if we have further questions to ask you?</p>

3.4. Statistical Methods

Population. The population under consideration for this research is composed of students and instructors from the whole country of Thailand. However, the sampling showed that this article had few respondents; therefore, the results of the survey do not claim to represent the whole country.

Sampling. As qualitative research, this article used non-random, purposive, convenience, snowball, and quota sampling methods (Creswell and Creswell 2018; Nikolopoulou 2022) to collect data with a view to gather thick description and to gain insights into remote teaching and learning. See Figure 2 below. In order to obtain respondents for this research, a sampling of individuals was selected. Through purposive sampling, two of the four researchers were the key persons in gathering respondents to the mixed methods questionnaire, as they are native Thai language speakers and most of the respondents are native Thai language speakers.

The questionnaire was in both the English language and the Thai language. Based on convenience sampling, each of these two team members contacted faculty members and students separately, as they contacted their peers and students. From these peers and students, other peers and students were invited to join this questionnaire, through snowball sampling. Through quota sampling, there must be at least twenty faculty members and twenty students for the research to establish reliability.

Team member one was able to recruit six instructors and thirty-one students to join the pool of respondents for the mixed methods survey. Team member two was able to recruit fifteen faculty members but zero students. Overall, there were twenty-one faculty members and thirty-one students, which exceeded the quota sampling required for reliability. For validity, three external peer reviewers checked the specific questionnaire items, matching them with the overall research questions of the study through the Index of Item Objectives Congruence (IOC).

Throughout the research process, members of the team have been meeting regularly once a week for peer debriefing and member checking to ensure the trustworthiness of the instruments, recruitment of respondents, and the data collected.

Simple descriptive statistics were gathered in the form of frequency tables for which reason the findings do not have predictive power. Non-random or non-probability sampling was used in this research in which the participants were selected not based upon probability but upon their willingness to join in this qualitative investigation. It is purposive sampling as research collaborators were chosen based on certain features that match the purpose of the study. They included instructors and students who were engaged in online education during the pandemic.

The convenience sampling was utilized in which research participants were easily accessible, as they were either former students, teaching colleagues, or friends whom the researchers met at conferences who teach at other universities. Snowball sampling was employed based on the referrals from the initial research collaborators. For instance, faculty members whom this research group invited to answer qualitative questions asked their contacts who faculty members are themselves and their students to fill out the forms to provide qualitative answers.

Quota sampling was conducted with a view to having the minimum number of research collaborators that the research team decided to have. This applied to both faculty members and students who responded to the qualitative queries of this paper. See Figure 2 below.

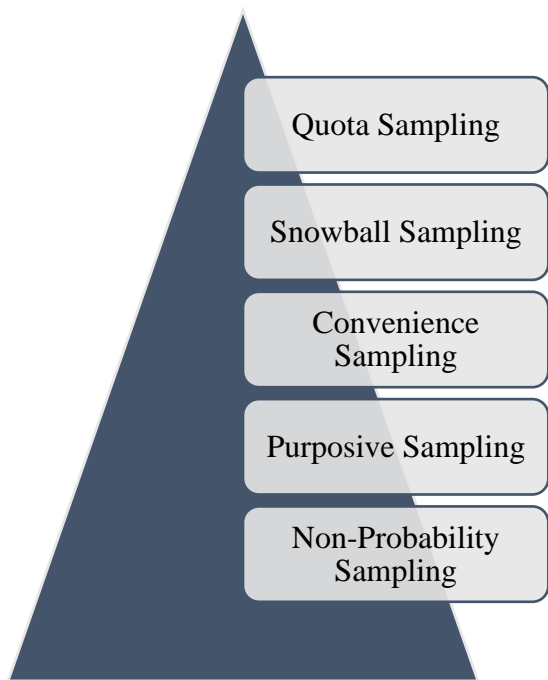


Figure 2: Qualitative Sampling Methods of This Paper with Descriptive Statistics Only
Source: Authors of This Article

The research team initially designed open-ended questions on Google Forms, but later switched to Microsoft Forms because of the license provided by their work affiliation. To collect enough responses, they made three attempts. The first attempt yielded thirty-one (31) responses from students by asking one student to distribute to her friends and six (6) responses from lecturers. This met the target for the students but was 14 responses short of the target for the lecturers. The second attempt involved collaborating with colleague speakers from two universities who visited the university for a seminar. They agreed to share the link with their colleagues, resulting in thirteen (13) more responses. In addition, the researchers personally contacted two friends who taught at two different universities and asked them to respond. They complied, bringing the total responses for the lecturers to twenty-one (21). The total number of responses from students was thirty-one (31). When combined, the twenty-one (21) lecturers and

thirty-one (31) students contributed to a grand total of fifty-two (52) respondents. See Figure 3 below.

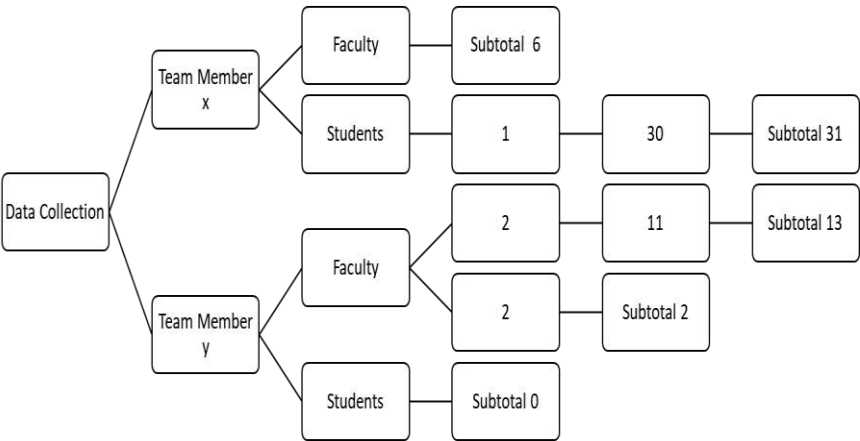


Figure 3: Descriptive Statistics of Data Collection Based on Non-Random Sampling
Source: Authors of This Article

3.5. Data Collection Methods

Initially, the research team intended to use Google Forms for the online questionnaire but later opted for Microsoft Forms. The decision was based on several factors: Firstly, Microsoft Forms is free to use. Secondly, people, including academics, are increasingly comfortable responding to online forms rather than hardcopy questionnaires. Thirdly, the anonymity of responses allowed research collaborators to provide rich and in-depth data on experiences and perspectives with privacy. Lastly, the researchers chose Microsoft Forms because the university, as an official subscriber, provides easy access to faculty members and students.

The researchers encountered challenges in data collection. The researchers assumed that since most people had smartphones, they were more inclined to answer questionnaires online. However, they realized that this assumption was false, as most people contacted did not respond online. Time for data collection was lost due to unexpected lack of response from selected respondents. Thereafter, a student

assistant was hired to distribute the QR code to faculty members and students. Unexpectedly, very few people responded online to the questionnaire. Next, office secretaries of different departments were requested in a memo to distribute and later collected hard copies of questionnaires to faculty members and students. Budget allocations had to be switched around to give room for hiring a student assistant and for the printing of the questionnaire.

To ensure transparency in data quality measures for the questionnaire related to the research on online education, the researchers indicated basic information in the questionnaire. These basic pieces of information included the purpose of the study, the way in which the findings would be employed, and the steps to guarantee privacy and security of the data collected. Through this provision in the questionnaire, trust was built with the research participants, and this increased their chances of sharing honest responses.

This paper has undergone the Ethics Review Board. There were three separate sets of reviewers at different points in time. The proposal successfully passed through a successive series of three reviews composed of three reviewers each. The fourth review was by three anonymous reviewers of the journal to which the paper was submitted. To ensure data quality control, there were a series of formal meetings with peer reviewers for validation of the proposal, instruments, data collection, and findings. The first meeting with three reviewers was to check the research proposal along with the questionnaire: one reviewer was based in Germany, another in Hong Kong, and the third one was from a university in Thailand. They provided constructive feedback to the proposal and questionnaire. The second was feedback from three peer reviewers from different universities who reviewed the questionnaire. They reviewed the overall research questions through the use of Index of Item Objectives Congruence (IOC) to ensure that the questionnaire items correspond to the research questions and therefore are valid. They individually scored each question in the questionnaire as good (1), revise (2), or not good (-1). The third meeting was with another set of peer reviewers with whom the researchers discussed the progress of the data collection. In general, different sets of peer reviewers provided constructive feedback.

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

This section described the qualitative data analysis techniques utilized in the research. Thematic analysis led to the identification of patterns, themes, and meanings in the qualitative data (Braun and Clarke 2013; Torraco 2016). The raw data was collected from both teachers and students.

3.7. Data Interpretation

Making sense of the raw data grounded on the responses gathered from those who answered our qualitative questions is the purpose of data interpretation (Strauss and Corbin 1998). In this case, the people who provided qualitative responses were teachers and students who were engaged in online teaching and online learning, respectively, in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thematic analysis of the data in the data analysis stage thereafter led to the development of a taxonomy (Torraco 2005).

3.8. Trustworthiness

To guarantee the validity of this article, triangulation measures such as peer debriefing and member checking were utilized to enhance the credibility of the data analysis and interpretation. Peer debriefing involved researchers meeting regularly to verify the accuracy of the data analysis and interpretation. Through peer debriefing, three external consultants confirmed that each question that faculty members and students had to answer aligned with the four initial research questions and the keywords of this research work.

If there were doubts about certain data, the researchers resorted to member checking, discussing the collected information with research collaborators to clarify their intended meaning. This was done to ensure that what the researcher has written in the paper reflects the message of the original source of information (Lincoln and Guba 1982).

3.9. Consistency

To ensure the reliability of this work, triangulation measures, specifically inter-coder agreement and an audit trail, were utilized to enhance the dependability of the findings. The title, keywords, and research questions were aligned with each other. Furthermore, the detailed questions that research collaborators had to answer were matched with the original four fundamental research questions.

With inter-coder agreement, the researchers of this paper independently analyzed and coded the same qualitative data, identifying the closeness of the categorizations in which the coding process was checked for reliability and the codes matched. Through the audit trail, all documentations of the research were chronologically recorded and filed in a common folder in the Google drive to which all the researchers had access. Revisions made during the research and data analysis were shared in the G-drive, which serves as a detailed trail of information in which all researchers can track and verify the steps undertaken, decisions made, and modifications made. For the summary of the research methodology of this article, see Figure 4 below.

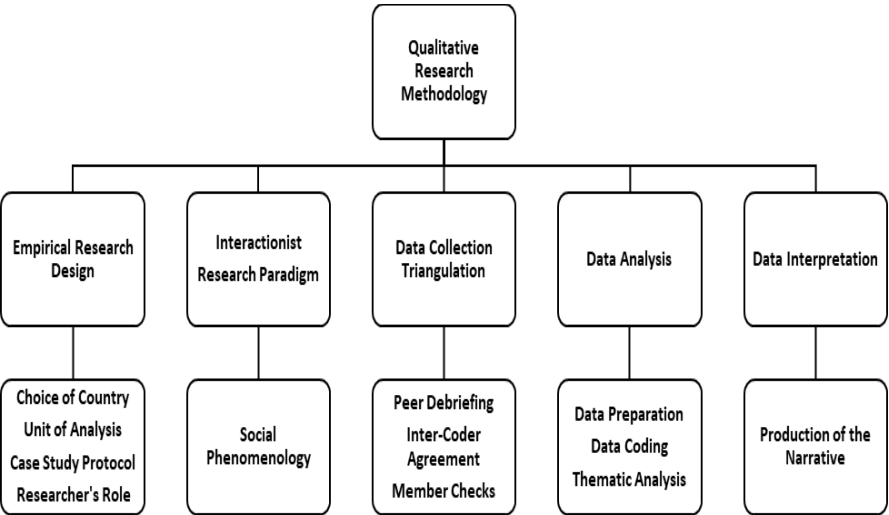


Figure 4: Research Process
Source: Authors of This Article

4. Context

This research was conducted at a Christian university in predominantly Buddhist Thailand. Convenience sampling was used due to the presence of the four co-researchers at this university. As a result of this convenience sample with a small number of respondents, the findings are limited in scope and do not generalize to all Christian universities in Thailand. This research does not claim the representativeness of the findings.

In Thailand, approximately ninety-five percent of the population is Buddhist, while Christians represent only about one percent. Christianity, particularly Roman Catholicism, was introduced by Portuguese merchants in the 17th Century. Today, Roman Catholic Thais make up about 0.4% of the population (Payap University 1983). Protestant Presbyterians from the U.S. began proselytizing Thai Buddhists in Bangkok in 1828. In April 1867, McGilvary established the first mission in Chiang Mai, which later became part of the Church of Christ in Thailand by 1934 (Sanchez 2023). Christian Thais are primarily located in northern Thailand, with the majority residing in indigenous hilly and mountainous areas, and about sixteen percent in lowlands (Payap University 1983). While both Western and Thai Christians share belief in Jesus Christ as God, they have differing approaches. Western evangelism tends to be confrontational, rejecting Thai Buddhism and often lacking understanding of Thai culture (Sanchez 2023). In contrast, Thai Christianity is characterized by respect for Buddhism. Consequently, Thai Christians emphasize humility and the cultivation of trusting relationships with Buddhists, in contrast to the confrontational approach of Western evangelism.

5. Findings

5.1. What Are the Profiles of the Research Participants in This Case Study?

The predominant religious affiliation within the sampled population is Buddhist, a common adherence among both instructors

and students. Notably, five students identified themselves as adherents of atheism. The response rates from different religions reflect the proportion of religions in the wider Thai society, with a higher number of Buddhists responding to our survey. See Table 2 below.

Table 2: Religion of Participants

	Instructors	Students
Buddhism	19	26
Christianity	1	-
Islam	1	-
Atheism	-	5
Total	21	31

Note: Original Table of the Authors of This Article

5.2. How Do Students Learn Most Effectively, Based on Their Own Preferences?

In the open-ended question asking about in what ways the participants learn most effectively, there are three groups of answers. Most respondents expressed a preference for self-directed learning. Following this, 12 Buddhist students preferred self-directed learning, while 10 Buddhist students preferred group study and practice, and 4 Buddhist students preferred lecture and notes. One atheist student preferred self-directed learning, while 4 atheist students preferred group study and practice. See Table 3 below. The findings in this section are grounded in the data.

Table 3: Religion of Participants and The Ways Students Learn Most Effectively

	The Ways Students Learn Most Effectively		
	Self-learner	Group Study and Practice	Lecture and note
Buddhism	12	10	4
Christianity	-	-	-
Islam	-	-	-
Atheism	1	4	-
Total	13	14	4

Note: Original Table of the Authors of This Article

Three different preferred learning styles emerged from the data collected from the qualitative open-ended answers of students: 1) self-learning, 2) group study and practice, and 3) lecture and note taking. There are overlaps in their responses, as they state their primary preference first, followed by their secondary preference.

To begin with, fourteen students declared that they preferred group study and practice. For example:

“I like to have hands-on activities and study with my friends.”

“I like to have hands-on activities. It helps me understand more.”

“I like learning by practicing.”

Next, thirteen students asserted that they are self-learners. Here are their qualitative open-ended responses:

“I like to study by myself and make a short note.”

“I like learning by myself.”

“I like learning by myself from online video clips, compare the information from the internet in order to confirm the accuracy, and then make a conclusion.”

Lastly, only four students affirmed that they prefer lectures and taking notes from lectures. One said, “I like lecture.” Another avowed, “I like to study from recorded sessions because I have poor connectivity.”

5.3. What Are the Least Effective Learning Situations Students Encounter in Online Learning?

In the open-ended question asking about the least effective learning situations participants found in online learning, there are four groups of answers. Most of the respondents stated that poor connectivity was their least effective learning situation. This was followed by reporting difficulty in concentrating. Additionally, one Buddhist student and one atheist student reported lower self-regulation and motivation, while one Buddhist student reported that instructors

assigning tasks rather than lecturing was the least effective learning situation. See Table 4 below.

Table 4: Religion of Participants and The Least Effective Learning Situations the Students Encountered in Online Learning

	Poor connectivity	Lower self-regulation and motivation	Could not concentrate as much	Instructors give assignment rather than lecture
Buddhism	22	1	4	1
Christianity	-	-	-	-
Islam	-	-	-	-
Atheism	4	1	2	-
Total	26	2	6	1

Note: Original Table of the Authors of This Article

According to the least effective learning situations experienced by the participants in online learning, they attributed their difficulties to poor connectivity, which led to loss of attention and information, resulting in an inability to understand the lecture. They also mentioned the loss of face-to-face communication and relationships with classmates, which is a critical factor in learning. One participant stated, “When it comes to online class, it means you could do anything at your place without concern about the teacher. For example, you can just put your headphones on and do other things.” Another student indicated, “maybe it is about the way or style teacher teaches me. Some kind of boring.” Another student complained that “some lecturers are too flexible. They should be stricter.”

5.4. How Do Instructors Teach Most Effectively, Based on Their Own Preferences?

With regard to the open-ended query about the ways in which instructors taught most effectively, there are four groups of answers. Most of the Buddhist respondents indicated that problem-based learning was the most effective method for students. This was followed by 5 instructors reporting the use of activities as the most effective ways in which they taught. See Table 5 below.

Table 5: Religion of Participants and The Ways Instructors Teach Most Effectively

	Activities	Problem-based	Student-oriented	Picture, sign, and diagram
Buddhism	5	6	4	3
Christianity	-	1	-	-
Islam	-	1	-	-
Atheism	-	-	-	-
Total	5	8	4	3

Note: Original Table of the Authors of This Article

Instructors indicated there are four general ways by which they teach most effectively: 1) activities, 2) problem-based, 3) student oriented, and 4) picture, signs, and diagrams There are also overlaps in their responses, with many stating their primary preference first followed by their secondary preference. Others outright indicated “mixed methods,” “contingent on the students,” as well as “using diverse pedagogies.”

First, eight instructors indicated that the problem-based approach is their preferred way of teaching. Examples of their responses include: “Give a case study. Let students discuss. Presentation,” and “Problem based learning.” Second, five instructors indicated that they prefer organizing activities. Examples of their responses include: “On the job training in a community,” “Try with activities,” “Activities,” and “Workshop.” Third, four instructors prefer student-oriented teaching. One wrote: “Self-practice of students.” Others wrote: “Sharing (talking), discussion, and activities,” “Reflections of students’ own experience and knowledge,” and “Reflection (knowledge, thought, feeling, utilization) of the contents, stories, activities.” Lastly, three instructors preferred using pictures and diagrams in teaching. Examples of their responses include: “Mixing instructional media,” “Use pictures and diagrams,” and “Work-based learning, use pictures, signs, diagram.”

5.5. What Are the Least Effective Teaching Situations Instructors Encounter in Online Teaching?

Regarding the open-ended question, which asked about the least effective teaching situations that instructors encountered in online teaching, there are three groups of answers. See Table 5. Most instructor respondents indicated that their most challenging teaching scenario involved students exhibiting reduced engagement or a lack of responsiveness to questions posed during online classes. This trend was identified as a common concern by both Buddhist and Muslim instructors.

If students do not react to or respond to the lecture, several issues might arise. First, the instructor would not know whether the students were listening. One instructor commented, “Communication with students is not good.” Second, the instructor would not know whether the students understood the content. This concern was echoed in comments such as “No participation from students” and “Hard to get feedback from students.” Third, the instructor would not know the extent to which the students understood the lesson. As one respondent observed, “It’s hard to see if students understand the content or not.” Fourth, the students might simply have opened the application but were really paying attention. This aligns with the comment, “Students do not focus and do not pay attention.” Fifth, for example, some students admitted that they were multitasking, consuming food and drinks or browsing the internet. One instructor reported, “Students do not turn on their cameras at all.”

That was followed by Buddhist and Christian instructors reporting poor connectivity. The Buddhist instructors and Muslim instructor stated that the students could not concentrate as much as in onsite face-to-face classes and also experienced a lack of motivation. See Table 6 below.

Table 6: Religion of Participants and The Least Effective Teaching Situations the Instructors Encounter in Online Teaching

	Poor connectivity	Less participation and no responses	Could not concentrate as much and lack of motivation
Buddhism	7	9	5
Christianity	1	-	-
Islam	-	1	1
Atheism	-	-	-
Total	8	10	6

Note: Original Table of the Authors of This Article

Participants identified poor connectivity as a reason for ineffective online teaching, which might cause the students to lose attention and miss information in the online classroom. This lack of participation, characterized by students' decreased participation and lack of responses, caused the instructor to be uncertain about whether the students were still paying attention in class. Instructors could not see students' body language, which is crucial for two-way communication. These situations, marked by students' lack of concentration and motivation, affect the effectiveness of the learning outcome.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Discussion

The concepts used in this article pertaining to communication theories, including face-to-face communication, non-verbal communication, two-way communication, and feedback, partially form the theoretical framework for this study. For this paper, the communication theories were applied to the online learning and online teaching experiences of both students and instructors. The methodology used was mixed methods. Quantitative closed-ended responses on a Likert scale provided descriptive statistics, while qualitative open-ended

responses to the same questions offered rich and deeper insights into the perspectives of the respondents.

The focus of this paper was faculty members and students in Thailand, with a non-random sample selected through purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling methods, which may not represent the entire country. Instructors and students who responded to the survey questionnaire provided their feedback for the improvement of online learning and teaching.

Both teachers and students complained about poor internet connectivity as an obstacle to fruitful and uninterrupted online teaching and learning. However, student preferences lean toward group and practice activities primarily, with studying alone being a secondary preference. In contrast, teachers prioritize the active participation of students in online classes. In essence, both students and instructors prefer two-way communication and face-to-face communications with different emphases. Teachers prefer student-teacher communication, whereas students prefer student-student communication. Nevertheless, both students and teachers require feedback as one measure of effective online learning and teaching, which this research has highlighted as a major issue. The limitations of this paper provide agenda items for further research on the reasons for the divergence in preferences between teachers and students, as well as how to address both teaching and learning situations effectively.

6.2. Limitations of Online Education

Online education is deemed essential, yet it remains insufficient due to various limitations. These limitations extend beyond mere internet connectivity issues. One prominent issue is the decreased level of attentiveness among students compared to onsite settings, attributed to numerous distractions. Students frequently opt to deactivate their video cameras during online classes, engaging in activities such as browsing the internet or even cooking simultaneously. This absence of visual engagement impedes instructors' ability to interpret students' body language, thereby hindering their assessment of comprehension levels. Instructors rely on visual cues such as facial expressions, hand gestures, and direct eye contact to gauge students'

understanding of the lesson material. Furthermore, the interactive dynamic found in onsite classes, where students can readily seek clarification from peers or instructors, is noticeably absent in online settings. Given the typically large class sizes in online environments, instructors often struggle to visually engage with all students, let alone ascertain their comprehension levels. These critical elements of engagement and interaction are notably lacking in online education.

