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A Christian social ethic for Singapore with reference to the works of Ronald H. Preston

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by Koh Kah Soon Daniel

Abstract

This thesis proposes a contextual Christian social ethic for a plural Singapore where Christianity, as a late arrival in East and Southeast Asia, is still regarded by most Asians as a foreign religion, mainly because of its association with past colonial exploits and present Euro-North American value-systems. Our thesis begins with an historical overview of Singapore from its founding as a British colony to its present position as an independent prosperous republic. Drawing on two failed attempts at Christian social engagement in post-colonial Singapore as examples, we argue against uncritical adoption of any social ethical model which is not culture-sensitive to the peculiar contextual concerns of that city-state.

We show that an appropriate and credible Christian social ethic for Singapore can be found, not so much in Liberation Theologies or Ecclesiological Ethics, though they have rightly attracted a lot of attention in recent years, but rather in the social theology of Ronald H. Preston and the tradition he represents. Preston's social theology, informed very much by a doctrine of creation, recognises God's grace at work in the life of all people and social structures. It encourages and facilitates constructive Christian social engagement in the political arena and the economic sphere where Christians, as members of overlapping communities, live and work with people of other faiths and those with no religious affiliation. When critically adapted and appropriately supplemented by other theological and philosophical materials in areas where we find deficiencies, Preston's social theology provides the congenial theological resources which can be used to frame a contextual Christian social ethic to meet the multi-faceted challenges of a plural, post-colonial Singapore.

A Christian Social Ethic for Singapore with Reference to the Works of Ronald H. Preston

by

Koh Kah Soon Daniel

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the Requirements for the Degree of
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in
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Declaration

I confirm that no part of the material offered has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other university.

Signed ...Daniel Sley.............

Date ...22 MAY, 2000...............

Content

Acknowledgement

The task of doing a Ph.D. project can be a lonely one. Long hours have to be invested in reading, researching and reflecting, often in self-imposed solitary confinement. But while it is a lonely job, it has been a joy to know that I was not alone. It is liberating to know that in spite of myself, God was with me, just as He is with me and He will be with me.

The best evidence of God's blessings is the interest shown and support given by both the Trinity Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Singapore and Trinity Theological College, Singapore, which provided the generous scholarship that allowed me to study in Durham, an excellent university set in an incomparably beautiful surrounding. Further evidence of God's grace is in having Dr. A.M. Suggate as my supervisor. I owe much to him for his guidance, patience, kindness, and encouragement without which I would not have been able to complete my doctoral project. Both he and his wife Jenny had been exceptionally hospitable to my family and I, and we are thankful to God for them.

Tet Lim and his family helped us to settle in when we first arrived in the middle of a cold winter. For the rest of our stay in Durham, my family and I had the privilege of making many new friends in the university and the wider community. Many of these friends, both local and international, have become very close to us, and we are thankful to God for the gift of friendship.

Then there are good friends and colleagues back in Singapore, too numerous to mention all by name, who believed in me, followed my progress (sometimes, the lack of it), and kept my family and I in their prayers. Stan, in particular, has been special, and he knows

Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to formulate an appropriate Christian social ethic for a plural post-colonial Singapore. No worthwhile Christian social ethic can ignore the fact of plurality or neglect the challenges posed by our plural world. Plurality takes many forms and configurations. The plurality we find in Singapore differs in a significant sense from the plurality that we find in the Euro-North American world. Whereas Britain, for example, might be called a plural society, the underlying ethos of the country has had a long history of Christian influence. Although church attendance has declined and Christianity might not be openly embraced by the majority of the population, nevertheless, because the Christian faith has had a long established presence and has contributed to the shaping of the society besides transmission of values, not many people in Britain would regard Christianity as a foreign faith.