6.3. Implications

Online education is often hailed as transformative, offering flexibility and accessibility to individuals with internet connectivity. It transcends geographical barriers, enabling students and educators to participate synchronously from any location, thereby bridging global divides. While online education undeniably facilitates lectures effectively, it falls short in fostering natural two-way communication, which is paramount for optimal teaching and learning outcomes.

Online education is most effective for learning concepts and theories, making particularly valuable for subjects such as divinity, history, linguistics, political science, and theology. However, online education has limitations. However, online education is often hailed as transformative, offering flexibility and accessibility to individuals with internet connectivity. It transcends geographical barriers, enabling students and educators to participate synchronously from any location, thereby bridging global divides. While online education undeniably facilitates lectures effectively, it falls short in fostering natural two-way communication, which is paramount for optimal teaching and learning outcomes. Online education faces limitations, notably its inadequacy in teaching hands-on skills. Fields requiring practical experience, such as anatomy, arts and crafts, chemistry, communication arts, cooking, horticulture, performing arts, pharmacy, physics, pottery, social work, surgery, and theater arts, find online education ineffective. For instance, the optimal method for learning anatomy involves laboratory dissections or medical students participating in actual surgeries under the guidance of experienced professionals. The same is true with learning skills in taking photographs and videos, which need hands-on practice. Therefore, while online

education offers benefits, it is constrained in disciplines reliant on tactile learning experiences.

While online education theoretically offers convenience for teaching and learning, the lack of two-way communication impedes mutual interaction and, consequently, engagement with lesson content. Despite the availability of video cameras, internet-based education faces communication barriers. In general, educators tend to speak while learners often passively listen, resulting in predominantly one-way communication. Consequently, students may feel isolated and disconnected.

For online or hybrid education to succeed, it is essential to cultivate an online environment that promotes a sense of communal comfort, dynamic involvement, collaborative actions, and feedback, which are crucial for bridging the geographic gap between learners and instructors. Instructors must devise engaging teaching strategies that encourage interactions and collaboration with educators as well as among the community of learners. However, all these strategies are easier said than done. Educators must develop creative teaching methods for online education to be effective and successful. Further research is needed to explore ways to enhance two-way communication in the cybersphere for both online and blended environments.

Overall, despite the aforementioned challenges, online education offers multiple benefits. First, it provides flexibility in scheduling, allowing students to balance their studies with family or professional commitments, as well as to navigate through calamities, political turmoil, or economic crises. Second, online education entails lower costs, as students can remain in their usual residence, eliminating the need to relocate or incur expenses related to housing near campus, transportation, or campus dining. Thirdly, students can create a more comfortable learning environment in the online setting, whether they choose to study at home or in a café while enjoying refreshments. Fourthly, students gain access to international scholars from anywhere in the world and can collaborate with them. Fifthly, students must adapt to changing conditions and effectively communicate their needs and questions to their online instructors and peers for a successful learning experience. Sixthly, students develop independent

learning skills, practicing self-discipline and time management to complete their courses successfully, as they lack the onsite peer support for motivation. Lastly, online education increases accessibility, allowing students to enroll in academic institutions worldwide that offer online education.

6.4. Summary

Research Question 1 examined the demographic profiles of students and instructors. In response to Research Question 2, students indicated that they learn most effectively through independent study or group collaboration. In response to Research Question 3, students reported poor internet connectivity as the primary obstacle they encounter in online learning. In response to Research Question 4, instructors stated that they teach most effectively through both class-based activities and students' problem-based learning. In response to Research Question 5, instructors asserted that the major least effective teaching situations they face in online teaching were very low and no class participation of students as well as poor connectivity. The researchers report these themes that emerged from both the quantitative closed-ended data and the qualitative open-ended data, as evidenced in the responses of learners and educators. On the surface, the internet problem might appear trivial, but it is a real legitimate economic and social problem, especially as online education needs Internet access. Additionally, the internet problem reveals intersectional issues: the rich-poor divide (in payment for more expensive subscriptions), ethnic divide, rural-urban divide, and the division between the rich and the poor in the Global North and the Global South. This exposes the "hidden curriculum" of internet access.

6.5. Recommendations

This research yielded recommendations from the teachers and students themselves, who were the research collaborators of this article, on ways to improve online education.

Students. Learners provided recommendations as solutions to the least effective learning situations they encounter in online learning. These recommendations included the following: instructors should be

more creative in finding ways to engage students in online participation. Instructors could also create video clips or record live video classes for students who cannot attend, enabling them to catch up on missed classes. Additionally, instructors could enhance online classes by incorporating interactive activities for students. Importantly, the university or government should provide a stable internet signal.

Instructors. On their part, instructors provided recommendations to address the least effective teaching situations they encounter in online teaching. Instructors emphasized the importance of motivating students to actively participate in the online classroom by preparing and implementing more online activities and group tasks. They suggested exploring techniques for teaching online that facilitate more effective two-way communication with all students in the class as much as possible. Additionally, ensuring stable internet signals was highlighted as crucial. However, it was noted that online teaching may not be suitable for practical subjects.

6.6. Suggestions for Further Research

This research focused on the perceptions of students and educators regarding their experiences with online learning and online teaching, respectively. Religion, philosophy, and psychology are not within the scope of this study. However, future research could delve into these aspects of online education.

6.7. Concluding Remarks

Online education has undergone significant development, reshaping traditional education and fostering scholarly activities despite geographic barriers. Regardless of pandemic, typhoons, or snowstorms, there now exists an innovative means to continue education amidst human-made or natural disasters. Consequently, whether embraced or not, digital education has become an undeniable reality. At the very least, all academic institutions will adopt a hybrid approach, while many may transition fully to online formats. Therefore, both teachers and learners must adapt and discover ways to maximize the benefits of electronic learning. As we navigate the

evolving landscape of online education, let us effectively utilize information and communication technology (ICT) to share knowledge and cultivate a robust learning community. Through this approach, educators and learners can communicate efficiently and foster a positive, dynamic, and collaborative academic experience together. Despite challenges in the digital environment, all hope is not lost. Online education can be as effective as onsite education, provided that instructors develop methods to ensure effective two-way communication online.

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AI in the Academe: Opportunities and Challenges for Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

The coming of artificial intelligence (AI), dramatically signaled by the release of ChatGPT 3.5 in November 2022, sparked varied reactions and questions in various sectors and industries, including the field of education. Prior to this, AI technology has been

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gaining ground with its various applications, yet it still managed to take many by surprise. After the initial panic and apprehension about the use of these increasingly powerful technologies, discussions have begun as to how to effectively manage the threats and maximize the affordances brought by these rapidly emerging developments. The growing discourse and literature on this subject confirm the relevance and urgency of this issue today. Gathering the concerns and insights from these ongoing conversations, this paper aims to explore the challenges and opportunities brought by AI to education in general and to religious education in particular, with the aim of naming potential risks and identifying possible areas that can be harnessed by religious educators today.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, AI in education, religious education, online learning, educational technology*

1. Introduction

Long the subject of imagination as evidenced in fictional literature and even film, the actual development of artificial intelligence (AI) began in the 1940s and has by now gained more comprehensive access, greater sophistication, and broader application. The release of the generative pre-trained transformer ChatGPT 3.5 in November 2022 followed shortly by its more advanced premium version, ChatGPT4 in March 2023, again triggered public awareness and interest in AI. At the same time, the recent popularity of chatbots like ChatGPT and similar applications also generated questions and concerns about the opportunities and challenges posed by these fast-evolving digital technologies in various fields of human endeavor.

Addressing the science and technology summit “Minerva Dialogues” held at the Vatican on March 27, 2023, Pope Francis (2023) asserted that the ongoing discussion on the responsible use of this technology is “open to religious values,” including ethical and

educational concerns. Even more recently, in his message for the 57th World Day of Peace, he called attention to the “ethical dimension” of the use of these technologies, underlining that “the challenges it poses are technical, but also anthropological, *educational*, social and political” (Francis 2024, 2). He further emphasized that the development of AI ethics, or the so-called “algor-ethics,” is a vital arena where “educational institutions and decision-makers have an essential role to play” (6).

Taking its cue from the Pope’s intuition, this study aims to explore the interface of AI with education in general and religious education in particular and how educators today, especially religious educators, can respond to these emerging developments without wasting their potential or ignoring their danger. It begins by discussing the positive opportunities brought by AI that are now being piloted or utilized in the educational landscape. It then proceeds by tackling the threats that AI brings to the table. Afterwards, it focuses more specifically on religious education and the particular challenges and opportunities that AI presents to religious educators.

2. AI and Education

Throughout the years, technology has paved the way for many improvements in society, leaving its imprint of advancement in almost all aspects of human operations. One of the fields that technology has significantly improved, especially in recent years, is education (Raja and Nagasubramani 2018; Ng 2015).

Like the rest of society marked by rapid innovation and the omnipresence of technology, education today can be aptly described as VUCA: volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Endless technological advancements often outstrip our capacity to adapt, with new developments already on our doorstep even before we have fully learned and adjusted to the ones on hand. Different learning management systems, methodologies, and techniques enhanced by technology are continually developed and utilized by learning institutions to innovate the learning experience. With smartphones and tablets taking over the place of desktop and laptop computers, teaching and learning

can now literally happen at one's fingertips, anywhere and anytime, without being confined to a physical campus or classroom.

During the recent pandemic, online education became even more widespread (Xie et al. 2020). When students could not access schools because of the lockdowns, gadgets became their learning avenue and the learning management systems available were utilized to make learning possible in spite of the limitations imposed by the crisis. With the recent resurgence of AI in the last two years, new possibilities also emerged in the educational horizon, with their capacity to enhance both teaching and learning (Holmes and Tuomi 2022; Vincent-Lancrin and Van der Vlies 2020). The usual panic and aversion at the beginning slowly gave way to various efforts to adapt and integrate AI into the learning landscape (Hutson et al. 2022; Grassini 2023; Irfan et al. 2023). This can be likened to the apprehension and reticence with which Google and other search engines in their early days were initially met by educators who feared that their use in educational settings would compromise rather than complement learning. These technologies, however, do not require the prior permission of educators (Miranda 2023) who have no choice but to contend with them or be left behind.

2.1. Opportunities for Education

According to the UNESCO website (2023), "Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to address some of the biggest challenges in education today, innovate teaching and learning practices, and accelerate progress towards SDG 4." Thus, it is regarded as a tool for educational advancement, in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 4 aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all."

AI has the potential to revolutionize education in many ways, making learning more personalized, efficient, and accessible. Adaptive learning systems that use AI can personalize learning and tailor educational content to the individual needs and learning styles of students, ensuring that each one receives materials and assignments that match their interests, abilities, and pace (Molenaar 2022; Furini et

al. 2022; Draxler et al. 2023; Chassignol et al. 2019). AI-powered tutors can directly provide students with immediate feedback and assistance, while helping them with homework, assignments, and review (Kim and Kim 2020; Yang and Zhang 2019). AI translation tools can also break language barriers, allowing students to access educational content in their native language or communicate with peers from different language backgrounds (Baidoo-Anu and Ansah 2020). For students struggling with disabilities, AI can offer real-time text-to-speech, speech-to-text, and other assistive technologies (Zdravkova 2022; Zdravkova et al. 2022).

In “ChatGPT and AI in Higher Education: Quick Start Guide,” UNESCO itself offers practical guidance for the use of ChatGPT and other emerging AI-based applications, tacitly acknowledging that these technologies must not be dismissed. According to UNESCO (2023b), this tool can be helpful if correctly applied in conjunction with other forms of AI in order to improve not only teaching and learning but other academic functions like research, administration, and community engagement. To this end, ChatGPT itself can be used as a standalone tool or integrated with and incorporated into other systems and platforms utilized by HEIs.

For instance, ChatGPT can provide both teachers and students with basic information, ideas, and feedback on their work. Moreover, ChatGPT has proven beneficial in research-related activities, like filling out technical sections of grant applications and predicting if publications will be accepted. Moreover, ChatGPT can help in administrative tasks like social media management, messaging services, and website integration to increase efficiency in academic institutions, making some services available 24/7, and across several platforms (UNESCO 2023b). Also, ChatGPT can be harnessed in planning extension projects like the design of community involvement programs where it could propose targeted methods designed to improve the community’s well-being that take into account their unique qualities and particular situation like geography, location, needs, and demographics. ChatGPT, of course, is but one of the many AI tools that are now at the disposal of educators and learners alike.

AI can also assist teachers in various ways to enhance their teaching methods and improve overall classroom outcomes. It can automate administrative tasks such as grading, scheduling, and record-keeping, effectively reducing their workload and allowing them to focus on more essential and impactful teaching and mentoring (Ahmad et al. 2022; Chen et al. 2020; Bryant et al. 2020). This would be akin to providing them with teaching assistants at a much lower cost or no cost at all. AI-based plagiarism detection tools can also help educators in detecting and addressing instances of academic dishonesty (Santra and Majhi 2023; Jiffriya 2021). Moreover, AI analytics can help teachers or counselors identify students who may be at risk early on by monitoring their progress and behavior, enabling timely and effective intervention (Lokesh et al. 2022). AI can likewise assist researchers in analyzing educational data to identify trends and generate insights on how to improve current educational practices and curriculum design (Alonso and Casalino 2019).

2.2. Challenges for Education

As the available technology continues to advance, the role that AI plays in education is only likely to expand, providing even more tools and methodologies to enhance both the learning experience for students and teaching experience for educators. Conversely, while AI technology holds great promise for transforming education, it also presents a number of concerning challenges that need to be confronted and addressed.

These challenges include equity and access since AI-powered educational tools often require access to technology and the Internet. This can exacerbate educational disparities as students without access may be left behind (Roscoe et al. 2022; Walsh et al. 2022; Yu 2020). The problem includes not only low-income students but rural students, students with disabilities, students in minority and underserved communities, as well as elderly students, among others. This concern about equity and access is also true on the institutional and national level since integrating AI in education can be expensive. Smaller schools or developing countries with limited resources may struggle to adopt these technologies (Carter et al. 2020) and keep pace with other learning institutions and nations. This serious problem, sometimes

referred to in general as the “digital divide” or more specifically to AI as the “algorithmic divide” includes inequities in “awareness, access, affordability, availability and adaptability” (Yu 2020, 331). Bridging this serious divide requires concerted efforts to provide equitable access to technology and internet connectivity for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background or geographic location.

Another important concern is data privacy since AI systems collect and analyze large amounts of data about the students. Ensuring the privacy and security of this data, which includes very personal and sensitive data, is crucial to protect students from potential breaches or misuse (Huang 2023). Some AI algorithms can also perpetuate and amplify pre-existing biases present in the data they are processing (Ferrer et al. 2021; Baker and Hawn 2021; Silberg and Manyika 2019). This algorithmic bias can lead to unfair outcomes in areas like grading, admissions, and personalized learning. Similarly, AI algorithms may not always adequately account for and address cultural and language differences, potentially disadvantaging certain groups of students while at the same time privileging others (Salas-Pilco et al. 2022).

The use of AI raises crucial ethical questions, such as who will be responsible if an AI tutor provides incorrect information or if AI is used to monitor students’ behavior without their awareness or consent. Over-reliance on AI tools may also lead to failure on the part of students in developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and even basic skills such as writing or computing (Malinka et al. 2023; Tlili et al. 2023; Yu 2023; Lim et al. 2023; Su and Yang 2023). Despite the availability of technological tools, students still need to acquire essential skills and other basic knowledge which are foundational, not only in their professional or vocational practice but in their life itself. Moreover, generative AI can produce content that may not always be accurate or reliable. Students who have not developed capacity to discern right information from wrong might use such content without verifying its accuracy, leading to misinformation that sometimes comes with disastrous consequences.

At the same time, there are important moral and ethical issues at stake such as honesty and integrity (Cotton et al. 2023; Mohammad-karimi 2023). For instance, the availability of AI tools can encourage

plagiarism if students use them to mechanically generate essays or assignments without proper attribution or original thought. This seriously compromises the learning process since if students learn by doing, allowing the AI to do their work for them eliminates the process by which they acquire essential knowledge and skills. Furthermore, while AI technology can personalize learning, there is also a risk that it may lead to a more isolated and depersonalized learning experience (Elmessiry 2023), further reducing interpersonal connections with teachers and peers and promoting an individualistic culture.

On the part of educators, many still need to be trained as to how to make use of AI tools in an effective manner (Baidoo-Anu and Ansah 2020; Chen et al. 2020). At the moment, not all teachers have the necessary skills or knowledge to integrate AI into their teaching methods. AI can also change the way curricula and program offerings are designed and delivered. Thus, educators and institutions need to adapt and incorporate AI into their teaching methods (Kim and Cho 2022) while those who could not do so run the risk of being left behind. Moreover, there are looming concerns that AI could later replace certain teaching and administrative jobs, eventually leading to job insecurity for educators as well as other school staff (Yang et al. 2021).

While AI can be a valuable tool for teachers, it should complement, not replace, the educational experience and other important aspects of teaching like mentorship, emotional support, and the cultivation of critical-thinking, problem-solving as well as relational skills. Effective integration of AI in education requires ongoing training and collaboration between educators and technology experts. It can be a truly powerful tool to enrich learning and educational experiences, but if not used mindfully or responsibly, there are also many ways by which it could actually impair learning and end up harming the learners and educators.

Addressing these challenges requires a thoughtful and collaborative approach that includes educators, policymakers, researchers, technologists, and all stakeholders in the process (Holmes and Tuomi 2022). This process involves a comprehensive framework that carefully considers ethical, privacy, and equity issues and ensures the continuous superintendence, monitoring, and evaluation of AI systems

in education in order to guarantee that they will benefit all (Chan 2023; Owoc et al. 2019; Hwang et al. 2020).

3. AI and Religious Education

Addressing the participants in the most recent “Minerva Dialogues,” a high-level annual meeting organized by the Catholic Church’s Dicastery for Culture and Education, that brought together scientists, engineers, business leaders, lawyers and philosophers in dialogue with Church officials, theologians and ethicists held on March 27, 2023 at the Vatican, Pope Francis lauded the benefits of technology “as evidence of the creativity of human beings and the nobility of their vocation to participate responsibly in God’s creative action” (Francis 2023). In the same address, he expressed his hope that “the development of artificial intelligence and machine learning has the potential to contribute in a positive way to the future of humanity; we cannot dismiss it. At the same time, I am certain that this potential will be realized *only if* [emphasis added] there is a constant and consistent commitment on the part of those developing these technologies to act ethically and responsibly” (Francis 2023). Thus, the Pope pointed to an ethical and responsible attitude as indispensable to the sound use of these advancements and it is here that education, particularly religious education, plays a very important role.

Prior to this, the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy for Life, organized a workshop on the theme “The ‘Good’ Algorithm? Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, Law, Health” on February 26-28, 2020. This was attended not only by Church leaders, theologians, and philosophers but also by scientists, tech-entrepreneurs and other stakeholders. At the end of the workshop, the Pontifical Academy for Life, together with Microsoft, IBM, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Italian government, signed the “Rome Call for AI Ethics.” This pact aims to advance ethical standards in the realm of AI and promote a shared sense of responsibility among governments, institutions, and organizations who have committed to it. Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the President of the Pontifical Academy, in presenting the Rome Call to the public, emphasized that it is not an official document of the Pontifical Academy alone but rather a set of

commitments shared by the stakeholders (Paglia 2020). The Rome Call provides guidelines for an ethical approach to Artificial Intelligence and contains important commitments centered around three key aspects: ethics, law, and education. In a prepared statement for the occasion delivered by Archbishop Paglia, Pope Francis re-emphasized the importance of “a broader educational effort” (Francis 2020) to ensure the correct and ethical use of these emerging technologies.

Other religious leaders also share the Pope’s concern about AI and its growing presence and influence in human affairs. In January 2023, representatives from the three Abrahamic faiths signed the Rome Call at the conclusion of an event organized by the RenAIssance Foundation, titled, “AI Ethics: An Abrahamic Commitment to the Rome Call.” Sheikh Al Mahfoudh Bin Bayyah, Secretary General of the Abu Dhabi Peace Forum, represented Islam; Chief Rabbi Eliezer Simha Weisz, member of the Council of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, represented Judaism; and Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life and the RenAIssance Foundation, represented Christianity in this historic event. The united front of these three big world religions represents an important milestone in the commitment of religions to ensuring a positive future for AI.

As highlighted by the Pope and the Rome Call, education plays a crucial part in the shaping of AI technology. Thus, not only do we have a question now of the role of AI in education but also of the role of education in AI and what all educators, including religious educators, can bring to its continuing development and integration, especially in the face of the threats and challenges that come with it not only to education but to society at large. While this educational effort is expressly “broader” in that it encompasses and engages the contribution of all sectors involved, it also falls in a special way on educators and religious educators who can focus on it in a more direct and targeted way. As critical stakeholders in the development, implementation, and responsible use of AI technology, their active involvement is essential to harness the benefits of AI while addressing ethical concerns and ensuring that technology enhances human life, rather than corrupts it.

In terms of advantages, the benefits brought by AI to religious education are actually more or less the same advantages that it brings to education in general. However, religious educators can only benefit and maximize these opportunities if they are willing to explore their potential in a proactive manner and ready to participate in their development as a real complement to traditional ways of teaching and learning. Otherwise, they are prone to being outpaced as the technology continues to advance very quickly. In this regard, the different religions have launched various initiatives.

For example, madrasas or Muslim schools in Indonesia are already beginning to adopt AI based digital technology not only for instruction but also for administration. It is certainly an advantage that in their country, schools that participate in this expanding digitalization program are assisted financially by the government. In 2019, the Muslims also opened Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence in Abu Dhabi as a global center of study and research about these technologies (Hamruni and Suwartini 2022). The openness of religious schools not only allows them to respond to and harness technology but also to put their vast resources at the service of its development.

Being grounded in tradition does not entail rejecting innovation but profiting from it and maximizing it as a means of promoting faith. In this regard, there are laudable efforts on the part of religious leaders and educators to seize the opportunity by studying the technology and developing it themselves to aid in their religious endeavors. For instance, we have the AI-based Catholic application called *Magisterium AI* that shows great potential for study and research due to its maintenance and management by the Church's leaders and educators themselves (Giangravé 2023; Pentin 2023). Because of this guidance, the application's content becomes more accurate and reliable. As such, users can utilize and consult it more confidently, without worrying about its veracity or accuracy, which is a very serious concern especially in doctrinal and moral questions. In Hinduism, we find a corresponding initiative as they use AI to systematize and organize the study of sacred texts such as the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* (Chandra and Ranjan 2022).

On the other hand, there are also worrisome incidents like unauthorized chatbots usurping and interpreting sacred Hindu texts to condone violence as people turn from seeking the guidance of live gurus to consulting online AI-powered gurus and even an AI app that even attempts to mimic the voice of the god, Krishna (Shivji 2023). These alternative and perhaps even more accessible and influential channels of religious education certainly merit the attention not only of religious leaders but even of mainstream religious educators who need to warn their students and train them to be critical in their engagement with online religion. Otherwise, the democratized access to religious resources and the flattening of religious authority that AI brings may lead to the erosion of doctrine and the corruption of moral beliefs.

Even the use of AI in the production of religious icons and images that play a crucial role in worship and religious education needs to be monitored as images depicting religious figures are beginning to circulate that exhibit deformities like missing fingers or contain inaccurate depictions that may lead to serious doctrinal issues later on (White 2023; Albia et al. 2023). In this case, educators themselves need to be intelligent and discerning when using AI-generated materials and presenting them to their students.

As we can see, there is clearly a need for religious leaders and educators to be involved, not only in the adoption and use of these fast-changing technologies but also in their guidance and development. On top of this, there is a unique opportunity that the current situation presents to religious educators who have the expertise and experience needed to address the need for AI Ethics in a more direct and focused way (Holmes et al. 2021). As most religions possess established ethical principles and moral codes, they can use this to guide developers and policymakers so that AI technologies align with ethical values. Part of this is integrating “algorithethics” or “the field of ethics that focuses on the development and deployment of algorithms” (Wagle 2023) into the general curriculum, starting with a basic idea of how AI and algorithms function so that students will have a working grasp of how these technologies more or less operate (Benanti 2023). A few of the ethical concerns that have already been raised include human dignity and rights (Miao et al. 2021; Berendt et al. 2020), digital divide and social

inequality (Qazi et al. 2020) and the loss of human contact (Guilherme 2019). The different world religions have much to contribute to these discussions as they bring the insights and perspectives of their own traditions into the conversation. Their universities, research centers, scholars and other resources can also be put at the service of this important area of research, dialogue, and cooperation.

Aside from this, world religions have a wealth of wisdom which can be applied towards the ethical use of AI. For instance, the Buddhist vow or commitment to eliminate suffering and promote the wellbeing of people can translate into a principle of non-maleficence and beneficence in AI use and development (Hongladarom 2021; Dalai Lama and Cutler 2020). Key Buddhist doctrines like impermanence (Batchelor 2008), compassion (Ho et al. 2021) and non-attachment (Ashcraft and Calvert 2023) can be adopted as foundational principles in the use of AI in education. The doctrine of impermanence, for example, can form the basis of an adaptive learning approach while personalized curricula, made possible by algorithms that analyze student performance, can in turn reflect the ephemeral and lifelong nature of knowledge acquisition (Kabudi et al. 2021). The idea of non-attachment can likewise be applied in the school context as learning liberation, encouraging students to approach knowledge openly and without prejudices (Ashcraft and Calvert 2023). Thus, students and educators will constantly strive to learn new things and gain new wisdom. Research then becomes an essential skill for students and educators, immersing them in a variety of vantages and opinions as they learn to give up rigid points of view and develop critical thinking, epistemic humility, and cognitive adaptability (Whitehead et al. 2018). We can see here that from Buddhism alone, there is a vast wealth of wisdom that can be channeled to the aid of AI for its humane and ethical use and development.

Meanwhile, as educators are freed by technology such as automated grading schemes and AI-powered feedback mechanisms from administrative tasks, teachers can now concentrate on promoting students' all-around development and fostering more interpersonal contact and collaboration in the classroom (Winkler and Soellner 2018). Religious practices like meditation and mindfulness, common to many religions, can also help in the cultivation of humanity in the

face of prolonged exposure to gadgets (Behan 2020; Khanna et al. 2023). They can be a source of strength and support for students and educators, and a quiet but effective way of passing on important moral and spiritual values. At the same time, reimagining and innovating traditional practices like the “digital Sabbath” can help avert dangers like fatigue and burnout and promote the overall health and wellness of both teachers and learners as they engage in online learning.

In an even more direct way, religions can be at the forefront of advocating important universal values and principles like human dignity to guide the integration of technology and education. The Catholic Church’s Congregation for Catholic Education, renamed as the Dicastery for Culture and Education, for instance, often emphasizes the need for human contact and interpersonal relationship in technology-assisted education (Congregation for Catholic Education 2020 and 2021). This is in line with the Pope’s vision of every academic institution as a true “community of study, research and formation” (Francis 2017) and not just a place for knowledge and skills acquisition. Because of their sensitivity and attention to these matters, religious leaders and educators can help to ensure that these concerns are not forgotten amid the rapid changes brought about by technological advancements.

Finally, religions can also make use of their moral and social platform to highlight specific ethical issues, call out inequities, warn about dangers, and rally for just practices such as providing equitable access for disadvantaged sectors, as embodied for example in the Rome Call. By doing so, they will help ensure that AI is developed and used in ways that respect human dignity, promote the common good, and even protect the planet for the benefit of coming generations. To this end, the increasing collaboration between the world’s religions can be harnessed in an interreligious endeavor to help in safeguarding a wholesome and sustainable future for everyone. Interfaith dialogue and cooperation can also gather diverse religious perspectives to discuss ethical and moral considerations related to AI. This dialogue can help identify values and principles common to all that can guide the continuing development of this technology. Ultimately, religions and religious educators can serve as an ethical and moral compass for

the development of AI, contributing to the creation of AI systems that align with universal human values and principles.

4. Conclusion

Now that the dust has begun to settle after the initial anxiety and apprehension brought by the coming of AI to society in general and education in particular, all educators can more calmly assess the advantages and disadvantages that these emerging technologies bring. As with past technological advancements, there is no way but forward and no other way to go but for educators to find ways not only to adapt to but to take full advantage of this technology. This calls for a careful, comprehensive, and collaborative effort that involves not only educators, school administrators, and students but all stakeholders.

Moreover, religions need to adopt a proactive stance and be willing to invest their time, effort and resources to take part in the guidance and development of AI technologies, not only for the sake of their own religious interests but for the common good of all humanity. On the part of religious educators, the current situation offers a unique chance to contribute significantly, especially in the development of “Ethics in AI” in the face of the moral and ethical questions, issues, and challenges that come with it.

In this regard, religions can also cooperate with each other and with other stakeholders as they bring the wealth of their respective traditions, including their doctrines, principles, and practices to the table, while pointing out issues and advocating for important concerns, most especially on behalf of the voiceless and marginalized. Religious educators can in turn exercise their crucial role and make the most of this golden opportunity, not only taking advantage of the benefits of AI but also participating in its continuing development and integration.

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Christian Witness and Proclamation through Migration

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ABSTRACT

People are constantly on the move, more so now than ever before. Crossing international borders is definitely a major characteristic of our present era. No countries or regions are immune from this worldwide migration phenomenon, certainly not Asia. Statistics indicate that Christian immigrants are the largest population on the move, totaling 49 percent of all international migrants on the planet. When Christian immigrants travel, they take their religion with them, or more personally, their God literally migrates with them. If every Christian migrant is a potential missionary, migration then could have enormous prospects and opportunities for evangelism – a communicative act that involves the transmission of beliefs, ideas, or messages regarding their religious worldview. Thus, the aim of this essay is to examine the impact of and contribution to Christian witness and proclamation through today's global phenomenon of migration. Migrants are indeed a precious gift of the Church, especially Asian Christian migrants, who normally bring their faith with them and bear witness of the Christian faith wherever they are. The effects of their

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plight and emigration not only alter the demo-graphic landscape and the image of Christianity, but also enhance the theology and spirituality of its host country.

Keywords: *migration, Christian migrants, Asian migrants, witness, proclamation*

1. Introduction

It's Saturday evening in Anguilla, a British overseas territory in the Eastern Caribbean also referred to as the West Indies. The choir of about a dozen Filipino migrants who are in their thirties has just gathered at St. Gerard's Roman Catholic Church to go over the songs in preparation for the Sunday Vigil Mass. Some of them are married, but most are single. Their beautiful voices and upbeat songs, accompanied by drum and guitar, usually attract a good crowd to church in spite of the summer heat. During the Communion meditation they sing a traditional Tagalog hymn to add more flavor to an already very cross-cultural liturgy. The members of the congregation are predominantly Caribbean with dark color skin whose ancestors came from Africa. The visiting priest, who was born in Viet Nam but now lives and works in the United States of America, is the main celebrant of the Mass. A few tourists from Europe or North America occasionally come to church.

Anguilla is one of the most northerly of the Leeward Islands, lying east of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. It is a flat island of coral and limestone and is noted for its spectacular coral reefs and pristine beaches attracting many tourists. Consequently, the island's main source of revenue is tourism. However, these Catholic Filipino migrant workers did not come to Anguilla from the other side of the globe for a vacation but for labor. As migrant workers they take their religion with them and fervently give witness to their faith in songs and service at the local church. Although vulnerable and displaced from their homeland and family, they actively live out their faith, contributing much and becoming a precious gift to this small and seemingly insignificant corner of the world.

Throughout the history of Christian mission, migration has had enormous prospects and opportunities for the church's planting, mission, and evangelism. When Christians travel, whether by force or voluntarily, they take their religion with them. Current statistics indicate that Christian migrants or immigrants are the largest population of people on the move, generating huge possibilities for missionary expansion, especially if every Christian migrant is a potential missionary. Thus, the aim of this essay is to examine the impact of and contribution to Christian witness and proclamation through today's global phenomenon of migration, especially from Asia. This essay will also explore the effects of Asian Catholic immigrants in the United States, whose presence not only alters the demographic landscape and face of Christianity, but also enhances the theology and spirituality of its host country.

2. The Worldwide Immigration Phenomenon

People are constantly on the move, more so now than ever before. In the first decade of the twenty-first century of this third millennium, the number of people on the move has increased from 175 million in 2000 to over 280.6 million people in 2020.² It is estimated that about 3.6 percent of the world's 8.1 billion people are displaced. That means one out of every thirty people in the world today is a migrant.³ From another interesting perspective, migrants would collectively constitute the fifth most populous country in the world. Because of the growing inequalities of wealth caused by globalization, political and ethnic conflicts, environmental disasters, implementation of free trade, and viable means of transportation, more and more

² International Organization for Migration (IOM), "Data and Research," <https://www.iom.int/data-and-research> (accessed on September 1, 2023).

³ For more facts and figures, see the website of International Organization for Migration (IOM): <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/wmr-2022-interactive/> (accessed on September 15, 2023). According to the IOM, world migrants could reach 405 million by 2050, or nearly 7 percent of the present global population. See <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-migration/world-migrants-could-total-405-million-by-2050-idUSTRE6AS00320101129> (accessed on September 27, 2023).

people are migrating than ever before, causing some to appropriately designate our era “the age of migration.”⁴

Crossing international borders is definitely a major characteristic of our present era. No countries or regions are immune from this phenomenon, certainly not Asia. In 2005, it was estimated that there were 53 million Asian immigrants scattered across the globe; by 2020, the number had increased to 85.6 million.⁵ Between 2000 and 2013, Asia added more international migrants than any other major area, gaining some 20 million international migrants, or 1.6 million additional migrants per year.⁶ While the total number of refugees in the world was estimated at 15.7 million, a disproportionate number, about 10.4 million of them, came from Asia.

International migration from Asia increased significantly in the 1970s and 1980s. There were basically three major political events that triggered the massive movement of people within and from Asia. In the early 1970s, the West-East Pakistan conflict forced approximately ten million people to flee from East Pakistan to India.⁷ With the fall of Saigon to the communist regime in 1975, millions of refugees—initially from Viet Nam and subsequently from Laos and Cambodia—fled by land and by sea to escape the violence of post-war retribution. It is estimated that between 1975 and 1995, some three million people fled the region. While most Asian countries pushed backed the rickety boats from their shorelines, the United States, Canada, Australia, and a few other European countries rescued these refugees and helped settle them in a foreign land. The third major exodus of people began in 1979 during the successive occupations of Afghanistan. The political conflicts that triggered the massive Afghan refugee crises were first

⁴ See Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, Fourth Edition; Revised and Updated (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁵ Migration Data Portal,
https://www.migrationdataportal.org/international-data?i=stock_abs_&t=2020&m=1&rm49=142 (accessed on September 20, 2023).

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http://esa.un.org/unmigration/documents/The_number_of_international_migrants.pdf

⁷ Maruja M. B. Asis, *Understanding International Migration in Asia*, Exodus Series 2 (Quezon City, Philippines: Scalabrini Migration Center, 2005), 12.

set off by the former U.S.S.R., followed by the Taliban, and have been drawn out even to this day. These events are believed to have displaced millions of people in 71 different countries.⁸

Since the 1990s, especially with the rapid economic growth of several Asian countries, migration in Asia has changed remarkably in character and landscape. While emigration continues, primarily for family reunification outside of the Asian region, for example to North America, Europe, and Australia, recent data show that new trends of migration are happening within Asia itself.⁹ The most noticeable trend is the migration of temporary labor from less developed countries to the increasingly industrializing countries. It is estimated that in the last decade alone there were about 6.1 million Asian economic migrants working outside their own native places, but within East and Southeast Asia (such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore).¹⁰ In the Middle East alone, there are some 8.7 million Asian contract workers employed in the Gulf oil countries like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, and the United Arab Emirates. While some migrant workers are highly skilled workers, many are hired to do the 3D jobs (dirty, difficult, and dangerous).¹¹ Castles and Miller noted that China alone has a “floating population” of 100–150 million people moving from rural areas to the new industrial areas. India too experiences large-scale internal migration and urbanization. There could be as many as 190 million internal migrant workers in India.¹² In any case, the “diaspora” population alone is estimated at

⁸ For a good synopsis of the situation up until 1993, see Silvano M. Tomasi, “The World-wide Context of Migration: The Example of Asia,” in *Migrants and Refugees*, ed. Dietmar Mieth and Lisa Sowle Cahill, Concilium 1993/4 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 3–10.

⁹ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 125; see also Asis, *Understanding International Migration in Asia*, 17.

¹⁰ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 127.

¹¹ Asis, *Understanding International Migration in Asia*, 17.

¹² The 2001 Census counted about 191 million people, or 19 percent of the total Indian population at the time, as internal migrants who had moved long distances to other districts or other Indian states. About 70 percent of all internal migrants are women, and marriage is the primary reason for female migration. For more information about India’s internal migration flows, see <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/internal-labor-migration-india-raises-integration-challenges-migrants> (accessed on June 26, 2015).

around 20 million people.¹³ It is well noted that many of the “Tiger economy countries” (Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand, Taiwan, and more recently Malaysia) have huge numbers of migrant workers. Malaysia alone has a foreign work force estimated at 2.6 million, while Japan and Thailand each have around 2 million.¹⁴ It is really impossible to know exactly how many Asian migrant workers there are in the Asian region because many are clandestine (undocumented), overstaying their visa permit, or running away from an employer. However, statistics show that emigration for employment within Asia has grown exponentially, “with about 2.6 million people leaving their homes in search of work each year.”¹⁵

The participation of women in international labor migration is another key recent development in the Asian region.¹⁶ Before the late 1970s, labor migration was predominantly male; by 1985, however, with the demand for domestic workers, nurses, sales clerks, and other female services in the Gulf States, 3.2 million female Asians were working in the Middle East.¹⁷ In the late 1980s and the early 1990s the demand for foreign domestic workers also increased tremendously in the newly industrialized countries in East and Southeast Asia (e.g., Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia). In Taiwan, for example, migrant domestic workers and caretakers comprised 41.5 percent of the foreign work force by 2004.¹⁸ In Indonesia, 81 percent of those who registered to work abroad, mainly in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, were women. Women’s labor migration in the Philippines has also increased significantly in recent years.¹⁹ As of mid-year 2020, the number of Asian female international migrants

¹³ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 125 and 139.

¹⁴ Castles and Miller, 136-141.

¹⁵ Castles and Miller, 127.

¹⁶ Gemma Tulud Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration: Social Justice and Religious Experience* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 33-50.

¹⁷ Cruz, 130.

¹⁸ Asis, *Understanding International Migration in Asia*, 21.

¹⁹ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 133; see also Gemma Tulud Cruz, “Migration in the Asia Region: Retrospect and Prospects,” in *Migration and Interculturality: Theological and Philosophical Challenges*, edited by Raul Fornet-Betancourt, 21-30 (Aachen: Institute of Missiology, 2004).

reached 35.8 million, which is about 41.8 percent of 85.6 million Asian international migrants.²⁰

Another growing phenomenon related to female migration since the 1990s is international marriages in the Asian region. Foreign brides, who come primarily from the Southeast Asian countries of Viet Nam, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, have been sought especially by men from Taiwan, Japan, China, and South Korea. It is estimated that as of 2004, foreign spouses in Taiwan alone reached around 300,000, and most of the women came from China and Southeast Asia. Notably, between 1995 and 2005, the number of Vietnamese women married to Taiwanese men skyrocketed from 1,476 to about 100,000.²¹ In 2004, there were 57,000 international marriages registered in South Korea.²² It is estimated that since 2006, at least 5,000 Vietnamese brides immigrate to South Korea every year.

Current trends suggest that labor migration in the Asian region will persist and continue to increase as newly industrialized countries demand more foreign migrants to work in 3D (dirty, dangerous, and demeaning) jobs as well as more foreign domestic workers.²³ Since

²⁰ Migration Data Portal, https://www.migrationdataportal.org/international-data?i=stock_abs_female_&t=2020&m=1&rm49=142 (accessed on September 27, 2023).

²¹ See Quang Hanh, “VN-Taiwan Discuss Brides’ Rights in Illegally-Made Matches,” *Vietnam Net Bridge*, <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/features/2005/08/482081/> (accessed on September 15, 2010). In the article, Hanh states that “According to Professor Chyong-fang Ko from the Taiwanese Central Research Institute, Vietnamese brides account for 35% of 338,000 foreign brides in Taiwan, or around 118,300 women, mainly from the south of Vietnam.” See also Hsia, http://cc.shu.edu.tw/~e62/NewSiteData/Teacher/Hsia/Hsia_file/imaged%20and%20imagined%20national%20anxiety.pdf (accessed on September 15, 2010).

²² Asis, *Understanding International Migration in Asia*, 28.

²³ While Asian migration has been of low-skilled workers, emerging trends indicate that the mobility of the highly skilled professionals, such as technicians, engineers, nurses, and medical doctors, is growing. Student mobility which is part of the skilled migration is also steadily increasing in numbers. The number is large enough to alarm some countries of the “brain drain” that has been caused by these professionals leaving their countries of origin. See Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 141; Asis, *Understanding International Migration in Asia*, 30.

most migrant workers in Asia are not protected by labor laws, men and, more so women (particularly “professional entertainers,” a euphemism for prostitutes), are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and violence. Many women and girls run the risk of becoming trafficked or forced into prostitution.²⁴ While the contemporary trends of labor migration have brought “a breath of fresh air”²⁵ to the region’s economic landscape, the situation raises serious concerns about the inhumane treatment of the vulnerable migrant workers and their psychological marginalization and alienation while living away from home.²⁶ It is even more heartbreaking to see the many host countries in Asia treating their own Asian brothers and sisters as aliens and strangers without much dignity or rights.²⁷

3. Migrants as Witnesses

Based on the religious composition of international migrants, approximately 105 million international migrants were Christians.²⁸

²⁴ According to UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), women and children being trafficked in Southeast Asia could be around 225,000 out of a global figure of over 700,000 annually. For concrete scenarios of abuses of women migration in Asia, see Cruz’s article. For an excellent resource and powerful reflection on the current “terrible scourge” of human trafficking, see the latest document published by the Society of the Divine Word, entitled, *Human Trafficking: Present Day Slavery*.

²⁵ Asis, *Understanding International Migration in Asia*, 21.

²⁶ In her recently published book, Cruz refers to the contemporary migration as “a wound of our time.” She goes on to say, “To be sure, many migrants are victims of injustice before, during, and after migration” (*Toward a Theology of Migration*, 5).

²⁷ Stephen Castles notices three dominant policies or attitudes that host countries in Asia have toward immigrants: 1) immigrants should not be allowed to settle; 2) foreign residents should only be offered citizenship in exceptional cases; and 3) national culture and identity should not be modified in response to external influences. See Stephen Castles, “The Myth of the Controllability of Difference: Labour Migration, Transnational Communities and State Strategies in East Asia,” <http://www.unesco.org/most/apmrcast.htm#attitudes> (accessed on September 16, 2010).

²⁸ For the religious composition of internal migrants in 2010, see <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/03/08/religious-migration-exec/> (accessed September 27, 2023). According to this figure, the top seven religious

Statistics indicate that Christian migrants or immigrants are the largest population on the move, totaling 49 percent of all international migrants on the planet. The top two favorite destinations of Christian immigrants are North America (72 percent of 43 million immigrants) and Europe (57 percent of 40 million immigrants).²⁹ Noticeably, 85 percent of immigrants to Latin America and the Caribbean are Christians.³⁰ If every Christian migrant is a potential missionary, migration then could have enormous prospects and opportunities for evangelism. When Christian immigrants travel, they take their religion with them, or more personally, their God literally migrates with them.³¹ As people in transition, who experience the pain of homelessness and displacement, “they are usually open to new commitments and ready to assume faith in a personal way.”³² Jonathan Tan also notes in his latest book, “In the context of Asia, the movement of peoples also brings about the movement of cultures and religions, resulting in increasing cultural diversity and religious pluralism across Asia, as the majority community in host countries are often faced with the challenges of welcoming and integrating incoming migrant communities.”³³

Jehu Hanciles correctly notes that “Christianity is a migratory religion, and migration movements have been a functional element in

affiliations of international immigrants are as followed: Christian (105,670,000); Muslim (58,580,000); Unaffiliated (19,330,000); Hindu (10,700,000); other religions (9,110,000); Buddhist (7,310,000); and Jewish (3,650,000).

²⁹ For charts and other pertinent statistics, see <http://www.statista.com/statistics/221384/immigration-to-north-america-by-religion/> (accessed August 30, 2012).

³⁰ See, Statista, <http://www.statista.com/statistics/221400/immigration-to-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-by-religion/> (accessed August 30, 2012).

³¹ When the Israelites travelled in the wilderness for forty years, God moved about with them and dwelled among his people in the tabernacle (Ex. 25:8; 29; 45-46; Nm 1:50). Tabernacle means, “tent,” “place of dwelling” or “sanctuary.” It was a sacred place where God chose to meet the Israelites, and the people came together to worship and offer sacrifice during the forty years that they wandered in the desert.

³² Samuel J. Escobar, “Mission Fields on the Move,” *Christianity Today* (May 2010): 31.