However, in Singapore, as in most East and Southeast Asian countries, Christianity, as a late arrival, is not a dominant faith. Societal moral values do not depend on resources from the Church. The Christian faith has not been tested on East Asian soil the way, say, Confucianism has impacted the East Asian society and offered the moral values and vision which have permeated those societies. East and Southeast Asia has survived and thrived without Christianity. In that sense, not only is Christianity not indispensable, but because of its association with European imperial past and the current Euro-North American world, it has often been viewed, at best, with benign tolerance, but more often with suspicion. It is not surprising therefore that Christianity in plural Singapore, as in most of East and Southeast Asia, has been regarded more as a foreign religion than one that is indigenous to Asia. An appropriate Christian social ethic that addresses the vexatious problems of a plural
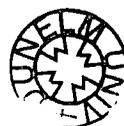
Asian society like Singapore has to take into consideration the popular perception that Christianity is a religion of the Europeans and Americans.

Another major difference between the plural society of Singapore and Britain is that Christians in Singapore are in the minority whereas the majority of Britons, even if they do not attend church any more, would probably consider themselves Christians, broadly construed. Working as a minority in a plural society is different from working as members of the majority, although in the case of Britain the relationship between the church and the population may seem estranged.

Our concern therefore is to formulate an appropriate Christian social ethic that is responsive to the peculiar plural post-colonial Singapore. The appropriate social ethic which we have in mind must respond to the contextual concerns of Singapore. It has to be theologically and tactically cultural-sensitive and cultural-sensible without compromising the integrity of the Christian faith. Our task is to show that an appropriate and contextualized Christian social ethic can be adapted from the social theology of Ronald H. Preston, with supplementary theological resources drawn from the works of theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas, John Milbank, Jeffrey Stout, Richard Mouw, William Temple, Reinhold Niebuhr, Charles Curran, Ulrich Duchrow, Jacques Maritain and Jose Miguez Bonino. Besides theologians, at the relevant sections, we will bring our discussion in dialogue with the works of scholars like F.A Hayek, John Rawls, Alasdair MacIntyre, Chua Beng Huat, Julia Ching and Tu Wei-Ming.

The approach we have adopted, in developing a social ethic that is appropriate for a post-colonial Singapore, will seek to avoid two temptations. Firstly, while it recognizes the past sins of the colonial powers, it refuses to indulge in a culture of blame. The appropriateness of a Christian social ethic for a post-colonial society is not measured by the

decibels or acerbity of anti-colonial rhetoric, although in the immediate decades after independence, in the era of Cold War between two Super Powers, when nationalist feelings were still raw, much of such rhetoric was needed perhaps for cathartic reasons, as an expression of pent-up anger and a demand for the right to be heard. But those years are now long gone. Secondly, while the task of theological reflection in a post-colonial setting must take into account peculiar contextual concerns and in some mutually implicating way critique the context and be enriched by the context, there is no need to dismiss or ignore the rich deposit of theological resources available from the older churches. To be sure, a social ethic appropriate to Singapore must address the contextual needs and concerns of Singapore. But there is no need to re-invent the theological wheel. In the traditions of the older churches, even if they remind us of past colonial exploits, there are theological treasures awaiting to be mined, critically no less, and adapted for a younger church in search for an appropriate Christian social ethic.

As far as we know, no Singaporean Christian has offered a Christian social ethic adapted from the social theology of Ronald H. Preston. We are not aware of any fully developed ecumenical Christian social ethic, written by a Singaporean, that addresses the challenges found in a post-colonial Singapore. The major critics of post-colonial Singapore are mainly sociologists, and among them, Chris Tremewan from New Zealand should be mentioned. Though he now writes as a social scientist, Tremewan was for many years a staff member of the Christian Conference of Asia when the ecumenical agency was based in Singapore. His critical view of Singapore, under Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong, will be scrutinised when we discuss the development of Singapore after 1965.

Our thesis will be divided into three parts. Part One covers Chapters One and Two. Part Two is the longest section, taking in Chapters Three to Eight. The concluding chapter is found in Part Three.