³³ Jonathan Y. Tan, *Christian Mission among the Peoples of Asia* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2014), 174.

its expansion.”³⁴ Hanciles observes that the six ages or phases of Christian history that were identified by Andrew Walls were shaped in one way or another by migratory movements.³⁵ From the very beginning, Christian expansion and migratory movement were forcibly and intimately intertwined. In a more comprehensive study, Hanciles’ book explores the massive consequential connection between migration and mission in the history of Christian missionary expansion, starting with the age of European migrations in the sixteenth century.³⁶ The book successfully demonstrates that migratory movement was and remains a prime factor in the global spread of Christianity, Islam, and other world religions. What he says in the concluding section of the book bears truth and wisdom, “Every Christian migrant is a potential missionary.”³⁷

This of course is not new. Migration was a key factor in the expansion of the church in the New Testament times.³⁸ In the book of Acts, the Evangelist Luke records numerous stories of Christian missions advanced in the context of migration. Early Hellenistic Christians who were scattered because of religious persecution founded churches in Samaria (8:1), Damascus (9:2), Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (11:19). In other cases, voluntary immigrants moved with a missionary purpose in mind. The efforts of Peter, John, and other itinerant missionaries succeeded in planting new communities in various towns throughout the regions of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria

³⁴ Jehu J. Hanciles, “Migration and Mission: Some Implications for the Twenty-first-Century Church,” *Missiology* 27, no. 4 (Oct 2003): 149.

³⁵ Hanciles, 148-49. For a complete study, see Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 16-25. See also his helpful article, Andrew F. Walls, “Mission and Migration: The Diaspora Factor in Christian History,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5, no. 2 (Dec 2002): 3-11.

³⁶ Jehu J. Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2008), 157ff.

³⁷ Hanciles, 378.

³⁸ The link between migration and mission is already found in the life of Jesus. Jehu J. Hanciles states that “Jesus’ life and ministry embodied the interconnection of mission, boundary-crossing movement, and the alienation of exile and migration” (*Beyond Christendom*, 150). For a brief survey of the theme of migration in the Bible, see vanThanh Nguyen, SVD, “Asia in Motion: A Biblical Reflection on Migration,” *Asian Christian Review* 4, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 22-27.

(9:31; 10:1-48). Paul, Barnabas, and their traveling companions were sent out on various missionary journeys to establish and build up the Christian communities in Celicia, Illyricum, Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia (Rom 15:19, 23-24). Paul's list of farewell greetings in Romans 16 likewise gives us a glimpse of his successful mission endeavor, reaching all the way to the imperial capital. We are told that he even planned to travel to Spain (Rom 15:24) to evangelize to the edge of the known world.

The story of Priscilla and Aquila illustrates that migration and mission were closely intertwined.³⁹ This Judean-Christ-believing-couple was constantly on the move for the purpose of communicating the gospel message to potential listeners.⁴⁰ They first settled in Rome, were then forced to migrate to Corinth because of the Edict of Claudius in 49 C.E., relocated in Ephesus for the purpose of evangelization, and finally returned to Rome after Claudius' death in 54 C.E. They relocated both their home and their trade at least three times in three different locations. Their home was as movable as the tents that they erected. Yet, they never faltered in their commitment to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, risking everything because of their faith. Like any immigrant who experiences the trauma of displacement and marginalization, they knew the importance of being welcomed and finding shelter. Their homes became house churches. The case of Priscilla and Aquila is a good example for lay Christian immigrants scattered all over the globe to emulate, for their displacement, whether voluntary or involuntary, can serve as an opportunity for church planting, hospitality, mission, and evangelism. Furthermore, the story of Priscilla and Aquila also serves as a reminder for the church to realize that Christian immigrants, voluntary and involuntary, can fall within the plan of God and become a key factor in the expansion of the church.

³⁹ See vanThanh Nguyen, "Migrants as Missionaries: The Case of Priscilla and Aquila," *Mission Studies* 30 (2013): 192-205.

⁴⁰ The references to Priscilla and Aquila appear six times in the New Testament: three times by Luke (Acts 18:1-3, 18-19, 26-27); twice by Paul (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3); and once by a Deutero-Pauline (2 Tim 4:19).

4. The New Face of Christianity

The map of Christianity is rapidly changing and so are its faces. At the beginning of the twenty-first century there were approximately 2.1 billion Christians or one-third of the world's population.⁴¹ While the majority of Christians still live in Europe and the global North, the sands are quickly shifting, moving away from its epicenter. It is estimated that by the year 2025, the majority of the 2.6 billion Christians will be found in the "global South," namely Africa, Central and Latin America, and much of Asia.⁴² In his award-winning and controversial book, *The Next Christendom*, Philip Jenkins writes, "The era of Western Christianity has passed within our lifetimes, and the day of Southern Christianity is dawning. The fact of change itself is undeniable: it has happened, and will continue to happen."⁴³ Both historians and scholars have finally come to acknowledge the accuracy of Jenkins' assertion that the emerging Christian world will be moored in the Southern Hemisphere.⁴⁴ Peter Phan, for example, recognizes that any statistics and projections, especially in terms of religious membership and beliefs, are notoriously unreliable. Yet, Phan states, "Even so, from the major trends in the development of Southern Christianity, one may confidently predict that it will enjoy a 'surging growth' in the next fifty years."⁴⁵ Furthermore, Phan correctly points out that while this demographic shift presents enormous challenges, it

⁴¹ These statistics were based on the 2005 population produced by the respected Center for the Study of Global Christianity; see <http://qideas.org/articles/four-faces-of-global-christianity/>. It is acknowledged by Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

⁴² According to Jenkins (*Next*, 2 and 94), 595 million would live in Africa; 623 million in Central and Latin America; and 498 million in Asia. Europe might still be in third place with 513 million. Jenkins (*Next*, 3) predicts that by 2050 only about one-fifth of the world's three billion Christians will be non-Hispanic whites.

⁴³ Jenkins, *Next*, 3.

⁴⁴ Jenkins, *Next*, 17; Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, "The 'New' Church History," *New Theology Review* 16, no. 4 (2003): 79-81. See also Miriam Adeney, *Kingdom without Borders: The Untold Story of Global Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009).

⁴⁵ Peter Phan, "A New Christianity, but What Kind?" in *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 204.

also provides new prospects for Christianity, especially in a host country like the United States of America.

5. A Marvelous Rainbow from the Orient

The United States of America is a country built on the backs of immigrants coming initially from European countries. Subsequently, Catholicism in the United States has benefited much from the multicultural “American” heritage. The mosaic of cultures is becoming increasingly more evident as the Catholic Church in the U.S. continues to welcome more immigrants from around the world, particularly from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Hispanics, for example, comprise more than 35 percent of all Catholics in the U.S., and more than 20 percent of all Catholic parishes have Hispanic ministries. Recent studies suggest that the Latino composition will continue to grow for decades to come.⁴⁶

At our Sunday celebrations, one cannot help but notice the cultural diversity of peoples represented in the pews. The Anglo, African, Asian, and Hispanic faces form a magnificent rainbow of colors. According to 2014 statistics,⁴⁷ there were approximately 15.2 million people in the U.S. who self-identified as Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander, and about 2.9 million people, which is a little over 19 percent, are Catholics. The percentage of Christians in general and Catholics in particular is significantly higher among Asian Americans than in their native lands. For example, Vietnamese Catholics in the U.S. are estimated to number 483,000, which is about 27 percent of the 1.7 million Vietnamese living in the U.S., while the percentage of Catholics in Viet Nam is only 8 percent.⁴⁸ The face

⁴⁶ Approximately 42.5 million US residents who self-identify as non-Hispanic white are estimated to be Catholic, representing about 21.6 percent of the 196.8 million people. Hispanics therefore represent the single largest racial and ethnic group among Catholics in the USA. See Mark Gray, Mary Gautier, and Thomas Gaunt, “Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church in the United States,” a CARA Report, June 2014, 7; for online document, see: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/upload/cultural-diversity-cara-report-phase-1.pdf> (accessed on August 15, 2023).

⁴⁷ Gray, Gautier, and Gaunt, “Cultural Diversity,” 7-8.

⁴⁸ Gray, Gautier, and Gaunt, 7.

of the priesthood is also changing. On any given Sunday, thousands of foreign-born priests are preaching from the pulpit. While an exact count is not available, it is estimated that there are about 8,500 foreign-born priests currently serving in the U.S. Each year there are approximately 300 new international priests who come to North America to begin a new ministry.⁴⁹ The majority of these foreign-born priests come from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.⁵⁰ In the archdiocese of Los Angeles, for example, the Mass on any given weekend is conducted in forty-five different languages.

Indeed, the face of the Catholic Church in the U.S. is changing, and it shall continue to be fashioned and enriched by newcomers, many of whom are Catholic immigrants. This transformation, however, brings ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity in our liturgical and sacramental celebrations, influences our religious devotions, and even alters our theology and spirituality.⁵¹ Different cultural practices and expressions of faith can cause tension and disturb the unity of the church. The reality of the church today might cause many Catholics to experience, more acutely perhaps than in previous times, an uneasy tension between unity and diversity. But the question is, “Is it a healthy tension that proves to be enriching or does it cause more misunderstanding and greater separation?”

6. Migrants as Precious Gifts of the Church

In his article, “Mission *among* Migrants, Mission *of* Migrants,” Stephen Bevans makes two important points. First, the church’s mission is among migrants because they represent the face of the “border Christ” who said, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me”

⁴⁹ Aniedi Okure, “International Priests in the United States: An Update,” *Seminary Journal* 1, no. 1 (2012): 35.

⁵⁰ Interestingly the U.S. Catholic Church is becoming a mission-receiving church rather than a mission-sending church. This is a clear sign of “mission-in-reverse.”

⁵¹ See William V. D’Antonio, Michele Dillon, and Mary L. Gautier, *American Catholics in Transition* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013); William Cenkner, ed., *The Multicultural Church: A New Landscape in U.S. Theologies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996).

(Mt 25:35); second, migrants are also the subjects of the church's mission. Bevens says, "Christian migrants themselves have precious gifts to give to the church itself—to form it more fully into the body of Christ in the world."⁵² Recognizing the "gift" of the migrants, the Catholic Church continually seeks ways to appropriately address the needs and pastoral care of the migrants and refugees. One of its pontifical documents states, "It should be led by the principle that no one, be they migrants, refugees or members of the local population, should be looked upon as a 'stranger', but rather as a 'gift', in parishes and other ecclesial communities. This is an authentic expression of the 'catholicity' of the Church."⁵³ Since migrants are precious gifts of the church, again Bevens correctly states, "The task of the local church is, therefore, not only to respond to migrants' need and to accompany them on their journey, but also to call and equip them for ministry, both within the church and within the world."⁵⁴

Migrants are indeed a precious gift of our church, especially Asian Christian migrants, who normally bring their faith with them and bear witness of the Christian faith wherever they are. Their presence not only alters the demographic landscape but also enhances the spirituality of the host countries.⁵⁵ Recognizing their precious gift

⁵² Stephen Bevens, "Mission *among* Migrants, Mission *of* Migrants," in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, eds. Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 90.

⁵³ Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of the Migrants and Itinerant People, "Starting Afresh from Christ: Towards a Renewed Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees." Fifth World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees, (Rome, 2003) Part II, Pastoral Care, #9. See http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_2004001_Migrants_Vcongress_%20findoc_en.html (accessed September 27, 2023).

⁵⁴ Bevens, "Mission *among* Migrants," 101.

⁵⁵ According to a survey done in 2010, Asian Americans exhibit more religious commitment with 64 percent saying religion is very important in their lives, compared to 54 percent for white Americans. Also, 6 in 10 Asian Catholics say they attend Mass at least once per week, while only 4 in 10 white American Catholics say that. Another interesting statistic is that 61 percent of Asian Americans report that they pray daily, while 55 percent white Americans are likely to do the same thing. See the 2011 survey done by the United States Conference of

to the U.S. Church, the Committee on Migration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 2001 wrote a wonderful document entitled, *Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith*. This pastoral letter affirms with loving assurance their presence and prominence in the U.S. Catholic Church. It states, “We pray that this pastoral statement will facilitate a fuller appreciation of their communities in our local churches and will encourage Asian and Pacific Catholics to take on active leadership roles in every level of church life.”⁵⁶ The document celebrates numerous gifts and contributions in which Asian and Pacific Catholics have enriched the church communities over many decades. It further states, “The Church is blessed with Asian and Pacific pastors, social workers, educators, diocesan directors, and lay leaders who are actively and selflessly contributing to building the Kingdom of God in this country. The number of Asian and Pacific Catholics who have been given responsibility in church structures, or are well known in their fields of endeavor, is growing.”⁵⁷

7. Conclusion

It might be a surprise for many to hear that Jesus was born in Asia. In his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, Pope John Paul II states:

The Church in Asia sings the praises of the “God of salvation” (*Ps* 68:20) for choosing to initiate his saving plan on Asian soil, through men and women of that continent. It was in fact in Asia that God revealed and fulfilled his saving purpose from the beginning. He guided the patriarchs (cf.

Catholic Bishops under the office of the Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church of the Asian and Pacific affairs, which is available online: http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/asian-pacific-islander/demographics/upload/survey_demographics.pdf (accessed on September 27, 2023).

⁵⁶ *Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith*, 1. For the online text; go to: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/asian-pacific-islander/resources/upload/AP-Pastoral-Statement-English.pdf> (accessed on September 27, 2023).

⁵⁷ *Asian and Pacific Presence*, 10.

Gen 12) and called Moses to lead his people to freedom (cf. *Ex* 3:10). He spoke to his chosen people through many prophets, judges, kings and valiant women of faith. In “the fullness of time” (*Gal* 4:4), he sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Savior, who took flesh as an Asian! Exulting in the goodness of the continent’s peoples, cultures, and religious vitality, and conscious at the same time of the unique gift of faith which she has received for the good of all, the Church in Asia cannot cease to proclaim: “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love endures for ever” (*Ps* 118:1). Because Jesus was born, lived, died and rose from the dead in the Holy Land, that small portion of Western Asia became a land of promise and hope for all [human]kind.⁵⁸

Jesus of Nazareth was born and brought up in a specific culture. He was a Jew who spoke a Palestinian Aramaic and was conditioned by a Semitic way of speaking and thinking. One must realize that Jesus dressed like a Jew, prayed like a Jew, taught and argued like a Jewish Rabbi. His life, mission, and teaching were totally rooted in the Jewish culture and identity. The Evangelist John puts it very plainly, “the Word was made flesh” (1:14). This simple yet profound statement indicates that the Word found human expression in a Jewish culture. Consequently, being born as a Jew, Jesus truly reflects an Asian face.⁵⁹

Like it or not, the face of the church in the twenty-first century will continue to be even more ethnically diverse. Similar to the story of early Christianity, diversity is not a thing to overcome but rather an essential component to foster. We are living in a time when ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity is more evident and intense than ever.

⁵⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, paragraph 1. To access online, see http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia.html (accessed on September 27, 2023). *Ecclesia in Asia* is a document issued by Pope John Paul II to serve as a blueprint for the expansion of the Roman Catholic faith in Asia. It summarizes ideas and conclusions of the Special Asian Synod held in Rome from April 18 to May 14, 1998. It was officially promulgated by John Paul II in New Delhi, India on November 6, 1999.

⁵⁹ Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Faces of Jesus* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993).

This can be an hour of great opportunities, especially with so many Christian migrants who are constantly on the move. These Christian migrants continue to give witness and communicate the gospel message wherever they go, and in doing so, they contribute to and enrich the local church with their strong family values and martyrdom spirituality.

From a communication perspective, the essay delves into the intricate dynamics of religious communication intertwined with the phenomenon of migration and religious adherence. It illustrates how migrants function as communicators of faith, embodying their religious beliefs through actions, rituals, and expressions within their new communities. At its core, migration operates as an intercultural and interreligious communicative act, with individuals traversing geographical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries while carrying their religious identities with them. Through their presence and activities, migrants engage in both verbal and non-verbal communication, showcasing their faith through participation in religious rituals, service activities, and community engagement.

This essay emphasizes the religious communicative potential of migrants as they navigate the complexities of cultural pluralism and religious diversity in their host countries. Their interactions with local populations, participation in religious gatherings, and contributions to community life serve as channels for the transmission of religious values and beliefs. As agents of religious witness, embodying the message of their faith through lived experiences of displacement, resilience, and commitment, migrants become powerful vehicles for evangelism and proclamation within diverse cultural contexts.

The parallels between contemporary migration patterns and historical instances of Christian mission underscore the enduring link between migration and religious expansion. Just as early Christian believers disseminated the message of the Gospel to new lands, migrants today continue to serve as ambassadors of faith, planting seeds of spiritual renewal and transformation in their adopted communities. In essence, the witness and proclamation by migrants constitute a communicative phenomenon, wherein migrants become agents for the transmission of religious beliefs, values, and practices.

Their presence not only enriches the religious landscape of host countries but also fosters dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect across diverse cultural and religious traditions.

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Sorcery and Witchcraft: A Critical Challenge in Papua New Guinea

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ABSTRACT

In the modern age of the twenty-first century, with rapid developments in technology and science, accusations of sorcery and witchcraft appear to be occurring with increasing and spreading regularity throughout Papua New Guinea (PNG), a country in the South Pacific, a strange neighbor of Asia. With ninety-seven percent of the population identified as Christian, issues associated with sorcery and witchcraft remain pervasive and severe. These concerns have heightened the apprehension of the government, international organizations, institutes, and Christian Churches, viewing them as among the most critical challenges to the country's peace and development. Based on various materials, research, and conferences on Melanesian culture, particularly on sorcery and witchcraft in PNG, and with experience of living in PNG as a Catholic missionary priest, the author relates to non-Melanesian readers the phenomena of sorcery and witchcraft in PNG with the reasons and the horrific consequences to the individuals, families, and communities. The author also delineates specific attitudes, strategies, and actions implemented by the government, organizations, and churches, grounded in Christian values, human

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rights, ethics, science, and biomedicine. These initiatives aim to persuade individuals to embrace scientific and verifiable explanations for death, sickness, and misfortunes, discouraging attributions to sorcery and witchcraft. As with other societal challenges, the author underscores that the optimal strategy for addressing sorcery-related issues involves ensuring access to healthcare services, strengthening judicial enforcement, promoting education, providing religious education, and fostering economic development.

Keywords: *culture, sorcery, witchcraft, Christianity, development*

1. Introduction

Most modern people do not believe in the effectiveness of sorcery and witchcraft, but just as some imaginary stories in fairy tales, or some superstitions, beliefs, and practices in ancient and primal societies. However, the idea that all sorts of illness, death, and misfortune are frequently caused by the deliberate interventions of individuals with special powers or magical knowledge is pervasive throughout Melanesian countries, particularly Papua New Guinea (PNG). According to Forsyth and Eves, sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices influence the daily life of people in PNG. Those beliefs and practices are significant vectors for tensions, fear, insecurity, conflict, and brutal violence in communities.²

Regardless of residing in rural villages or urban settings, a prevailing belief persists among the populace that sorcery and witchcraft engender detrimental consequences, causing harm and death to innocent individuals. Consequently, sorcerers and witches are perceived as formidable adversaries to individuals, families, and communities within society, instilling fear and insecurity. Paradoxical-

² M. Forsyth and R. Eves, eds., *Talking It Through: Responses to Sorcery and Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices in Melanesia* (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2015), 1.

ally, in the absence of substantive evidence, numerous individuals accused of practicing sorcery and witchcraft have been subjected to brutal forms of punishment, including public burnings, beheadings, and hangings, with such occurrences prominently featured in daily newspapers.³

Significantly, witchcraft and sorcery, along with their ensuing consequences, pose critical challenges to the society of PNG, necessitating concerted efforts and collaboration among the government departments and religious organizations. After a brief introduction to the country of PNG, this paper presents the phenomena of sorcery, emphasizing their alarming repercussions. Lastly, it outlines some attitudes, actions, and approaches aimed at alleviating the tension and fear associated with sorcery and witchcraft, thereby mitigating accusations that fuel sorcery-related violence. Perhaps with these measures, PNG may eventually be “free from sorcery and witchcraft-related violence through strengthened partnerships between relevant stakeholders” as hoped by the *Sorcery National Action Plan*.⁴

2. Papua New Guinea, a Strange Neighbor of Asia

2.1. Brief Introduction to Papua New Guinea

According to archaeological findings, the ancestors of the present inhabitants of PNG arrived possibly as early as 50,000 years ago from Southeast Asia, having traveled through the Southeast Asian peninsula.⁵ As the undiscovered land, most of the parts of PNG were unknown to the Europeans and Asians until Don Jorge de Meneses (1498-1537) discovered the principal island of PNG around 1526-27.

³ Forsyth and Eves, *Talking It Through*, 1.

⁴ The vision of the *Sorcery National Action Plan* (or *Sorcery Accusation Related Violence National Action Plan*) is the official document that gathers the different necessary actions that have been envisaged to counteract sorcery-related violence in Papua New Guinea with the support of the national government and many other relevant stakeholders.

⁵ “Papua New Guinea Country Profile,” *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15436981>

However, the foreigners knew very little of the PNG inhabitants until the late 19th century.⁶

The northern half of PNG became a colony of Germany in 1884, called German New Guinea. In 1914, Australian troops occupied German New Guinea, and it remained under Australian military control until 1921. The southern coast of New Guinea was under British protectorate on November 6, 1884. The protectorate, called British New Guinea, was annexed outright on September 4, 1888. The possession was placed under the authority of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1902. In 1905, British New Guinea became the Territory of Papua, and formal Australian administration began in 1906 and ended with the invasion of the Japanese in 1942.⁷

Following the surrender of the Japanese in 1945, the civil administration of Papua (British New Guinea, as well as New Guinea (German New Guinea), was restored. Papua and New Guinea were combined in an administrative union to become the country of Papua New Guinea. The Administration of PNG became open to United Nations oversight. Elections in 1972 resulted in the formation of a ministry headed by Chief Minister Michael Somare (1936-2021), who pledged to lead the country to self-government and then to independence. PNG became self-governing on December 1, 1973, and achieved independence on September 16, 1975.⁸

2.2. Papua New Guinea, a Stranger Neighbor of Asia

Among the South Pacific countries, geographically, PNG is the largest island state that is connected to Southeast Asia through the common border with Indonesia. In fact, in May 1963, the United Nations transferred a part of PNG (West New Guinea) to Indonesia. Today, this region is called West Papua of Indonesia. Thus, PNG is the closest neighbor to Asia. Barton suggested PNG should be consi-

⁶ “Papua New Guinea History,” *Papua New Guinea Embassy in Japan*, accessed August 1, 2023, <http://en.png.or.jp/about-png/history-of-png/>

⁷ “Papua New Guinea History,” *Papua New Guinea Embassy in Japan*.

⁸ “Papua New Guinea History,” *Papua New Guinea Embassy in Japan*.

dered the tenth country in the Southeast Asian geographic realm after reunifying the South and North of Vietnam.⁹



Photo: Papua New Guinea and Southeast Asia

Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. (<https://www.britannica.com/place/New-Guinea#/media/1/411548/281347>)

Since 1976, PNG has joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a special observer. However, until now, after forty-seven years, due to some political and diplomatic reasons, PNG is still keen to join ASEAN but is waiting to become a full member of this association.¹⁰ On July 16, 2019, during the reception for the Vietnamese Ambassador to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, Pham Vinh Quang, who came to present his credentials, the Governor-

⁹ T. F. Barton, "Papua New Guinea: Tenth Country of Southeast Asia?" *Journal of Geography* 77, no. 7 (1978): 269-272. DOI: 10.1080/00221347808980139

¹⁰ "Papua New Guinea Keen to Join ASEAN," *The Brunei Times*, August 5, 2015, <http://www.bt.com.bn/news-asia/2015/08/05/papua-new-guinea-keen-join-asean>.

General of Papua New Guinea, Bob Dadae, expressed his hope that Vietnam will help his country's bid to become a member of ASEAN.¹¹

Despite Papua New Guinea's geographical proximity to Asia, it remains relatively unfamiliar to most Asians. Six years ago, when I informed my friends and family members that I was going to PNG as a missionary, nobody knew where PNG was. During my travels to various Asian countries, including the Philippines, Singapore, India, Vietnam, and Hong Kong, customs officers frequently inquired, "Where is PNG?" or "Where is Port Moresby?" This underscores the limited knowledge that many Asians possess about Papua New Guinea.

According to the New World Encyclopedia, Papua New Guinea (PNG) encompasses the mainland along with approximately 600 offshore islands, constituting a collective landmass of around 462,800 square kilometers. The population exceeds 10 million, encompassing over 600 distinct tribes and 800 unique indigenous languages. Given this linguistic diversity, the official languages of PNG include English, Tok Pisin (Pidgin), and Motu (the lingua franca of the Papuan region).¹²

PNG is also famous for its richness of traditional culture. The provinces within the country often maintain distinct identities with limited interconnections. Numerous tribes residing in remote areas continue to uphold their unique traditional customs and rituals. An exemplar of such cultural preservation can be observed in the inhabitants of Kiriwina Island, specifically within the Trobriand Islands. Mosko M., Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the Australian National University, writes:

Despite the vicissitudes of contacts, colonization, Christian conversion, Papua New Guinean National Independence,

¹¹ Vietnam Embassy in Indonesia, "Papua New Guinea Governor-General Hails Vietnam's Position," *Vietnam Plus*, July 17, 2019, <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/papua-new-guinea-governorgeneral-hails-vietnams-position/156271.vnp>

¹² "Papua New Guinea." *New World Encyclopedia*, accessed August 1, 2023. https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/New_Guinea

globalization, and so on, the culture and social organization of Trobrianders have, in the eyes of many observers, exhibited characteristics of being congenitally resilient, conservative, and resistant to external influence.¹³

In PNG, around 80-85 percent of the populace engages in a traditional village-centered lifestyle, dependent on subsistence and small cash-crop agriculture. They directly derive their livelihood from farming. Only 15-20 percent of the population resides in modern urban areas in Port Moresby, Lae, Madang, Wewak, Goroka, Mt Hagen, and Rabaul. The population is young, with over half of the population under the age of 23.¹⁴

In health care services, roughly half of primary health services are provided by church agencies, with some funding from the government. Essential health services have declined in several provinces since the mid-1980s due to a lack of staff and supplies.¹⁵ As I observe, there is no clinic in the villages. On Kiriwina Island where I lived for four years, with a population of forty thousand, there is a small hospital with three nurses without any doctor. Provincial hospitals are under pressure, as are the general hospitals, few, that serve their neighboring provinces. People must travel a long way to reach the hospitals.

Despite PNG's policies for universal primary education, schooling remains neither free nor compulsory. Schooling expenses are a heavy burden to most families in PNG. Many students must walk for hours to school. Consequently, about two-thirds of school-age children attend school, and some three-fifths of adults are literate; in both cases, rates are lower among women and girls than among men

¹³ M. Mosko, *Ways of Baloma: Rethinking Magic and Kinship from the Trobriands* (Chicago: Hau Books, 2017), 2.

¹⁴ "Papua New Guinea Country Brief," *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia*, accessed August 1, 2023, [https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/papua-new-guinea/papua-new-guinea-country-brief#:~:text=Papua%20New%20Guinea%20\(PNG\)%20has,has%20over%20800%20known%20languages.](https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/papua-new-guinea/papua-new-guinea-country-brief#:~:text=Papua%20New%20Guinea%20(PNG)%20has,has%20over%20800%20known%20languages.)

¹⁵ "Daily Life and Social Customs," *Britannica*, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Papua-New-Guinea/Daily-life-and-social-customs>

and boys. Only about half of those who begin primary school complete all six years and only one-fourth of those students enroll in secondary school.¹⁶

3. Problems of Sorcery and Witchcraft in Papua New Guinea

3.1. The Phenomena of Sorcery and Witchcraft in the Conception of Spirit World

PNG, characterized by its linguistic diversity with over 800 languages, exhibits a profound complexity in cultural traditions and beliefs. Each tribe within the region possesses a unique worldview encompassing spiritual beings, human existence, and the material world. According to Bartle, life in PNG is perceived as an integrated wholeness. Beyond the observable realm, there is a prevailing belief in the existence of an invisible world. Within the PNG worldview, the physical and spiritual, secular and sacred operate in tandem. So, as individuals and communities, human life is influenced and controlled by spiritual beings and religious rituals. The people of PNG believe that there are many spirits or spiritual beings. As Bartle observes, the people of PNG live in a world that is populated with spirits.¹⁷

According to Whiteman, many Melanesia religions do not have a great spirit like creator gods. It seems, however, that where they exist, creator spirits have become the objects of legend and myth but not the objects of worship. They are inactive and often need to be more approachable to people. However, it is ghosts and spirits that are active in the affairs of the human community, and so it is to them that Melanesian people turn to in veneration and propitiation.¹⁸ Besides, the beliefs in the spirit world are different from one another. Bartle divides the spirit world of PNG into four main groups: gods and cultural heroes;

¹⁶ "Daily Life and Social Customs," *Britannica*.

¹⁷ N. Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea* (Point No. 29), (Goroka, PNG: Melanesia Institute, 2005), 40.

¹⁸ D. Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries* (Hattiesburg: William Carey Library, 1983), 108.

ghosts of ancestors and spirits of the dead; bush spirits or natural spirits; and evil occult forces connected with sorcery and witchcraft.¹⁹

In the belief of the people of PNG, spiritual beings must have power, which means they must be able to change things, to do something, and to affect the visible world, such as to cause sickness and even death to the people. They believe that spirits are very close to humans and have regular influence on human life. The people of PNG have grown up in a society with many sources of power. To have a good and abundant life, they need the help of various sources of power, such as the chiefs, the departed members of the clan, the supernatural spirit beings, and the natural world in which they live.²⁰

It was previously assumed that with the advancement of education and modernization, beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft would diminish. However, contrary to this assumption, such beliefs have not waned but rather proliferated. Moreover, the faith in Christian God does not supplant the traditional hierarchy of spirits; instead, it is incorporated alongside them. Often, God is perceived as the same high God of the ancestors or a Supreme Being in some tribal communities.²¹ Most of Christians in PNG still believe in that spirit but think that Jesus Christ has greater power than other spirits. Many Christians have divided loyalties and choose whichever source of power they think will be most appropriate at a particular time.²²

In the twenty-first century, marked by advancements in science, technology, and widespread access to information, the prevalence of modernization has not diminished the apprehension surrounding spiritual powers. Despite the flourishing of scientific and technological developments, the fear of sorcery and witchcraft remains pervasive. Beliefs and fears concerning these phenomena are not only widespread but have also intensified within communities, posing a

¹⁹ Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, 41.

²⁰ Bartle, 40.

²¹ B. Narokobi, "What is the Religious Experience for a Melanesian?" in *Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader*, ed. J. D. May, 69-77 (Goroka, PNG: Melanesia Institute, 1985), 72.

²² Bartle, 44.

significant societal concern. This concern has prompted numerous regional, national, and international conferences dedicated to discussing these issues.²³ Consequently, a substantial majority of Papua New Guineans, irrespective of age, gender, residence, education, religion, or profession, continue to harbor a belief in the existence of sorcery. They think certain individuals, through the practice of evil sorcery, have the power to inflict death or sickness upon others.²⁴

A substantial number of unexplained illnesses and accidents in Papua New Guinea are attributed to sorcery and witchcraft. When an individual succumbs to illness, the prevailing belief is not a natural cause but rather an attribution to sorcery. Consequently, efforts are made to identify the alleged sorcerer or witch responsible for the demise. This perspective extends to accidents, including traffic incidents, where human error is not considered the primary cause. In the PNG mindset, accidents are perceived as occurring under the influence of supernatural or extraordinary powers. The pervasive belief in malevolent intent and sorcery instills profound fear among the populace, shaping their perceptions of adverse events.²⁵

In a Catholic community within the parish of Bomana, where I am serving as the acting parish priest, four people passed away in a week. A young man died in a traffic accident, a woman passed away due to old age, and two others succumbed to illness. The community was gripped by fear to the extent that they refrained from attending

²³ In 1982, a conference was held by the Research Centre for South-West Pacific Studies, La Trobe University, with the theme: "Sorcery, Healing and Magic in Melanesia." In 2003, the Melanesia Institute of Goroka undertook a research project under the provisional title of "*Sanguma* in Paradise." A conference was held by The Australian National University in Canberra, 5-7 June 2013, on "Sorcery and Witchcraft-Related Killings in Melanesia: Culture, Law and Human Rights Perspectives." In December 2013, there was another conference on "Sorcery and Witchcraft Accusations: Developing a National Response to Overcome the Violence" in Goroka, PNG. In 2003, the Melanesian Institute started a project on Sorcery and Christianity in PNG.

²⁴ R. Auka et al., "Sorcery and Witchcraft Related Killings in Papua New Guinea: The Criminal Justice System Response," in *Talking It Through: Responses to Sorcery and Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices in Melanesia*, ed. M Forsyth and R. Eves, 241-53 (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2015), 241-42.

²⁵ Bartle, 219; Auka et al., 250.

church for two consecutive Sundays. There was suspicion among the residents that a sorcerer or witch resided in the village. This pervasive fear of death extended to encompass concerns for both individual well-being and the safety of family members.

To identify the witch or sorcerer, the people consult the diviner or tribal chief, believed to possess the ability to see the invisible world. Alternatively, they devise means or reason to accuse the alleged witch and sorcerer. For example, a man had a dream that the suspected sorcerer came and carved out his son's eye with a knife. Shortly after his dream, the son developed swelling in his eye and succumbed to that swelling. That man concluded that the suspected sorcerer had employed sorcery to cause his son's death.²⁶

3.2. Variety of Sorcery and Witchcraft

In PNG, distinctions and categorizations of sorcery, witchcraft, and magic lack clarity and are often complicated by myriad permutations across various dimensions. Due to the diversity of cultures and beliefs, every province or region has its own ways of beliefs and practices. According to the Sorcery Act 1971 of PNG, sorcery and witchcraft are known in various languages and parts of the country as witchcraft, magic, enchantment, *puripuri*, *muramura*, *dikana*, *vada*, *meamea*, *sanguma* or *mailra*.²⁷ The Papua New Guinea Sorcery Act 1971 distinguishes between innocent sorcery, which is protective and curative, and evil sorcery, intended to harm others.

According to Zocca and Urame, various methods exist for gaining power through the practice of sorcery and witchcraft. Generally, practitioners employ natural materials, such as leaves, stone, ginger, garlic, or animals like rats and snakes. Additionally, materials associated with humans, such as cloth fragments, and bodily

²⁶ Auka et al., "Sorcery and Witchcraft Related Killings in Papua New Guinea," 247.

²⁷ Auka et al., 242.

remnants like human waste or body parts, including sexual secretions, semen, vaginal fluid, and menstrual blood, are utilized in their rituals.²⁸

Among the various forms of sorcery and witchcraft prevalent in PNG, *sanguma* is the most popular. In *tok pidgin*,²⁹ *Sanguma* (“occult powers”) generally denotes an evil power or spirit that manifests itself in animal form, compelling individuals to inflict illness or death upon others. Believers hold that the victim of *sanguma* will suddenly fall sick and die. However, the term *sanguma* can be used to refer to all different kinds of sorcery and witchcraft. Generally, among the people of PNG, *sanguma* is regarded as inherently evil, and people who are accused of being *sanguma* are seen as a threat to society. They are frequently hunted down, burnt alive, or killed.³⁰

Today, witchcraft and sorcery-related beliefs and practices are being transported around PNG to places that never previously existed. These beliefs and practices have become mixed and localized. People living in cities and towns come from different provinces or districts, learning sorcery and witchcraft-related beliefs and practices from each other. Moreover, witches and sorcerers employ modern techniques such as computers, mobile phones, or chemicals to poison people. Sorcery practices are also being commodified and increasingly able to be bought at local markets. Forsyth and Eves observe that the variety of sorcery and witchcraft seems to be increasing rather than diminishing.³¹

According to Zocca, there are many theories to explain sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices. In primal societies, people tend to attribute the cause of natural phenomena to non-empirical entities, such as gods, spirits, ancestor’s spirits, or persons with special powers

²⁸ F. Zocca and J. Urame, eds., *Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Christianity in Melanesia. Melanesian Mission Studies* No. 5. (Goroka, PNG: Melanesia Institute, 2008), 173.

²⁹ *Tok* is derived from English “talk” but has a broader application, also meaning “word,” “speech,” or “language.” *Pisin* derives from the English word “pidgin”; the latter, in turn, may originate in the word *business*, which is descriptive of the typical development and use of pidgins as inter-ethnic trade languages (Wikipedia).

³⁰ Bartle, 43.

³¹ Forsyth and Eves, 5-6.

(magicians, sorcerers, and witches).³² Thus, sorcerers and witches are believed to possess supernatural powers for good or evil purposes. Conversely, individuals experiencing negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, guilt, envy, hatred, and despair, seek to find a reason for their suffering. Accusing sorcerers and witches serves as a means of releasing these negative emotions.

3.3. Sorcery and Witchcraft with Violence

The issues of sorcery-related violence are ultimately rooted in the existence of the belief and practice of sorcery and witchcraft. Most Papua New Guineans believe in sorcery, viewing it as akin to a religion with a supernatural aura. Many people in PNG fear the efficacy of evil spirits involved in these practices. Even Tom Amukele, a member of the parliament, reported that sorcery and witchcraft were significant causes of death in his district. The impacts of these beliefs and practices in village communities are challenging to comprehend.³³

Regarding the problems of sorcery and witchcraft, Forsyth and Eves propose that two perspectives must be considered. First, from viewpoint of the local people, the problem of sorcery and witchcraft adversely affects the community and society due to the actions of sorcerers and witches. These actions include killing or injuring innocent people, undermining the businesses, and instilling fear and insecurity. Victims in this context are those believed to have been harmed or killed by the actions of a witch or a sorcerer.

From the perspective of outsiders, such as the church, international NGOs, and institutions, accusations of sorcery and witchcraft lead to violence, tribal conflicts, and murder. Those accused of being witches or sorcerers may be subjected to harm, including potential death, with the community possibly attacking or expelling them.³⁴ Many other indirect victims live in villages under suspicion of

³² Zocca and Urame, *Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Christianity in Melanesia*, 14-18, 39-43.

³³ Zocca and Urame, 117.

³⁴ Forsyth and Eves, 2.

being witches or sorcerers, and the spouses and children of the accused individuals also become victims.³⁵

There is no way to demonstrate that a person practiced sorcery because sorcery and witchcraft involve the use of supernatural power and spiritual beings. There is no clear evidence to prove the effectiveness of sorcery, and accusations of sorcery and witchcraft are typically employed to target innocent or defenseless victims.³⁶ In fact, the accusations reflect the tensions and conflicts between individuals and groups. Simultaneously, people use sorcery as an excuse or explanation for deaths, sickness, or unnatural events. The accused may admit culpability under duress to escape torture.³⁷

When a doctor is unable to determine the illness or cause of death, people seek alternative explanations from a *Glassman* (diviner) to find who might be responsible for the illness or death.³⁸ Many of these suspicions and accusations result in violence. Cox and Phillips recount the story of a Papua New Guinean doctor who returned to his village for his uncle's funeral. He took the opportunity to explain that the uncle died of cancer, not sorcery. However, his advice was ignored. Several days after he returned to town, some of his relatives attacked suspected sorcerers, assaulting them and burning their houses.³⁹

Unfortunately, many women suspected of being sorcerers face acts of torture, violence, abuse, or even death. According to Eves and Kelly-Hanku, in Goroka, the majority of the attacks recorded during the research targeted women, with 30 of the 32 victims being women and 25 of the 27 murdered being women. As a result, the women must

³⁵ F. Zocca, ed., *Sanguma in Paradise: Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Christianity in Papua New Guinea* (Point No. 33) (Goroka, PNG: Melanesia Institute, 2009), 32.

³⁶ M. Stephen, ed., *Sorcerer and Witch in Melanesia* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 250.

³⁷ Zocca and Urame, 6, 27; Auka et al., 249.

³⁸ J. Cox and G. Phillips, "Sorcery, Christianity and the Decline of Medical Services," in *Talking It Through: Responses to Sorcery and Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices in Melanesia*, ed. M. Forsyth and R. Eves (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2015), 42-43.

³⁹ Cox and Phillips, "Sorcery, Christianity and the Decline of Medical Services," 43.

relocate to their husbands' village, rendering them vulnerable outsiders.⁴⁰ This regrettable trend is consistent with the widely held view that women have less influence in the PNG community than men.⁴¹

4. Some Attitudes and Actions Towards Sorcery and Witchcraft

4.1. The Responsibility of Medical Services

From the sociological view, sorcery and sorcery-related violence can be attributed to poverty and societal inequality. Simultaneously, when the public health service system fails to operate effectively in the community, it creates confusion and suspicion among people regarding sickness and death. In the society of PNG, one of the most significant issues is the decline in medical services and training, resulting in inadequate treatment for people's illnesses. There are insufficient doctors even for essential service provision. According to Doctor Lino Tom, the Health Minister of PNG, there is only one doctor for 30,000 persons.⁴²

Cox describes the situation of the hospitals in PNG:

In severely under-resourced hospital environments, where there are barely enough doctors for even basic service provision, the role of the competent, experienced doctor as a teacher is impossible. Junior doctors and students are left to their own devices in many hospitals. They make critical clinical decisions without supervision and often progress through their career without access to ongoing medical education opportunities. Those senior doctors engaged in teaching and training rapidly become burnt out as demands for their skills exceed the limitations of their goodwill and

⁴⁰ R. Eves and A. Kelly-Hanku, "Witch-Hunts in Papua New Guinea's Eastern Highlands Province: A Fieldwork Report." *In Brief* 2014/4 (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2014), 78.

⁴¹ Auka et al., 252.

⁴² "One Doctor to 30,000 Persons Ratio in PNG," *PNG Health Watch*, April 23, 2023, <https://health.onepng.com/png-health-news/one-doctor-to-30000-persons-ratio-in-png>.

energy. Professional frustrations compound this, where doctors are forced to work below their skill level and training due to limited resources and inadequately supported health systems.⁴³

Most cases of sorcery accusations are related to sickness and death, particularly when a doctor fails to provide a clear explanation for the problem. According to Cox and Phillips, people in PNG distinguish between an illness that is curable by biomedical means (*sik bilong marasin* – sickness of medicine) and one that biomedicine cannot cure (*sik bilong ples* – sickness of place/village).⁴⁴ They believe that “white”⁴⁵ medicine can cure “white” sickness, but only Papua New Guinean cures can heal Papua New Guinean illnesses. Therefore, they seek alternative explanations in sorcery and witchcraft-related beliefs and practices.

Moreover, one of the leading causes of death in the country is HIV/AIDS. Many HIV/AIDS patients die without even knowing the nature of their sickness, or they keep it a secret from their relatives and friends. When a person appears sick and experiences pain or other symptoms of an illness, they immediately consider the possibility of sorcery. In situations where there is no doctor, or when the doctor is unable to diagnose the illness, sorcery is often used as an explanatory framework. Poor medical service further contributes to the prevalence of beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft.⁴⁶

For the near future, Cox and Phillips warn that if medical education, training, and ongoing professional development continue to be under-resourced, it is highly likely that doctors, health extension officers, and nurses will lack the expert knowledge necessary to reassert the importance of biomedical understandings of diagnosis. Consequently, curative practices that center on this expertise, requiring a functioning hierarchy of roles to be effective, are currently being

⁴³ Cox and Phillips, 47-48.

⁴⁴ Cox and Phillips, 44.

⁴⁵ The people in PNG use “white” to refer to what belongs to the foreigner, such as “white man” means the foreigner.

⁴⁶ Cox and Phillips, 47.

undermined. This situation lends credibility to sorcery as a perceived cause of illness and injury.⁴⁷

Sorcery accusations, from the perspective of a medical doctor, are the social outcomes of an impoverished system of biomedical service provision where the training of expert staff crucial to producing effective health services is neglected.⁴⁸ Therefore, improving health-care services, including training doctors and nurses, constructing more clinics and hospitals, ensuring an adequate supply of medicine, and educating people in healthcare, may contribute to the decline of sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices.

4.2. The Attitude and Actions of the Church

The Christian Bible consistently forbids any practice of magic, sorcery, witchcraft, necromancy, and divination⁴⁹ because these practices set themselves up against God by attempting to compel the powers of the universe, particularly the evil spirits. However, according to Zocca, the Bible does not deny the effectiveness of sorcery and witchcraft. Sometimes, sickness and death are understood as the consequence of satanic influence or God's punishment, but not necessarily from magical evil practice or sorcery and witchcraft.⁵⁰

Concretely, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2116 writes:

All forms of *divination* are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead, or other practices falsely supposed to “unveil” the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums, all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate

⁴⁷ Cox and Phillips, 48.

⁴⁸ Cox and Phillips, 49.

⁴⁹ From Old Testament, cf. Deut. 18: 10-14; Ex 22: 17-18; Lev. 19:26; Wis. 17:7. From New Testament, cf. Acts 13: 6-12, 16: 17-24; Gal. 5: 20; Rev. 9: 21; 21: 8, etc.

⁵⁰ Zocca and Urame, 21.

hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone.⁵¹

In accordance with established Christian doctrines, church leaders, mirroring prevailing sentiments in contemporary society, regard sorcery and witchcraft as mere superstitions antithetical to Christian beliefs. They reject any substantive association between sorcery, witchcraft, and malevolent consequences, vehemently prohibiting all forms of magical practices as being inconsistent with Christian teachings.⁵² Some evangelical denominations equate sorcery and witchcraft with evil spirits, considering them as the work of people possessed by demons. Some churches understand that practicing sorcery and witchcraft is a form of worshipping the power of evil.⁵³

According to Zocca, in the history of evangelization in PNG, missionaries have endeavored to root out sorcery from society. However, there were some differences in the reasons for their opposition. Some missionaries opposed sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices, viewing them as satanic. Others considered sorcery and witchcraft phenomena as merely products of ignorance, superstitions, and fraud in primal societies. In the name of science, they tolerantly tried to educate and explain to people the fundamentals of basic scientific knowledge.⁵⁴

While opposing the belief and practices of sorcery and witchcraft, missionaries preached the existence of God and supernatural and spiritual beings such as angels, evil spirits, and the human soul. They emphasized the power of God in blessing and punishment, miracles, and visions. Furthermore, they talked about the evil activity of demons in the world. All these beliefs easily fit into the traditional magical mindset of people in primal societies.⁵⁵ Consequently, the people of PNG accepted the Christian faith quickly and widely. After

⁵¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: revised in accordance with the official Latin text promulgated by Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC, United States Catholic Conference, 2000), n. 2116.