Chapter One provides an historical overview of Singapore. It serves as the context to help us understand how Singapore has been transformed from a British colony into a vibrant successful cosmopolitan country which seems to be perpetually insecure. Though our historical survey will begin with the founding of Singapore as a British colony, our particular interest will be in post-colonial Singapore. The success of Singapore and the problems the country encountered since independence have attracted critical studies, mainly by sociologists and economists. We will interact with the conflicting interpretations offered by different scholars as we seek to comprehend and critique Singapore's socio-political development. Two failed attempts by Christian groups to engage in the socio-political arena of post-colonial Singapore will be highlighted to point out where the Church might have been naive in exercising her social responsibility and to point to the need for an appropriate contextualized Christian social ethic that addresses the multifarious challenges of a plural Singapore.

Chapter Two is a short chapter which spells out the preliminary reasons for saying that it is in Preston's social theology, when properly adapted with supplementary contribution from other theologians, that we can find suitable theological resources required for us to formulate a Christian social ethic, appropriate for Singapore. We acknowledge the perspectives which Liberation Theologies and Ecclesiological Ethics, two other leading schools of theology, have brought to our debate on Christian social responsibility. Nevertheless, we will explain why these two schools of theology, while attracting interest among Christians from different countries, are not appropriate for Singapore, even though

there are invaluable lessons which can be tapped for the benefit of the Church in that city-state.

In Part Two, the basic theological framework in Preston's social theology will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four. We will show that Preston's social theology, while being informed by the traditional corpus of Christian doctrines, is shaped very much by a doctrine of creation, supported by his understanding of the Orders of Creation, a version of the Natural Law and the common good. He holds a deep belief in the grace of God at work in the life of all human beings and the whole of the created order. In the world created by God, human beings have pride of place as God's unique creation. Preston's theological framework also deals with human inter-relatedness, the prevalence of sin, the eschatological hope provided by Christ, the virtues of love, justice and equality.

Having provided Preston's theological framework, we are interested in knowing how this can be brought to bear on the various social spheres of our world. Chapter Five tests out the adequacy of Preston's social theology in its response to the perplexing problems of a plural society. We will argue that his social theology does not avoid the problem of plurality or pluralism, and in fact, he has shown us ways for Christians to work with Christians, and for Christians to work with people of other faiths and philosophies. Chapters Six and Seven will assess Preston's social theology and how it grapples with conflicting and competing claims in the political and economic arenas. And in Chapter Eight we will evaluate an approach to decision-making which Preston has employed and defended against strong criticisms from theologians like Duncan Forrester. The approach is the process of finding what has been described as middle axioms. At the various stages of our discussion of Preston's treatment of plurality, politics, economics and middle axioms, we will critique his social theology from the perspective of a Singaporean mindful of

Singapore's contextual concerns, and seeking to adapt a Christian social ethic appropriate for a plural Singapore.

By the time we reach Part Three and the concluding chapter, we should have made a cumulative case for formulating a Christian social ethic adapted, mainly and critically, from the social theology of Ronald H. Preston, that will be appropriate for the peculiar contextual challenge of Singapore. Our conclusion should establish that Preston's social theology and the tradition in which he represents, when critically adapted, do offer us both the theological resources and tactical tools for us to engage in the socio-political arena of a plural post-colonial Singapore. We are mindful, of course, that what we have presented, in the end, is only a limited academic exercise and it is therefore a small contribution to the nascent theological enterprise of the Church in that island republic.

Needless to say, more can be written about Ronald Preston's social theology and about Christian social ethics for Singapore than we have provided. We have to leave out, for example, a detailed discussion of Preston's use of the Bible in his social theology, though we have made reference to his reservation about using the Bible for finding direct answers to the complex problems of the world. We have also omitted Preston's treatment of Christian socialism and his response to their criticisms about profit, self-interest, service and egalitarian values. These, and other themes, will have to be dealt with at another time, perhaps by others.[1] With regard to Singapore, building on what we have written, there are some possible directions for taking our Christian social ethic further, for example, in addressing the issues of authoritarian politics that characterizes much of East Asian politics vis-à-vis the different democratic models favoured by Europe and America. But this is beyond our scope, and we have to leave it to others to attend to it.