⁵² Zocca and Urame, 25.

⁵³ Zocca and Urame, 26.

⁵⁴ Zocca and Urame, 27-28.

⁵⁵ Zocca and Urame, 28.

one hundred years of evangelization, ninety-seven percent of the population are Christians.

However, Christianity should accept that it has been unable to eradicate the magical mentality with its beliefs and practice of sorcery among the Christians. In PNG, most of Christian believers maintain their traditional beliefs and practices related to sorcery and witchcraft, even when these conflict with the Gospel message or scientific explanation. Thus, Whiteman quoted the observation of Shapera about the society of Africa, which is analogous to the situation in PNG: “The greatest failure of the Church and Western civilization generally has been regarding magic and sorcery.”⁵⁶

The people of PNG strongly believe that they live under the influence of spirits and ghosts of ancestors. Mindful of this traditional mentality, some church leaders redirect the blame from sorcerers or witches to spiritual beings like demons, ghosts, angels, and God. Adverse events are seen as indications that God wants to reveal something to humans or has a mysterious divine plan.⁵⁷ Church leaders should explain to people the meaning of suffering in the wisdom of God with the example of Jesus on the cross. During funeral celebrations, drawing from the story of Job (2: 1-11), leaders need to emphasize the truth that God is the owner of life. Without God’s will, nobody has power over human life (Job 2: 6). All negative events always have their own meaning that we need to discover. From the story of Job, the faithful need to learn to be patient and persevere in the faith.

To assist the faithful in difficult circumstances, religious leaders, parish priests, and community leaders should spend time visiting the sick to comfort them and their families with prayers. They help the sick prepare for death and assist the family in accepting the sickness and death of their family member. During these visits, they could try to convince the family not to seek sorcerers and witches but to trust in God and accept the realities of human life. They may explain

⁵⁶ Cf. D. Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries* (Hattiesburg: William Carey Library, 1983), 356.

⁵⁷ Zocca and Urame, 54.

the sickness being experienced using relevant biomedical explanations. For young people and children, the church needs to provide a solid religious education in Catechism and Bible classes, explaining why the Bible and the church consistently forbid the practice of sorcery and necromancy. Simultaneously, pastors should promote respect for law and order and foster faith to influence attitudes and emotions.⁵⁸

4.3. The Criminal Justice System Response

4.3.1. *The Response to the Practices of Sorcery and Witchcraft*

At the end of the nineteenth century, the colonial government of British New Guinea sought to prevent the practice of sorcery through the law to fulfill its civilizing mission, believing that the introduction of the Western legal system would essentially achieve this goal. However, they had difficulty prohibiting something they believed did not exist. The *Native Regulations 1922* declared: “Sorcery is only deceit, but the lies of the sorcerer frighten many people and cause great trouble. Therefore, the sorcerer must be punished.”⁵⁹

According to Stewart, the *Native Regulations 1939* also prohibited the practice of sorcery by an alleged sorcerer who:

- (a) practices or pretends to practice sorcery; or
- (b) threatens any person with sorcery, whether practiced by himself or any other person; or
- (c) procures or attempts to procure any other person to practice or pretend to practice or assist in sorcery; or
- (d) is found in possession of implements or “charms” used in sorcery; or accepts payment or presents in the shape of food or otherwise when the obvious intention of

⁵⁸ P. Gibb, “Practical Church Interventions on Sorcery and Witchcraft Violence in the Papua New Guinea Highlands,” In *Talking It Through: Responses to Sorcery and Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices in Melanesia*, M. Forsyth and Eves, R. eds. (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2015), 311-14.

⁵⁹ Cf. C. Stewart, “The Courts, the Churches, the Witches and their Killers,” in *Talking It Through: Responses to Sorcery and Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices in Melanesia*, ed. M. Forsyth and R. Eves (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2015), 185.

making such payments or presents is to propitiate a Sorcerer, shall on conviction be liable ...⁶⁰

In 1971, the National Parliament issued the *Sorcery Act*, which made sorcery (including what is known in various terms) an offense. However, there was a big problem with dealing with sorcery in the formal court system because it was difficult to find evidence demonstrating that a person practiced sorcery. Sorcery is a sacred practice that no one wants to discuss openly. The other problem was convicting a witch or sorcerer for killing by supernatural powers, as the evidentiary burden was on proving the effectiveness of the act of sorcery in a court of law.⁶¹

4.3.2. *The Response to Sorcerer and Witch Killers*

According to the basic principles of the law, sorcerers should be brought to justice and not killed by the villagers. Thus, killing the sorcerer was clearly considered murder under the Criminal Code. However, during the colonial era, customary beliefs in sorcery were automatically accepted by the courts. Hence, the courts came to treat a genuine belief in sorcery not as a defense against the charge but as a special factor to be considered in mitigating the sentence after the accused had been convicted of the crime.⁶²

For example, in 1980, there was a case involving 15 men who killed a woman accused of being a sorceress at Porgera in Enga Province, in the highlands. However, they expressed no remorse, as they believed she had killed many people, and it was an act of honor to rid the community of such a threat to the well-being of all. Finally, the judge ordered a three-month jail sentence and a compensation payment for the pigs.⁶³

The witch-killers usually say they were acting, believing they were defending the community. Sometimes, the whole community

186. ⁶⁰ Cf. Stewart, "The Courts, the Churches, the Witches and their Killers,"

⁶¹ Stewart, 188; Auka et al., 242- 43.

⁶² Stewart, 187; Auka et al, 246).

⁶³ Stewart, 190.

gathered and agreed that, to save the people, the sorcerer should be put to death. It is challenging for the judge to decide because to act on behalf of the community to commit a severe crime takes or requires so much courage on the part of actors, as was the case of the two accused.⁶⁴

In addition, not long ago, the Supreme Court decided it was no longer automatically a “special” mitigating factor. Henceforth, the sentence’s mitigation would depend on the facts in each case. In 2007, in a particularly nasty case of witch torture and killing, the death penalty was imposed. As recently as 2013, a newspaper report claimed that a man in Enga Province had been sentenced to 30 years in jail for killing his aunt on suspicion of sorcery.⁶⁵

On May 28, 2013, the PNG government amended the existing laws in the *Criminal Code*, which state that any person found guilty of murdering a suspected sorcerer is liable to the death penalty. It means the government firmly stands against sorcery-related killings.⁶⁶ After 2000, there have been more reported cases of sorcery-related violence, and the sentences imposed by the courts have been harsher than in the 1980s.⁶⁷ Today, at least in theory, the PNG courts will not tolerate sorcery-related violence anymore.

However, most cases relating to sorcery and witchcraft-related violence were not brought to the court of justice or followed up in investigations to result in legal proceedings.⁶⁸ Instead, the people try to resolve the sorcery-related problems among themselves. Besides, in PNG, the police force is poorly trained and paid. There are not enough police officers to respond to violence, particularly sorcery-related violence. And usually, sorcery-related violence is a group attack. Police officers cannot control the situation when they are often outnumbered and outgunned.⁶⁹ In Milne Bay Province, where I live,

⁶⁴ Stewart, 190.

⁶⁵ Stewart, 192.

⁶⁶ Auka et al., 250.

⁶⁷ Auka et al., 246.

⁶⁸ Auka et al., 244-46.

⁶⁹ Auka et al., 251.

there are only 18 police officers in the province. Thus, they cannot face the group of criminals, such as in sorcery-related violence.

5. Conclusion

As a neighboring country of Asia, PNG is quite unfamiliar to most Asians due to its diversity in language and culture. The rapid development of science and technology does not significantly change traditional beliefs and practices, including sorcery and witchcraft. People still believe in the effectiveness of sorcery and witchcraft, thinking that some individuals can use evil powers to harm and kill others. Therefore, many people are trying to identify who the sorcerers and witches are in their communities to either murder or expel them. Zocca observed that almost every day, the PNG press reports cases of sorcery-related killings and torturing with various kinds of appeals.⁷⁰ So, sorcery and witchcraft problems are not merely criminal acts or traditional belief systems, but criminal acts based on a belief system.

Most of the accusations related to sorcery and witchcraft stem from a lack of understanding of basic biomedical knowledge and the weaknesses in the healthcare system, particularly in relation to sicknesses and deaths. Therefore, the government needs to open more medical schools, clinics, and hospitals to improve healthcare services across the entire country. Additionally, the churches, through pastors and religious and community leaders, should consistently proclaim the truth of the Gospel to help people change their minds and believe in God, the author, and owner of human life, so that the faithful may live according to Gospel values and virtues.

Today, the criminal justice system takes sorcery and witchcraft-related crimes more seriously. With control over the police forces, the government of PNG is making efforts to prevent and stop violence and criminal activities related to sorcery and witchcraft. Besides healthcare services, churches, and the legal system, addressing

⁷⁰ F. Zocca, ed., *Sanguma in Paradise: Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Christianity in Papua New Guinea* (Point No. 33) (Goroka, PNG: Melanesia Institute, 2009), 6-7.

the problems of sorcery and witchcraft also requires the collaboration of the entire society, including governments, the educational system, and social media, so that PNG may be “free from sorcery and witchcraft-related violence.”⁷¹

⁷¹ The vision of *Sorcery National Action Plan* (or *Sorcery Accusation Related Violence National Action Plan*).

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***Kasiyana* as Religious Communication among the Kankanaeys in the Philippines**

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous cultures have their belief systems, including the recognition of a supreme being, and with such recognition comes their moral systems, which guide how they live their lives. As for the Kankanaeys in the Cordillera Region of the Philippines, Kasiyana is one of the practices that portrays their belief in the divine and serves as a moral guide in their relationship with other people and the environment. The pervasiveness of Kasiyana in the Kankanaey cultures makes it a viable source of reflection in religious communication. Thus, the paper aims to make explicit how Kasiyana expressions and manifestations are forms of religious communication. The paper started by extracting how the COVID-19 survivor participants perceived, expressed, and manifested the Kasiyana. With the participants' extracted manifestations of Kasiyana, the paper discussed how the Kankanaey concept of Kasiyana qualifies in some pertinent areas of religious communication. The paper also presented how Kasiyana is intertwined with Christian teachings, making it more sensible to discuss as religious communication.

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Keywords: *Indigenous, cultural identity, cultural preservation, Kankanaey spirituality, Cordillera*

1. Introduction

Throughout history, humans have developed various modes of transmitting knowledge, meaning, and human experience.² Such developments also transpired within indigenous cultures. The generational transmission of cultural practices, knowledge, and beliefs through oral traditions, rituals, symbols, sacred texts, songs, and genealogies has been attached to how they relate to a divine being. Such relation with a divine being plays a vital role in how the indigenous people relate to other people and their environment. Therefore, religious communication has been an integral part of human civilization. It has been serving the indigenous people a means to connect with the divine, express their beliefs, and establish social norms and values.

Making sense of the world is a primary concern of every individual. From childhood, people ask questions about the world, which is the start of making sense. It is essential to meeting basic physical, emotional, and social needs and desires.³ Thus, regardless of whichever culture one belongs to, making sense is a necessity. Also, part of what people make sense of is the culture itself. How they make sense of the world includes how they phenomenologically express and make intelligible whatever their experiences with the ultimate being and other entities that they believe exist despite not being perceived by vision. Such embeddedness of making sense of the world through one's culture is the embeddedness of religious communication among the Indigenous peoples.

Religious communication is significant in indigenous cultures as it expresses the connection of the indigenous people with their gods and ancestors. They communicate and connect with their gods and

² Nepia Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition: An Indigenous Perspective* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2019), 40-60.

³ Colette Daiute and Katherine Nelson, "Making Sense of the Sense-making," *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 7, no. 1-4 (1997): 207-215.

ancestors through rituals, prayers, and sacred ceremonies to ask for guidance, protection, and blessings. Religious communication in indigenous cultures also plays a crucial role in establishing social norms and values. It transmits ethical ideals, moral teachings, and cultural traditions from one generation to another.

For the Kankanaeys, *Kasiyana* is one of the ways by which they make sense of the world. *Kasiyana* expresses the Kankanaeys' belief in the presence of the divine, which they believe is actively participating in their lives. Thus, this paper tries to qualify the *Kasiyana* expression by the COVID-19 survivor participants as a religious communication among the Kankanaeys. *Kasiyana* expression intertwined with other Kankanaey values, morality, and some Christian teachings makes a viable reflection in religious communication. The paper argues that the Kankanaeys have been doing religious communication through the utterance and expression of the *Kasiyana*.

The paper does not intend to discuss the presence or absence of a religion among the Kankanaeys. Instead, it aims to extract out the religious practices attached with the expression of *Kasiyana* and put it into dialogue with some pertinent areas of religious communication. Such process is also not to diminish the original understanding of *Kasiyana* but to recognize its value and pervasiveness in the lives of the Kankanaey Christians. To go deeper, the following section will introduce an overview of the *Kasiyana*.

2. A Prelude to *Kasiyana*

Kasiyana is a Kankanaey cultural concept and practice. It can be roughly translated into English as "All will be well."⁴ It speaks of recognizing one's own or others' unfortunate situations. The pitiful situation of oneself or others necessitates mercy and compassion from everyone. This is also attached to hope, faith, encouragement, and

⁴ Minnie Degawan, "'Kasiyanna'- an Indigenous Community Coping Mechanism for Disasters Like Pandemics," IUCN.org, accessed January 15, 2022, <https://www.iucn.org/news/commission-environmental-economic-and-social-policy/202004/kasiyanna-indigenous-community-coping-mechanism-disasters-pandemics>

other things those afflicted need.⁵ During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people were suffering because of the virus. The word was used in the Kankanaey communities to comfort the afflicted and express hope for the future. However, understanding the term “*Kasiyana*” in Kankanaey communities extends beyond mere translation. It represents a comprehensive worldview rooted in acknowledgment of a supreme being.

Because of the scarcity of literature on the worldview and religious practices of the Kankanaeys, the author relies on accessible accounts of *Kasiyana* found on digital platforms. These accounts align with the author’s understanding and are corroborated by discussions with elders from the author’s Kankanaey community. In one instance, a Facebook article attempted to delve into the etymology of the term “Kasiyan.” Upon closer examination, the word emerges as a combination of various Kankanaey terms: “*Kaasi*,” “*Asi*,” “*Asi-asi*,” “*Ya*,” and “*Na*.” “*Kaasi*” denotes pitiful, typically describing an individual’s condition or circumstance.⁶ “*Asi*” means mercy or that which someone in a dire situation needs.⁷ “*Asi-asi*” refers to an adverse event or circumstance that has caused a person to have pitiful conditions.⁸ Another proposed etymology for the term *Kasiyana* suggests a potential religious influence from the Ilocano phrase “*Kaassia Na*,” which means “He will show mercy,” with “He” referring to the Christian God. Regardless of the preferred etymological interpretation, both explanations underscore the concept of mercy within the context of individuals or communities enduring unpleasant experiences.⁹

Furthermore, *Kasiyana* is not merely descriptive; it embodies positivity, optimism, hope, and faith. A subsequent Facebook post indicates that its usage extends beyond adverse situations to include the initiation of endeavors and the resolution of conflicts or during

⁵ Brandon Billan Cadingpal, “‘Kasiyana’ as Ordinary Theology: The Case of the Covid-19 Survivors” (MA Thesis, Saint Louis University, 2023), 21-26.

⁶ Besao NHS – SHS, “A Bit of Igorot Culture: ‘Kasiyana,’” March 26, 2020, <https://m.facebook.com/besaonhsshs/posts/2578260062411910>.

⁷ Besao NHS – SHS, “A Bit of Igorot Culture: ‘Kasiyana.’”

⁸ Besao NHS – SHS, “A Bit of Igorot Culture: ‘Kasiyana.’”

⁹ Brandon Cadingpal, “Kasiyana,” 23-24.

ritual conduct.¹⁰ Therefore, *Kasiyana* portrays a “meaningful message of hope towards the future, comfort at present, encouragement to move forward, which should be anchored in timeless faith as expressed in undergoing required rituals by the Unseen (*Kabunian*-Creator).”¹¹

This sentiment is echoed in another blog, which states that *Kasiyana* is “an expression of sympathy and encouragement, in the belief that we shall overcome any hardship or crisis and find better days ahead.”¹² A second blog article affirms the stated ideas on *Kasiyana* and adds that *Kasiyana* is “used to comfort and give hope even though everything is hopeless.”¹³ The latter article emphasizes the necessity of sincerity when uttering *Kasiyana*, as insincerity would diminish its essential message of comfort.¹⁴

Degawan translates *Kasiyana* as “all will be well.”¹⁵ She adds that the term affirms that balance will soon be achieved.¹⁶ Difficulties in life are seen as imbalances. However, with great optimism anchored in the belief of *Kasiyana*, things will soon be restored to their proper places. Similarly, others translate *Kasiyana* as “It’s alright. Things will get better.”¹⁷ These expressions signify an acknowledgment of present struggles while maintaining hope for a brighter future. However,

¹⁰ Roland Ngalob, “A Bit of Igorot Culture: ‘Kasiyana,’” Igorot Culture and Identities, Facebook, April 12, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/543461166304661/posts/551971292120315/>.

¹¹ Ngalob, “A Bit of Kankanaey Culture: ‘Kasiyana.’”

¹² Partners for Indigenous Knowledge Philippines, “Kasiyana Series,” Philippine Task Force for Indigenous Peoples Rights & Partners for Indigenous Knowledge Philippines, last modified September 4, 2020, <https://pikp.org/category/kasiyana-series/>.

¹³ Igorot People, “Inayan ya Kasiyana, Taboo and Hopefully,” last modified April 6, 2007, <http://igorotpeople.blogspot.com/2007/04/inayan-ya-kasiyana-taboo-and-hopefully.html>

¹⁴ Igorot People, “Inayan ya Kasiyana, Taboo and Hopefully.”

¹⁵ Minnie Degawan, “Kasiyanna.”

¹⁶ Minnie Degawan, “Kasiyanna: Particular Challenges of Indigenous Peoples in Facing COVID-19,” Cultural Survival, accessed January 15, 2022, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/kasiyanna-particular-challenges-indigenous-peoples-facing-covid19>.

¹⁷ Igorotage, “Kasiyanna (A Kankanaey Optimism),” Igorotage.com, accessed January 17, 2024, <https://www.igorotage.com/blog/p/9ykoZ/kasiyana-a-kankanaey-optimism>

embracing *Kasiyana* extends beyond passive acceptance of adversity. It entails active efforts to alleviate the current circumstances, whether through prayer, tangible actions, or the embodiment of other Kankanaey values and traditions. Moreover, *Kasiyana* embodies not just optimism but also hope, entrusting the divine to guide the way forward. The referenced sources unanimously underscore the profound significance of *Kasiyana* within the cultural and spiritual framework.¹⁸

Although *Kasiyana* exists independently of established religion, its pervasive influence among the Kankanaeys serves as a vehicle for communicating values, traditions, morals, and faith—essential aspects of religion. This phenomenon underscores the constant acknowledgment and reverence for a supreme or ultimate being, rendering *Kasiyana* a pertinent topic in religious communication. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the practice of *Kasiyana* among the Kankanaeys transcends the confines of Kankanaey culture and intersects with Christianity. These instances exemplify processes of ‘interculturalization’ and a realization of the call of synodality.

3. Research Questions

The paper aims to demonstrate how the expression of *Kasiyana* among the Kankanaeys, particularly those who have survived COVID-19, exemplify religious communication. The following questions will guide the exploration of relevant areas of religious communication pertaining to *Kasiyana*.

- 1) How was *Kasiyana* expressed and lived by the Kankanaey COVID-19 survivors?
- 2) What makes *Kasiyana*, as Kankanaeys’ expression and practice, a religious communication?

¹⁸ *Kasiyana* is not a term that can just be used as an ordinary street language since it requires sincerity, pure intentions, and respect before it can be used. The term cannot just be used in the context of fun or jokes since it is used during pitiful situations, and no one should dare laugh at others’ misfortunes.

- 3) How can *Kasiyana*, as religious communication, be constantly relevant and significant in the lives of Kankanaey Christians?

The study utilized a qualitative method to answer the raised questions. Mainly, it employed the hermeneutical-phenomenological design to disinter the wide-encompassing Kankanaey concept *Kasiyana*, especially how it is manifested as religious communication among the said indigenous group. Through an interview, the author was able to acquire ample responses, shedding light on the questions at hand. The nine individuals who participated in the study were professionals who were COVID-19 survivors. In view of ethical considerations, the participants' identities were hidden through codes (P1, P2, ...). Also, the paper ensured that the topic does not fall under the scope of the National Commission on Indigenous People's Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) Process. Despite being out of the FPIC's control, the study still employed the highest ethical standards in dealing with the participants and processing the data gathered from them by hiding their identities. Ethical guidelines for qualitative research by Creswell were also followed to ensure the integrity of the study.¹⁹

4. Results and Discussions

The nine participants' responses to the interview questions resulted in the substantial discussion below. The coding process, following a hermeneutical-phenomenological design, facilitated the organization of discussions into themes. However, only the most significant themes are presented in this paper.

4.1. *Kasiyana* Expression and Manifestation

Kasiyana, introduced earlier, can manifest in various situations, such as when reassurance, care, mercy, and compassion are

¹⁹ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (California, USA: Sage publications, 2017).

needed, embodying the values expected when interacting with others. In this context, we focus on how participants experienced *Kasiyana* during their COVID-19 recovery.

4.1.1. *Kasiyana as a Prayer*

Kasiyana, evident among the participants, served as a prayer for their own situations and for the world during times of affliction. When the word “*Kasiyana*” was heard or uttered, it immediately signified a plea for divine intervention to heal any sickness they experienced. This prayer also entailed requests to be liberated from distressing situations, such as concerns about loved ones not with them during isolation and their well-being. The following statements from the participants will illustrate this.

Kasiyana is my prayer asking for God’s intervention to bring hope, encouragement, inspiration, and well-being to someone in a difficult situation, just like how it had helped me during my recovery from COVID-19 (P3). ... I prayed to God for healing, faster recovery, and protection. I kept in mind that I would not lose hope that I would recover and that my swab test would turn out negative. Kasiyana, this COVID-19 will pass (P2). ... While in the Hospital, many people have been sending positive thoughts and prayers for me. They say Kasiyana, and hearing such a word means they are praying for my best outcome. They were the ones who became a source of inspiration and hope for me to cope with my case (P5). ... Kasiyana, likened to a prayer, asks for divine intervention for my speedy recovery and well-being (P4).

Whether referencing the Kankanaey god or the Christian God in their prayers, participants expressed *Kasiyana* as a form of worship. Some mentioned both deities, as most Kankanaeys are Christians. Nevertheless, the essence remains consistent: it is an act of reverence toward a supreme being.

Another notable aspect in the participants’ responses regarding *Kasiyana* is that their prayers were not solely for themselves. They also prayed for everyone burdened similarly, aiming to extend the same prayer offered to them through *Kasiyana*. This highlights the

Kankanaeys' strong sense of community. The following statements illustrate this sentiment.

That was when I looked up to Him and prayed for healing not just for me and the entire family but for everybody who, like me, has contracted the disease (P4). ... I know during those moments that I'm not the only one suffering. There are many. That is why I kept hoping that Kasiyana would extend to everyone in difficult situations during those times. It's not easy as I am experiencing it, so I hope everyone in need of the same prayer receives it. It means a lot (P2).²⁰

Hearing *Kasiyana* from fellow Kankanaeys, as evident in the quoted statements, provides hope not only due to the reassurance of divine assistance but also because it assures them of the community's support during times of struggle. Therefore, *Kasiyana* can be understood as a communal prayer shared by everyone, whether afflicted or not. Someone in a difficult situation hearing *Kasiyana* can be assured that both God and the community stand with them.

4.1.2. Kasiyana as Hoping

The futuristic aspect of *Kasiyana* surfaced in the participants' responses. They stated that saying *Kasiyana* or when it was said to them meant looking forward to a better situation in the coming days. *Kasiyana* also assures the afflicted not to worry that much since God is with them. Therefore, *Kasiyana* embodies hope for a better tomorrow. This sentiment is reflected in the quoted statements below.

What I'm going through will soon pass. Kasiyana. It speaks of a better tomorrow—a promising better tomorrow (P1). ... Kasiyana- this concept from the Kankanaeys has taught me to continue hoping despite the hopelessness of the situation that I encountered. It taught me that "this too shall pass." Indeed, by God's grace, I was able to cope with my situation. And I can say That I am well and healthy (P7). ... Aside from

²⁰ These statements are just few of the many statements talking about extending the hope, inspiration, and other more they have received when they were extended the term "*Kasiyana*." These answers surfaced when they were asked what help "*Kasiyana*" offered them.

Kasiyana being comforting if you hear it from others, it's more of looking forward to a better tomorrow while we help ourselves because God is there. It's like constantly looking forward; if today is not in our favor, it will be temporary anyway. One way of saying I surrender to what the situation right now is but, at the same time, expect a good turnout of events later (P8).

The hope expressed by the participants goes beyond mere reliance on God to solve all their problems. Participant 8, for instance, clarified that hope isn't simply praying and expecting improvement solely through belief in *Kasiyana*. Instead, hoping in *Kasiyana* involves surrendering what they cannot control to God, while actively taking steps towards what they can influence. This hope is rooted in faith, acknowledging a supreme being. Like faith, hope in *Kasiyana* isn't passive reliance on divine intervention; it's about entrusting what's beyond one's control to God while actively working towards realizing their hopes.

4.1.3. *Kasiyana as a Sense of Community*

The Kankanaeys value *Kasiyana* not only for its hope-giving aspect but also because it embodies vitality. Despite individual hardships, *Kasiyana* is consistently manifested as communal support within the Kankanaey community. The various values within Kankanaey society are intricately woven into their expression of *Kasiyana*. Discussing Kankanaey communities inherently involves delving into their core values, notably their strong sense of communal solidarity, which instills confidence in mutual assistance. Consequently, *Kasiyana* is perceived as a reflection of community spirit.

For instance, *Kasiyana* bolstered community spirit through *Binnadang*, also known as *Galatis* or *Ub-ubo*. *Galatis* refers to voluntary assistance provided by all community members during times of need, such as in the event of a death. Furthermore, *Ub-ubo* or *Galatis* initiatives are organized to aid affected families in recovering from such tragedies, like by aiding in the construction of a new

dwelling.²¹ Kankanaey values consistently emphasize communal support, epitomizing their collective spirit. The subsequent statements further underscore this communal ethos inherent in Kasiyana.

... Our culture is not “kanya-kanya” type, especially with my direct family. We help each other in practical, financial, and spiritual ways, which is why things went well. Even the care they’ve shown by saying Kasiyana is such a help (P9). ... “Ub-ubo,” as I stated earlier, can be one practice associated with Kasiyana. Expressing their oneness [through] Kasiyana also entails their willingness to help in any way they can. “Seg-ang”²² is an assurance of God’s mercy and compassion (P7). ... Growing up in a Kankanaey community and taking part in its cultural beliefs and traditions, which are essentially communitarian, living out Kasiyana made me realize an innate moral responsibility towards community members. Thus, one who recognizes his moral responsibility towards community members finds a way to express help or comfort (P4).

As articulated by Participant Nine, it’s essential to underscore the moral duty to support those in distress. For the Kankanaeys, if physical presence isn’t possible, conveying heartfelt wishes to those in need is considered an expression of “Inayan.”²³ Thus, practicing *Kasiyana* aligns with the principles of “Inayan,” representing a moral obligation among the Kankanaeys to assist every community member, even strangers.

4.2. Qualifying *Kasiyana* as Religious Communication

This section explores how *Kasiyana* can be qualified as a form of religious communication among the Kankanaeys. It will focus on

²¹ Brandon B. Cadingpal, “‘Tengaw’ Observance: The Kankanaeys Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication* 19, no. 2 (2021): 296.

²² “Seg-ang” is a Kankanaey term, which can be directly translated as mercy. It is used in this paper as the Kankanaeys’ recognition of the supreme being as always merciful and compassionate.

²³ “Inayan” is a Kankanaey term that speaks about the necessity to do things appropriately, just, and correctly. Otherwise, a negative consequence will arise from not doing good things.

elucidating the religious aspects of *Kasiyana* and its expressions in belief and practice. While indigenous systems encompass beliefs, perspectives, and social ties that could qualify as religions,²⁴ this paper doesn't primarily aim to delve into that aspect. Rather, its focus is to illustrate how the communication of *Kasiyana* is imbued with religious significance by examining the essential values and relationships inherent in its practice within the Kankanaey culture.

4.2.1. *Kasiyana as the Kankanaey God-Talks*

The god-talks of the people in their everyday dealings can be considered as "Ordinary Theology." Ordinary theology is a theology articulated by people without formal education or degree in theology.²⁵ Though expressed informally, the Kankanaeys' communication reveals their connection with both God and fellow humans. *Kasiyana* serves as a channel for their discussions about divinity. Participants articulated how *Kasiyana* reflects their acknowledgment of a supreme being, guiding their actions in alignment with what is just and moral. While not explicitly religious communication, this discourse embodies elements of it. Quoted participant statements further illuminate this perspective.

It is an assurance of a better tomorrow. It speaks of how we should go on with life. Difficult times will come, but Kasiyana, we can make it through with the help of God. Just know how to trust yourself and God, and Kasiyana, all will be well (P8). Kasiyana is not only a word we say and hear. It's how we do things as we go on with life. We don't know what happens in the next few hours, but we still hope that the good things we do with sufficient effort will matter. No one knows what will happen in the future, but I can be assured of God's presence through Kasiyana (P9). ... After all, we are all human beings. We all need care and love. Kasiyana is a concrete way to show those. Life will be

²⁴ Robin M. Wright, "Indigenous Religious Traditions," in *Religions of the World: An Introduction to Culture and Meaning*, ed. L. E. Sullivan (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 31-60.

²⁵ Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002), 56.

beautiful with love and care from everyone. God is with us, Kasiyana says it. (P5).

The participants explicitly discussed how *Kasiyana* extends beyond moments of recovery, emphasizing its significance in their overall lives. They view *Kasiyana* as a spirituality grounded in their belief and trust in a supreme being, historically referred to as “*Kabunian*” by the Kankanaeys. Their statements underscore that *Kasiyana* serves as a guiding principle for living. Consequently, their discourse sheds light on how to navigate life’s challenges. As the embodiment of the Kankanaey’s discussions about divinity, *Kasiyana* can be seen as a form of religious communication.

Religious communication involves acknowledging the continual presence of a divine entity among people. It stems from recognizing a supreme being capable of actions beyond human capability. This acknowledgment isn’t merely an excuse for human limitations, but rather underscores the relationship between the divine and humanity, a relationship deeply ingrained in Kankanaey culture. As evidenced by the responses of participants, every instance of *Kasiyana* reflects their acknowledgment and connection with God. Their relationship with the divine is further evident in how they navigate and interpret the world around them. Even the enduring adherence to moral principles through “*Inayan*,” despite the influence of modern education, serves as a testament to this relationship. Such examples epitomize religious communication.

4.2.2. Kasiyana as a Prophetic Discourse

Another aspect of religious communication is the prophetic discourse, which means discourses bearing the moral responsibility to denounce injustices, remind people of their commitments, provide alternatives to current realities, call to repentance, and express the will of God.²⁶ *Kasiyana* might not be able to fulfill all the identified requirements. However, it can serve other aspects of prophetic discourse.

²⁶ Piet J. Naudé, “Is Prophetic Discourse Adequate to Address Global Economic Justice?” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67, no. 1 (2011):1-8.

4.2.2.1. *On moral responsibility*

Moral responsibility was mentioned a few times in the previous sections of this paper. However, this section emphasizes the primacy of moral responsibility attached to *Kasiyana*. The intent is to put the demands of *Kasiyana* for moral responsibility vis-à-vis prophetic discourse as one of the fulfillments of *Kasiyana* as a form of religious communication. This purpose is elucidated through participants' statements, which emphasize that *Kasiyana* extends beyond mere comforting words or expressions of sympathy and empathy. Rather, it entails actively taking responsibility for addressing the needs of those who are afflicted.

... We are obligated to love and care for our fellow beings. That is why if we see someone needing assurance and hope, we say Kasiyana. We extend help in any way we can (P6). ... living out Kasiyana made me realize an innate moral responsibility towards members of the community (P3). ... When I was in dire need during that time, I didn't have to beg for help. When they found out about my situation, they voluntarily offered what they could to me (P8). ... We help each other in practical, financial, and spiritual ways, which is why things went well. By them saying Kasiyana, I can feel they care for me. (P9). ... Kasiyana is attached to values and practices like "ub-ubo" and "inayan." If one is genuinely concerned about their brethren, they will be one in action of helping them – that is, in the spirit of "ub-ubo." One should know what to commit and omit –practicing Kasiyana (P2).

Participants in the Kankanaey community emphasize that every member is expected to provide support when someone is struggling to recover from the COVID-19 virus. This obligation isn't enforced by community leaders but arises naturally upon recognizing others' needs. This recognition itself serves as the driving force for action. Fulfilling this obligation reflects one's moral responsibility, which is inherently in human nature's innate concern for others. This innate inclination can also be rooted in humanity's inherent intentionality and goodness. Humans are naturally oriented towards others, and this orientation is always positive.

4.2.2.2. *On providing future alternatives to current reality*

Prophetic discourse portrays the so-called “alluring vision of the future.”²⁷ It is an assurance of a better future despite the chaotic present time. However, it entails more than passively awaiting a predetermined destiny; it also involves active efforts towards realizing this envisioned future. Biblical prophets underscore the importance of proactive engagement in shaping a better tomorrow, beyond mere optimistic anticipation. As previously discussed, *Kasiyana* in Kankanaey culture similarly conveys the promise of a better future to the afflicted, rooted in the constant presence of a divine being in human affairs. Hence, *Kasiyana* serves as a prophetic concept intrinsic to Kankanaey culture, as reflected in participants’ statements.

... My God will never forsake me, even in those trying times. Because I believe in Kasiyana. Apart from this, I also think those who have already departed from this world are watching over us. The hardships are just temporary (P1). ... Kasiyana is also about “Talek”²⁸ and “Pammati.”²⁹ Though the mentioned words cannot equate to Kasiyana, they speak of hope, faith, and trust, which Kasiyana is also about. This trial will soon pass; have faith (P9). ... My belief in Kasiyana made me even stronger emotionally. I knew that someone up there would help me get through these difficult times. No matter what life gives me, He will protect, direct, and keep me away from harm. Thanks to the constant inspiration from Kasiyana (P8).

The participants’ expressions of *Kasiyana* extend beyond present circumstances. While acknowledging present responsibilities, *Kasiyana* primarily involves anticipation and active efforts towards improving future conditions. Through *Kasiyana*, individuals receive assurance and cultivate hope for a better tomorrow, thereby gaining clarity amidst current challenges. Consequently, *Kasiyana* serves as a

²⁷ Piet J. Naudé, “Prophetic Discourse,” 1-8.

²⁸ “*Talek*” in Kankanaey means trust. It can be trust to fellow human beings, events, and to God.

²⁹ “*Pammati*” can be roughly translated as faith, which may also be directed towards others, events, and God.

significant form of religious communication, particularly in its role within prophetic discourse.

4.2.2.3. *On the expression of the will of God*

Surrendering one's limitations to a divine entity is an act of acknowledging and expressing acceptance of the "Will of God." Among the Kankanaeys, communicating *Kasiyana* involves relinquishing to the divine anything beyond their control. *Kasiyana* signifies embracing the current adverse circumstances and recognizing the irrevocable nature of certain situations. As *Kasiyana* is predominantly invoked in times of despair, individuals may find solace in the divine's intervention, considering it their sole source of hope. Uttering *Kasiyana* is akin to affirming "thy will be done." However, it also entails exerting effort to help oneself despite the challenges. The following responses from participants will provide illustrative examples of this concept.

... Even though it is a struggle as days pass, I still keep my faith in God. I know He is there. He's always with me. There's nothing to fear. Though, naturally, we feel anxious about what might happen, I still know God can help me (P2). ... I was worried about so many things. Thanks to Kasiyana, which was extended to me through video calls by many people, I realized that God was with me. God will work in whatever rightful way He can. It's what kept me calm. I gained confidence that whatever happens, God's way will prevail (P1). ... Pray and let God do His part. Whatever happens, God works in ways we cannot see, but it will surely lead us to goodness. Whatever is good is what God wants, so trust him. By believing in Kasiyana, I know I trust God's way (P9).

The participants' trust in divine intervention when uttering *Kasiyana* reflects their affirmation of the will of God, which, as articulated by one participant, is inherently benevolent. Participant Two observes that individuals facing adversity may naturally experience anxiety. Nonetheless, with the reassurance of God's presence and goodness, they find solace in the understanding that the divine always seeks what is best for them and would never compromise its sacred

nature. This discourse prevalent among the Kankanaeys constitutes a significant form of religious communication.

4.2.3. *Kasiyana as a Source of Theological Reflections*

Another essential criterion for communication to be considered religious is its capacity to facilitate theological reflections. While *Kasiyana* may not feature prominently in every daily change among the Kankanaeys, when it does arise, it becomes a focal point for contemplation among both speakers and listeners. It prompts individuals to reflect on the reasons behind adversity, the workings of the divine, human interconnectedness, aspirations for the future, interpersonal relationships, environmental stewardship, and various other topics. Due to its broad applicability across different aspects of Kankanaey life, *Kasiyana* serves as a lens through which individuals engage with their world and spirituality. It encourages the Kankanaeys to discern meaning in their experiences, relationships, and broader contexts. The statements provided by participants below exemplify some of the facets of *Kasiyana* that contribute to its role as a catalyst for theological reflection.

... I always seek guidance from the knowledge transferred to me by my parents. During my recovery, I kept saying Kasiyana, and I continued reflecting on how things were changing. Kasiyana made me realize that traditional ways of thinking still work. (P5). ... Kasiyana is a unique concept of being hopeful. Its definition of hope goes beyond the definition of being optimistic. It is a retroactive/reflexive concept that when somebody says it, it is not only being hopeful for the person who is sick. Also, the one extending Kasiyana acquires hope by seeing that what they said gave hope to the sick. I just realized that when I was alone and bombarded with many things. (P3). ... Kasiyana is significant because our grandparents have passed it on, which is still precious. Before, sciences and technologies were not as advanced as today, but they made it well through life because they lived with these principles and values. Aside from being sentimental, being passed on to us speaks of how life should be lived no matter our context (P9).

Further reflections were prompted by Kasiyana when participants were asked to consider its broader impacts. Although initially posed as a question, the ensuing reflections underscored the profound relevance and significance of Kasiyana to them. Some participants recounted their earliest encounters with the term, recalling the moments when they first grasped its meaning. Others discovered new dimensions of Kasiyana, recognizing its effects on both the afflicted and those offering solace. The fact that these reflections prompted individuals to articulate insights beyond the typical usage of Kasiyana demonstrates its capacity to foster contemplation on life's complexities.

4.2.4. Kasiyana Relevance and Significance in the Lives of Kankanaey Christians

While contemporary Kankanaey communities predominantly adhere to Christianity, there has been a seamless integration of Kankanaey cultural practices with Christian traditions, values, and teachings. Consequently, this section highlights the fusion of Kankanaey culture, particularly manifested through *Kasiyana*, with Christian values and teachings. This synthesis is presented for recognition and contribution to processes of inculturation or inter-culturation.

4.2.4.1. Kasiyana manifests the theological virtues and Jesus' commandment of love

Virtues are acquired through the practice of virtuous deeds.³⁰ It is something one does with constancy to be considered a virtue. However, theological virtues are not acquired but instead given by God.³¹ The term 'theological' suggests the virtues' connection with God wherein God infuses the said values.³² Therefore, such theological virtues are God-given gifts innately endowed to every human.

³⁰ Michael D. Palmer, "Ethical Formation: The Theological Virtues," *The Holy Spirit and Christian Formation: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (2016), 110.

³¹ Joseph P. Wawrykow, "The Theological Virtues," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies (2012; online edition, Oxford Academic, 1 May 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326093.013.0023>, accessed 7 Feb. 2024.

³² Joseph P. Wawrykow, "The Theological Virtues."

The exemplification of these three theological virtues is intended for a moral life grounded in the belief of God.^{33, 34} The participants' responses were observed to such manifestations of theological virtues.

For us Kankanaey Christians, we have faith, which I think is applied by how we live out and say Kasiyana. The Kasiyana speaks about trust, belief, and confidence because we believe that tomorrow will be better and that we trust that God will do His way of helping us while we do ours (P6). ... Trust or "Talek" and "Pammati" is what I think Kasiyana is in other terms. Though the mentioned words cannot equate to Kasiyana, they speak of hope, faith, and trust, which Kasiyana is also about. This trial will pass; have faith (P9). ... Kasiyana is Hope. As a Christian, I have hope because of God's daily presence. And because of my faith in God, everything is okay. I really believe, Kasiyana, God is in control (P4).

The statements provided simultaneously address the theological virtues of faith and hope. While these virtues may seem indistinguishable to ordinary individuals, the experiences shared by participants reveal distinctions between them. Participants discussing faith express their belief and trust in both life and God. Their trust and belief in life itself constitute human faith, whereas their trust and belief in God represent the theological virtue of faith. The unwavering faith of the Kankanaey people in God, as expressed through *Kasiyana*, motivates them to persevere towards a brighter future, even amid uncertainty. Hope, as highlighted throughout this paper, articulates their aspirations to God, specifically the Christian God, alongside their faith. The presence of the other theological virtue, love, is evident in the subsequent quoted statements.

... Kasiyana is how I felt the love of God through the love of the community extended to me during those pandemic struggles. I felt like the best way to express my love for Him

³³ Gilbert Meilaender, "The Virtues: A Theological Analysis," in *Virtue and Medicine: Explorations in the Character of Medicine*, ed. Earl E. Shelp (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1985), 151.

³⁴ William C. Mattison and William C. Mattison III, *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues* (Michigan, USA: Brazos Press, 2008).

is through prayer (P2). ... Kasiyana is giving hope and expressing one's love, especially to those in need. Hearing it from my friends made me feel loved because they wanted me to live longer. I'm pretty sure that those positive greetings are ways God says He loves me in human language (P3). ... The efforts extended to me by my community are how they are expressing their love for me. The others are friends of friends whom I'm not even close with, but you can see how they say their oneness with me in my isolation. I think it comes from our culture that love, like other Kankanaey values, is communally expressed and practiced (P7). ... It [referring to Kasiyana] matters as we deal with human lives. It's about our relationships as well. How we say we love God must be portrayed by how we love and care for everyone (P8).

Many participants acknowledged that the love they experienced resonated as a divine love expressed through human interaction. Others emphasized that their love was unconditional, evident even in their relationships with digital acquaintances whom they had never met in person. These depictions of love articulated by the participants reflect the theological virtue of love and echo Jesus' commandment of love as outlined in John 13:34-35. According to this commandment, individuals are called to love both God and their neighbors. Jesus not only preached this commandment but also embodied it, exemplifying the profound love he advocated.³⁵ Notably, the love Jesus espoused was radical, challenging individuals to love even their enemies and prioritize the welfare of others over themselves.³⁶ This radical form of love is evident in the Kankanaeys' portrayal of extending love to neighbors, including those with whom they may not have close relationships. The communal expression of love demonstrated by the Kankanaeys towards the afflicted reflects the same divine love advocated by Jesus, emphasizing how love for others mirrors love for God.

³⁵ William Chang, "The Love Commandment (John 13: 34-35)," *Asia Journal of Theology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 263.

³⁶ Frederick Mawusi Amevenku, "Jesus's New Commandment in John 13: 34-35: 'Love Your Neighbour More Than Yourself' in Ethical Perspective," *Biblical Studies Journal* 4 no. 1 (2022): 15.

4.2.4.2. *Kasiyana adheres to the Catholic social teachings*

The Catholic Social Teachings (CST) represent a series of moral principles that have evolved over the course of Catholic history, conveyed through church documents reminding individuals of their obligations as Christians and members of society.³⁷ However, it is essential to recognize that CST transcends mere textual pronouncements. While the Catholic Church commemorates the issuance of ‘*Rerum Novarum*’ in 1891, it is equally imperative to acknowledge the contributions of activists, prophets, intellectuals, and analysts who endured significant challenges in championing these social principles.³⁸ Similar to Pope Leo XIII’s scrutiny of the adverse ramifications of the Industrial Revolution, questioning the detrimental effects on human well-being and the environment catalyzed the emergence of CST. Today, Catholic Social Teachings serve as a foundational framework for Christian ethics, highlighting the nexus between religious conviction and societal engagement. The imperatives outlined within CST warrant discourse and reflection, as they delineate the ethical responsibilities incumbent upon individuals and institutions alike.

In the Kankanaey cultural milieu, the *Kasiyana* tradition serves as a poignant reminder of moral imperatives centered on solidarity with others, preferential treatment for the marginalized, and the inherent worth of every individual. While acknowledging that *Kasiyana* may not comprehensively embody all facets of Catholic Social Teachings (CST), it is nonetheless pertinent to recognize its alignment with CST principles. Several participants remarked how *Kasiyana* functions as a channel for fulfilling these moral obligations.