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[1] E.g., John Elford and Ian Markham, eds., *The Middle Way*, a forthcoming publication from SCM Press.

Transliteration of another language into English can be a problem especially when there is more than one way to spell a word. In transliterating Chinese words, we have mainly retained the Wade-Giles system instead of *Hanyu Pinyin* which is now widely used in China but not well-known elsewhere. We have therefore, for example, kept the use of *Tao*, instead of *Dao*, unless we are quoting a word directly from a source that uses the *Pinyin* system.

Part One

Our concern in this section is to provide an historical survey of Singapore with particular emphasis given to the post-colonial era. It will also set out the preliminary ground to explain why we find in the social theology of Ronald H. Preston the resources we require, to help us frame an appropriate Christian social ethic, that will be responsive to the contextual concerns of Singapore.

Chapter One

The Context: An Historical Overview of Singapore

To have a sense of what makes Singapore the plural vibrant city-state that she is today, it is essential that we should have at least an overview of her socio-political history. For our purpose, this historical overview should take us from the early nineteenth century when Singapore became a British colony to the present-day Singapore. We will divide this historical survey into three different periods; the first begins with the founding of modern Singapore in 1819 to the Japanese occupation and surrender in 1945. This will be followed by the post-war period from 1945 leading to the short-lived union with Malaysia and the enforced independence in 1965. And finally, our third period is the post-colonial era from 1965 till the late 1990s.

The primary context of this study is post-colonial Singapore and more space will be given to the socio-political development in Singapore and Christian social engagements in that plural society since 1965.

1. The First Period: 1819-1945

1.1 The Founding of Modern Singapore

Not much is known of ancient Singapore, a speck[1] at the southern tip of the Malay peninsula, linking the Indian Ocean via the Straits of Malacca to the South China Sea and

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[1] Cf., Bobby E.K. Sng, *In His Good Time,* p. 18, Alex Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Crucial Years,* p. 6 and Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley, eds. *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore,* p. v. Singapore is presently linked to the Malay peninsula by a 1,056 metre causeway and a new bridge. The causeway carries a railway-line and a major water pipe that supplies most of the water required by land-scarce Singapore, drawn from rivers in the State of Johore.

the Pacific Ocean. [2] Her modern history, nevertheless, began when Sir Thomas Stamford

Raffles of the East India Company, with the tacit approval of Lord Hastings, the British

Governor-General of India, signed an agreement with the Temenggong [3] and the Sultan of

Johore in 1819 for Britain to establish a presence on the island. That agreement signed on

30th January, with Major Farquhar a senior member of Raffles' expedition force as a co-

signatory, paved the way for the British East India Company to set up a "factory" there. In

Singapore Raffles found an ideal location for developing a free port which could counter

Dutch monopoly of the spice trade, while at the same time serving the wider British imperial

expansionist ambition in East and Southeast Asia.[4]

1.2 European Hegemony and the Redrawing of Southeast Asian Boundaries

Five years after the British had outmaneuvered the Dutch in securing a foothold in

Singapore, the 1819 agreement, which had permitted the British a somewhat limited role on

the island, was renegotiated and upgraded largely in favour of the British. The Malay rulers

were persuaded to cede sovereignty of Singapore in perpetuity to the British in 1824. That

was the year Britain signed the Anglo-Dutch treaty[5] in London which, although it settled

disputes over territories in Southeast Asia between the two European kingdoms,[6] had in fact

redrawn the boundaries of the Indo-Malayan world without consulting the people of the

affected countries.

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[2] For comprehensive introductions to Singapore, besides K.S. Sandhu and P. Wheatley, *op. cit.*, see also Ernest
C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, eds., *A History of Singapore*, Ong Jin Hui, Tong Chee Kiong and Tan Ern Ser,
ed., *Understanding Singapore Society*, Philippe Regnier, *Singapore: City-State in South-East Asia*, R.R.
Milne and Diane K. Mauzy, *Singapore: The Legacy of Lee Kuan Yew*, and C. M. Turnbull, *A History of
Singapore 1819-1988*.

[3] A Malay chieftain.

[4] John Drysdale, *Singapore: Struggle for Success*, p. xxiv. Cf., Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the
Second World War," in Ernest Chew and Edwin Lee, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 29ff. For an excellent account of
Anglo-Dutch rivalry in Southeast Asia from 1819-1824, see Harry J. Marks, *The First Contest for
Singapore*.

[5] The full text of the treaty is reprinted in Marks, *op. cit.*, pp. 252ff.

European imperialist powers imposed their wills on the colonized and carved Southeast Asia into various spheres of interests that left Burma, Malaya, North Borneo and the Straits Settlements under British rule, with the Dutch taking over the Indonesian archipelago, the Portuguese controlling part of Timor, the Spanish (succeeded later by the Americans) holding on to the Philippines, while the French entrenched themselves in the Indochinese peninsula.[7] What happened in Southeast Asia in many ways mirrored the brutal exploits of European imperialism and their gun-boat diplomacy around the world. Little wonder that in latter years, nationalists fed by the collective memories of countries once humiliated by Western colonial powers would react vehemently, and for some violently, against their former colonial masters, not only at political forums, but also in theological debates, and in some tragic circumstances, in the jungles where guerrillas reigned.

1.3 Economic Growth and the Influx of Immigrants.

In the initial years, the affairs of Singapore were supervised by the British administration based in India. But because of its growing importance to the commercial interest of Britain, from 1867 Singapore as part of the Straits Settlements[8] became a crown colony and was placed under direct rule from the Colonial Office in London. As the region opened up, more opportunities for business and jobs became available, leading to an increased inflow of economic migrants, mostly from the poor villages of South China and the Indian sub-continent.[9] Some of the more enterprising immigrants, especially among the Chinese, would link up with British businesses, serving as wholesalers and intermediaries between suppliers and purchasers of goods and services. The successful Chinese traders and

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[6] Ernest Chew, "The Foundation of British Settlement," in Ernest Chew, and Edwin Lee, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 39.

[7] See Philippe Regnier, *op. cit.*, pp. 9ff and D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia,* pp. 197ff.

[8] The Straits Settlements included Penang, Malacca, Labuan, Cocos Islands and Christmas Islands. Raj K. Vasil, *Governing Singapore*, p. 171.

[9] W. G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore*, p.150.

business houses were to control a major share of the economy of their adopted land and gradually formed an extensive network of entrepreneurs, merchants, plantation owners, and bankers among the Chinese Diaspora.[10]

1.4 The Making of a Plural Society

As Singapore prospered, more economic migrants were to arrive from China and India, and to a lesser extent from Ceylon and Indonesia. Many of them made their way to Malaya to find work in the new rubber plantations and tin mines.[11] The various waves of new migrants and those who settled in Singapore gradually re-shaped the demography of the British colony, so much so that even though the Malay in 1824 had a majority of 60% of the total population, yet within a short three years, the Chinese migrants would overtake the Malay as the most dominant ethnic group. Early at the turn of the twentieth century, the number of Chinese both locally-born and immigrants increased to account for 75% of the total population.[12] The seed was sown for Singapore to become the only independent country outside China to have the largest percentage of ethnic Chinese population in a multi-racial society, surrounded immediately by two predominantly Islamic Indo-Malayan neighbours.

It was inevitable that changes to ethnic composition would also bring about a re-ordering of religious groupings, especially when the immigrants had brought with them religious beliefs from countries known for, and nurtured by rich and long-established Asian religio-cultural civilizations.