Growing up in a Kankanaey community, taking part in its cultural beliefs and traditions, essentially communitarian, and living out Kasiyana made me realize an innate moral responsibility towards community members. For example, “inayan” is still a firm belief or practice in the community

³⁷ Thomas Massaro, S. J., *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action* (Washington DC, USA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023), 35-46.

³⁸ Marvin L. Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements* (Connecticut, USA: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998), 1-5.

(P4). Who else will care for our brothers and sisters if not us? As Christians or just by being humans, we must offer what we can to others even if we're not being told. If I cannot give material things, I can at least provide hope by saying Kasiyana (P7). ... The value of mercy and compassion, solidarity and empathy or sympathy embedded in Kasiyana is related to the value of "Inayan" because one who does not know how to be one with the community if one is grieving is making one despicable – to avoid being such, one must understand the "Inayan" (P9).

The participants frequently emphasized the communitarian ethos prevalent among the Kankanaeys, illustrating the inherent solidarity ingrained within their culture. While solidarity is often discussed within the context of their communities, it transcends such confines, extending to encompass all humanity. Moreover, their acknowledgment of the obligation to assist those in need reflects a preference for the marginalized in any form of deprivation. Poverty, in their perspective, extends beyond mere material lack to encompass any form of struggle or adversity, prompting a collective response facilitated through practices like *Kasiyana*. Furthermore, their readiness to offer aid to the afflicted underscores their reverence for human life and their recognition of the inherent dignity and rights of every individual within the community. In essence, their actions epitomize the core tenets of CST, as they embody principles of solidarity, preferential option for the poor, and the valuing of human life. Therefore, *Kasiyana* serves as a tangible manifestation of these CST principles, demonstrating the convergence of cultural traditions with moral imperatives espoused by Catholic teachings.

Indeed, *Kasiyana* is revered within the context of Kankanaey culture and holds a prominent place within the realm of Christian belief. Its dual significance resonates deeply with individuals who navigate the intersection of their cultural identity and religious faith, epitomizing a harmonious coalescence of tradition and spirituality.

5. Conclusion

Kasiyana, as discussed, embodies the property of reminding moral responsibilities, elicit reflections, reassure the presence of the divine, and provide viable grounds for inculturation, particularly the intertwining of Kankanaey values and traditions with Catholic teachings. Such embodiment proves *Kasiyana* to be a notable religious communication among the Kankanaeys. *Kasiyana* may not be a practice of established religion but rather a demonstrated indigenous knowledge and practice that amalgamates the Kankanaey values together, and that is what makes its communication and practice religious. Not only is the application of *Kasiyana* always in recognition of the divine, which makes it religious, but it also establishes relationships, a crucial aspect of recognizing religious communication.

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BOOK REVIEWS

DOI: 10.62461/CJH220224

Yoel Cohen. *Rabbis, Reporters, and the Public in the Digital Holyland*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2024, 290 pp. ISBN: 978-1-138-83384-5 (hardback).

The media landscape changed from fighting for space and airtime during the pre-Internet era to manifold options for forms of news publication during the Internet era. Regarding their proponents and audience, technological innovations and increased accessibility of capable devices herald the transformation of the public into citizen journalists. However, a host of challenges regarding news report quality, accuracy, and balance also pervades the current media setting. In *Rabbis, Reporters, and the Public in the Digital Holyland*, Yoel Cohen traces these changes and comprehensively analyzes the complex triadic (troika) relationship between rabbis, the media community, and the public, which departs from the two-way analysis previous scholarly studies dwelled on.

In eleven chapters, Cohen proficiently covers and weaves together an insightful discussion on the three elements (rabbis, the media community, and the public) and their multi-faceted relationships. The chapters are as follows: 1. The media setting; 2. The rabbinic setting; 3. Is Judaism news?; 4. Gathering the news; 5. Religion and the Israeli journalist: a theological profile; 6. The public and religion news; 7. Rabbis' exposure to media; 8. Rabbis, Jewish values, and the media; 9. Rabbi Google, or the virtual Jewish community?; 10. Religio-cultural walls in the 21st century; 11. The unholy Jewish troika: rabbis, journalists, and the Israeli public.

Chapters 1 and 2 map the Israeli media and the Jewish religion in Israel. Drawing from the demographics and the historical development of the Israeli media setting, Cohen gleans from the data the possibility that internet news websites may eventually become the dominant news source for the broader Israeli population. Despite the perceived trend, the continued influence of religion will sustain print newspapers, albeit only the weekends are guaranteed since traditional

and religious Jews desire to read newspapers during the Sabbath. Cohen conducted surveys and qualitative interviews to understand the journalists-rabbis relationship. Findings reveal the current state of the quality, accuracy, and balance of the news coverage of religion. In turn, Cohen suggests bridging the rabbis-journalists divide.

Chapter 3 presents the coverage of religion on news websites. Cohen analyzes four months of content from the four leading Israeli news websites. The pattern from the contrasting (two religious and two secular) popular news websites suggests that “mutual perceptions between rabbis themselves and journalists will continue to be defined, in part, by how the respective media – secular and religious media – each define the issues” (p.56).

Given the importance of how perception is shaped, chapters 4 and 5 focus on Israeli reporters and how they gather news on religious matters. One of the key findings is that “there was a high level of interest within news organisations in news about religion: 84% of journalists said they had very great interest or great interest, 13% had medium interest, and only 4% had no interest or little interest” (p. 82). Thus, the digital landscape that offers almost unlimited space allows increased coverage of religious news compared to traditional print media. In chapter 5, Cohen debunks the popular misconception that “the journalistic community are not representative of the broader Israeli population” (p. 105).

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the exposure of the public and rabbis to religious news media. Despite the general interest in religious matters mentioned in chapters 4 and 5, chapter 6 unravels the public’s complaints regarding religious news coverage. Two prominent criticisms against media by the public are social media causing *loshon hara* (social gossip) and a serious problem with sexual modesty (*tzniut*) and the media. Comparing this with the vantage point of rabbis, chapter 7 explores how, generally, rabbis inform themselves about world and community affairs through media. This exposure to news media affects rabbis’ fulfillment of their various roles in their communities.

Chapter 8 probes the philosophical attitude of rabbis towards the media. This attitude consequently affects the media-religion debate, which drives further exploration of matters like privacy and proper ways of communicating information.

In chapter 9, Cohen poses relevant questions on how media technology transformed the Jewish religion and its dynamics. The COVID-19 pandemic is a significant event that spurred attention to moral and religious questions regarding technology and its utilization for spiritual life. Chapter 10 further examines digitalization and concentrates on the Haredim's lifestyle. This chapter reveals how digitalization and globalization challenged the Haredi "cultural walls" strategy. In confronting those challenges, Haredim developed their own Haredi style of media and policies toward technological advancements.

In Chapter 11, Cohen delves into how media and religious news influence the secular-religious divide in Israel. The digital Holyland has no common ground, for the rabbis, reporters, and the public have widely different answers to essential questions. The last section also briefly inquires about artificial intelligence (AI) and its possibilities, such as having a rabbinical chatbot.

I consider this book a landmark study that has been properly scaffolded by Yoel Cohen's sustained research publications on matters related to the rabbis-media-public nexus. This book demonstrates his years of scholarly research and adept utilization of language. Regarding content, Cohen always justifies his remarks, suggestions, and insights through his gathered and analyzed data. Furthermore, the mindfulness toward concise explanations of Jewish terminologies and brief yet meaningful contextualization prove how the book caters even to readers unfamiliar with the complexities of Jewish media, religion, and culture.

Given that the study covers a wide scope and an ever-evolving landscape, the book has its distinct limitations, with specific methodologies (i.e., surveys, qualitative interviews, content analysis) employed to gather the salient developments in the complex nexus of the rabbis-media-public troika. Also, the scope may have prevented

detailed discussions on certain matters (e.g., AI and its impact and possible influence on the digital Holyland). However, the book's limitations provide an important mapping for researchers interested in areas such as Judaism, media studies, and the implications of technological advancements. Scholars may pursue research lacunas illuminated by the book.

Overall, this book will be of great importance to both specialist and non-specialist readers, especially rabbis, the media community, and the public sphere. Heeding the book's call for dialogue will deeply foster beneficial relationships and ethical use of technology, specifically in the pursuit of protecting our basic rights, e.g., the right to know and freedom of expression.

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Steven Bouma-Prediger and Nathan P. Carson. *Ecoflourishing and Virtue: Christian Perspectives Across the Disciplines*. Routledge: London and New York, 2024, 288 pp. ISBN: 978-1-032-38750-5 (paperback)

The concept of ecoflourishing emphasizes how nature and humans may coexist harmoniously and grow together. Beyond maintaining the current status quo, fundamental sustainability improves the environment's and people's welfare. To the greatest extent possible, ecoflourishing aims to establish conditions that support the flourishing of ecosystems and human civilizations. Ecoflourishing requires an understanding of the interdependence of all living things. This view encourages environmental responsibility and stewardship as vital aspects of human existence. Looking at this issue, the problem of the environment is a concern that demands everyone's attention.

For this reason, different disciplines are asked to participate in helping the environment. Due to environmental concerns' complexity and multifaceted nature, solutions must include knowledge and strategies from various academic disciplines and the corporate and public sectors. It is crucial to remember that taking an interdisciplinary approach to environmental issues is beneficial and necessary. We may comprehend environmental concerns more thoroughly and effectively by combining the knowledge and techniques of several fields. This strategy makes it possible to craft creative, just, and long-lasting solutions, eventually improving the resilience and long-term health of both natural and human systems.

The book *Ecoflourishing and Virtue: Christian Perspectives Across the Disciplines*, edited by Steven Bouma-Prediger and Nathan P. Carson, is an attempt to understand our ecological responsibility from a comprehensive point of view. The book is primarily an anthology of essays exploring the relationship between ecological sustainability and Christian ethics. The book aims to thoroughly explain how Christian virtues can direct and motivate ecological responsibility and action. As said in the editors' introduction, the book explores how ecological virtues might support the flourishing of our home planet amid

unparalleled environmental change and disaster. The book addresses this issue by bringing together the multidisciplinary insights of Christian researchers and scholars. In this way, the approach is interdisciplinary and, at the same time, very reflective since it points out the experiences and ideas of diverse luminaries.

As provided by the editors, the book's central questions are: What virtues are needed for us to be better caretakers of our home planet? What vices must we extinguish if we are to flourish on the earth? What is the connection between such virtues and vices and the flourishing of all creatures?

To answer these questions, the editors were able to combine viewpoints from the social sciences, environmental science, philosophy, and theology. The contributors provided reflections and narratives to visualize the context of the environmental situation. The book crafted starting points for an ecological response through the lenses of philosophers, theologians, and scientists. Through this, this multidisciplinary approach emphasizes how intricate ecological problems are and how important it is for various areas to work together. Applying Christian virtue ethics to environmental challenges is one of the book's central themes. The authors contend that cultivating an ecologically sustainable and prosperous existence requires humility, fairness, love, and stewardship.

Each chapter offers a perspective on ecological virtue ethical dilemmas through the lenses of several academic disciplines, including literature, philosophy, theology, geology, biology, and economics. The chapters address world problems and perspectives, present poignant, poetic analyses, and highlight distinguished scientists' contributions and life lessons reflecting on a lifetime of environmental effort. The anthology encourages new thinking and action by addressing significant contemporary environmental challenges such as ecological racism, interfaith communication, ecological philosophies of work and economics, marine pollution, ecological despair, hope, and humility. It emphasizes how human vices and virtues fuel many ecological issues and solutions. It will interest anyone in philosophy, ethics, theology, religious studies, and environmental studies.

The essays in the book also examine how biblical teachings and Christian theology provide a foundation for ecological responsibility. They discuss concepts like care for creation, the intrinsic value of nature, and the moral obligation to protect the environment. The book also emphasizes the practical applications of Christian values in resolving ecological problems. It addresses sustainable practices, environmental legislation, community involvement, and lifestyle modifications supporting ecological responsibility and consciousness. Numerous contributors discuss the links between social inequality and environmental deterioration. They advocate for justice and fairness in ecological practices, highlighting the necessity of an integrated strategy considering the welfare of vulnerable people and the environment. The importance of moral and spiritual development in fostering an ecological worldview is emphasized throughout the text. It looks at how Christian activities like worship, prayer, and community service might help people become more aware of and receptive to environmental challenges.

While the book offers insightful information about the relationship between environmental sustainability and Christian ethics, some areas could be further developed. Expanding the scope of disciplines could improve the discussion, providing a more thorough grasp of the connections between environmental and social challenges. Theoretical explanations are thorough, but the principles could be more applicable and valuable if there were additional case studies and real-world examples. Concrete examples of ecoflourishing in action would be provided by communities or organizations that have effectively incorporated Christian virtues into their environmental operations.

To sum up, the book offers hope despite its severe critique of ecological issues. It invites readers to picture a future in which human well-being and ecological flourishing are interwoven, sustained by faith-driven action, and inspired by Christian virtues. “Ecoflourishing and Virtue” offers insightful information and helpful advice for people who want to connect their faith with environmental care. It makes a strong argument for integrating Christian ethics with ecological issues. The book has been thoughtfully and engagingly edited by the editors, Steven Bouma-Prediger and Nathan P. Carson, to challenge and encourage readers to think about their role in building a just and

sustainable world. To end, I hope this book will help readers reflect on their ecological responsibility so that we can all strive to care for our common home – the environment.

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Chad R. Diehl. *Shadows of Nagasaki: Trauma, Religion, and Memory after the Atomic Bombing*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2024, 363 pp. (E-book).

Healing from a traumatic experience is a journey that transcends beyond the order of time. The healing process includes retelling the story to look back at how it has influenced the way live at present, and how we envision the future. The journey of healing is a lengthy one, marked by both progress and setbacks, which include striving to constantly examine and review how one interprets the experience. The book, *Shadows of Nagasaki: Trauma, Religion, and Memory after the Atomic Bombing*, offers that perspective of a journey of healing from the emerging narratives of the community of *hibakusha* (i.e., those who experienced and survived the atomic explosion) in retelling and examining their stories about the atomic explosion as they lived it, beginning with Nagai Takashi's interpretation of the event.

The symbolic distinction between Hiroshima and Nagasaki's atomic bombing experiences is succinctly captured in the phrase "Hiroshima rages, Nagasaki prays" (p. 179). This phrase encapsulates the perception of Nagasaki as a city that silently grapples with the atomic bombing, lacking the outward expression of anger seen in Hiroshima. Thus, the book has the following primary intentions. Firstly, it aims to "confront the Christian image of ground zero by acknowledging its reality" (p. 16). Secondly, it seeks to "pioneer post-atomic Nagasaki studies in English" (p. 17). It is structured into five parts, each highlighting themes such as remembrance, healing, recovery from trauma, and human suffering.

The essays in the first part, titled "Catholic Responses," generally explore the legacy and approach of Nagai Takashi to remembering the atomic bombing and assess his impact in understanding the post-atomic experience of Nagasaki. He echoes in his writing that the bombing is not a divine punishment, but a providence of God by which the martyrdom of the Catholic Christians of Urakami was the sacrifice to end the war. Nagai worked tirelessly for the spiritual revival and physical reconstruction of the city. His significance lies in his inter-

pretation of the atomic bombing experience, intended to console the Catholic community of Urakami as they grappled with profound loss and suffering. Ozaki, Nagai's student, used anamnesis as a means of processing trauma. He viewed life as isolation, drawing from his experience of internal turmoil and his constant embodiment of his mother's love, which kept her memory alive. Anamnesis served as a source of courage for him in speaking about his experiences. As he put it, "It is love that saves us from isolation" (p.125).

The second part, titled "Literature and Testimony," portrays Nagasaki as a Christian and international city, embodying a juxtaposition of Japanese and Western cultures. The essays in this section demonstrate that writing and literature serve as powerful tools to preserve the memory of the event and amplify the voices of various narratives, ensuring that they are heard, protected, and perpetually remembered. Peace activists like Akizuki Tatsuichirō, Kamata Sandano, and other movement groups contributed to documenting both the traumatic memories of the bombing and the postwar daily life of *hibakusha*. In addition to Nagai Takashi, *hibakusha* poets such as Yamaguchi Tsutomu and Yamada Kan utilized poetry to express their traumatic experiences. Their works illustrate the challenging nature of writing about a traumatic memory, as it necessitates recalling and often reliving the painful moment. These survivor-poets crafted verses to articulate their understanding of the atomic bombing experience and to assign meaning to it, whether that be in the context of God's providence or humanity's destruction.

The third part of the book, "Sites of Memory," delves into the physical sites and ruins connected to the atomic bombing, which played a crucial role in shaping the environment of remembrance. The city's identity is intricately tied to the images of reconstruction and recovery, even as it recalls and memorializes unprecedented acts of violence. For example, the Peace Parks in Hiroshima and Nagasaki serve as landmarks that prompt contemplation on peace, educating visitors about its civic significance. The replication of Urakami Cathedral, despite debates regarding the preservation of its authenticity and its impact on the memory of the bombing, offers a means to ponder human values. This is evident in its preservation, relocation, and replications, all of which prompt reflections on resilience and faith. These

monuments stand as witnesses to the understanding of peace as an embodiment of people's enduring faith in God's providence, translated through their efforts toward restoration and reconstruction.

The two essays in the book's final part, titled "Reflections," delve into Nagai Takashi's legacy. Nagai perceived the bombing as both "providence, holocaust, and trial" — a sacrificial and providential event that helped end the war. This perspective, dubbed the "Urakami Holocaust Theory" by Shinji Takahashi, drew criticism for two main reasons. Firstly, it seems to absolve Japanese leaders of responsibility for imperialist wars and overlooked the actions of American leaders who ordered the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima towards the end of World War II. Secondly, Takahashi argued that Nagai's interpretations failed to transcend the Urakami Catholic community, dominating other perspectives and narratives on the bombing and its traumatic aftermath. Nonetheless, despite the occasional criticism of Nagai, Tokusaburo Nagai, his grandson, dedicates himself to preserving his grandfather's enduring legacy, particularly through reprinting "*The Bells of Nagasaki*." This work serves as a timeless testimony, asserting that true peace can be achieved and sustained if the world adheres to the principles of peace and fraternal love.

Truly, the *Shadows of Nagasaki* is an excellent read for anyone interested in exploring post-atomic Nagasaki studies. Its contents highlight Nagasaki's post-atomic experience as a topic for sustained discussion and serious study among scholars. Rather than focusing solely on the bombing itself, it explores Nagasaki as a melting pot of narrative reflection, creating a 'memory landscape' that allows the expression of various perspectives about the experience. This book is highly recommended as it shows the meaning of collective work of the healing of memory through remembrance and reflective storytelling of the memory from the survivors.

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Sara Docan-Morgan. *In Reunion: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Communication of Family*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2024, 270 pp. ISBN 9781439922842 (pdf).

The family is known to be the most basic unit of society, where everything originates. The family is where a child is endowed with the ideas of the world, such as their sense of morality and the wisdom necessary to participate in other existing social structures. Thus, part of a person's identity is their sense of family belonging. In such a progressive time, we can ask: what does it mean to be a family? Should our views on family remain in the traditional perspective, where biological connections constitute it, or should we consider the common nuclear identity, which consists of a father, mother, and child? While this may remain true for most of the world, a segment struggles to grasp the essence of family, particularly children who have been adopted. The recently published book by Sara Docan-Morgan, *In Reunion: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Communication of Family*, provides us with a comprehensive narrative of the dynamic experiences of adoptees.

The book explores the stories of adoptees who decided to enter into a *reunion*, searching for their birth families and trying to establish the connection that was once lost either initially or over a sustained period. Docan-Morgan utilizes the real-life experiences of her participants, who are Korean transnational adoptees, and analyzes how their encounters would equate to a broader, perhaps novel, understanding of what makes a family a *family*. The author was inspired by her experience of being a transnational adoptee herself. Still, it must be commended that she never attempted to make it only about herself despite the present similarities she shares with her participants. By analyzing transcripts and conducting research, the author sheds light on a new perspective of family dynamics: that communication plays a fundamental role in its establishment and formation.

The book is divided into seven chapters. As each chapter unfolds, it further adds to Docan-Morgan's claim that the family is an established relationship built upon communication. Chapter One

provides a historical milieu of Korea and how it became known for exporting children or sending children to Western countries such as America as adoptees. As adoptees grew up, they became aware of their sense of identity and wanted to explore their ethnic roots, thus the desire to be in reunion. This is the pivotal moment for adoptees, as they grapple with the question of who they should consider as their “real” parent – the birth parents who relinquished them while having a valid concern or their adopted parents who have been their family since they were adopted.

Chapter Two discusses why adoptees chose to go to Korea and search for their birth families, often expressing the sentiment “why not?” While many of them do indeed consider their adoptive family as their *real* family, they feel compelled to fill a gap not in their identity, but for their birth family who lost them. Reunions are commonly portrayed in media as emotional encounters, but in reality, they are often described as *awkward* rather than emotional, as adoptees are meeting strangers rather than *family* members.

Chapter Three dwells on how cultural differences affect reunion. In anticipation of such a momentous event, adoptees prepare a lot by studying what is deemed good or bad in Korean culture. However, adoptees find it difficult to process it as it contradicts the Western understanding of the world they have been cultivated in. However, despite these challenges, they continue to communicate with their family as part of their process of meaning-making in the reunion.

Chapter Four delves deeper into Korean culture and notes that language plays a massive role in reunion. The adoptee and the birth family speak different languages, which contributes to the difficulty of feeling included in the family. While some may succeed in learning the Korean language, the majority initially find it an insurmountable ordeal in establishing a relationship.

Chapter Five shifts the focus towards adoptive parents and how their support affects the success of the reunion between their adopted child and their birth family. It was found that adoptive parents often show signs of worry and fear that they may “lose” their child, but they still provide support, recognizing its inherent importance to their

child's identity. Returning to the critical point, it is crucial for the adoptee in the reunion to communicate effectively with their adoptive parents to reassure them that they are still whom they consider as their "real" parents.

Chapter Six deals with how maintaining communication with birth families after reunion affects their overall relationship. It was notable in this part that those who decided to retain their communication with their birth families were able to widen their perspective about who their birth family really is, thus considering them now as part of their "real" family. These developments were able to happen because communication was present throughout. The last chapter dwells on the author's concluding remarks, which return to the main idea that family is constituted through communication. This part also contained recommendations for making reunions more valuable for those who aim to partake in such a tedious process.

Overall, the book offers significant value and provides fresh perspective on the concept of the family, which is greatly needed in our fast-evolving world. Through this scholarly pursuit, may more trans-national adoptees be allowed to seek their birth family so that they can communicate with them until they can rightly claim them again as their *family*. Thus, we must include more of these topics in our everyday discourses. Every person has a right to a sense of belonging, exclusive to *families*. This book will remind us to rethink the institutions existing in our society and ponder whether we are providing people with what they need as a part of themselves.

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