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[10] E.g., Rupert Hodder, *Merchant Princes of the East*, p. 3.

[11] Huff, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

[12] J.B. Tamney, *The Struggle Over Singapore's Soul*, p. 3. A detailed table showing the demographic changes and population mix from 1871 to 1970 can be found in a study by Chiew Seen-Kong, "Ethnicity and National Integration: The Evolution of a Multi-ethnic Society," in Peter S. J. Chen, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 34.

1.5 The Church in Early Singapore

Where were the churches in early colonial Singapore? A short reply is given by Ray Nyce, one time director of the now defunct Institute for the Study of Religions and Society in Singapore and Malaysia. He summarizes,[13]

Christian work in Singapore started very early in the modern history of the island, not long after Raffles arrived. The Anglican Church, for example, dates its work back to 1826, with the coming of Rev. Robert Burns. The Roman Catholic Church dates its beginning even earlier, in 1819, when the first priest visited a small community of Roman Catholics already here; the first Catholic place of worship was built in 1832. The first Presbyterian, Rev. T. McKenzie Fraser, arrived in 1856. The Brethren trace their work back to 1867 and the arrival of Mr. Alexander Grant. The first Methodist workers were William F. Oldham and Dr. J.M. Thoburn, who arrived in 1885. Seventh-Day Adventist work started with a treatment room in Sophia Road in 1905. The Salvation Army started work in 1935, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church in 1936, and the rest all later.

Nyce referred to the arrival of the established denominations. But some Christians had entered Singapore under the auspices of mission organizations such as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the Church Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society.[14] As for Nyce's "and the rest" which came later, these include the Lutheran Church, and others like the Baptist Church, Pentecostal Church, the Evangelical Free Church and a proliferation of independent churches and para-church organizations.[15]

Fortunately, for Singapore, the churches were not too introverted caring only for their own membership. They had in fact extended Christian ministry to the local Asian population, no doubt doing evangelistic works, but also initiating social services to serve the temporal needs of a mixed, unsettled and unsettling migrant population. As early as 1859,

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[13] Ray Nyce, *The Kingdom and the Country*, p. 55.

[14] Sng, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-37.

[15] Ibid., pp. 233ff.

the Anglican Church commissioned Tamil and Chinese workers to reach out to the Asians.[16] Missionaries like B. P. Keasberry, and W.G. Shellabear became experts in the Malay language, working with the Malays, and the Malay-speaking Straits-born Chinese, although their work among the Malays who were mostly Muslims did not yield much fruit.[17]

In the absence of adequate social services provided by the Colonial administration, the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Seventh-Day Adventist Churches pioneered general medical care and hospital work. The medical services provided by the Anglican Church, for example, broke new grounds when the St. Andrew's Medical Mission situated at the heart of the over-crowded Chinatown initiated specialist care then not available in the colony. "It set up the first Orthopaedic Hospital for the treatment of patients with tuberculosis of bones and joints. It ran the first hospital devoted entirely to the care of sick children. It pioneered the training of paediatric nurses ..."[18] The Methodist Church, together with the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Presbyterian Church were in the forefront establishing mission schools. Of particular import in that it broke new grounds in helping to overcome entrenched social taboos, were the schools opened by the churches specifically catering to the needs of local girls at a time when girls were expected to stay at home, and at the appropriate time, married off. A product of the Methodist mission school, Dr. Bobby Sng gives this assessment:[19]

That Christian mission schools have made a positive impression on society is evident. Today, in the world of business and commerce, the professions, civil service, industry and politics, large numbers of graduates of these schools can be found and, in many instances, they have retained their Christian sense of vocation. Probably, one

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[16] Nyce, *op. cit.*, p. 55. Cf. Sng *op. cit.*, pp. 72f.

[17] Nyce, *op. cit.*, p. 55. Also, Sng, *op. cit.*, pp.128.

[18] Sng, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

[19] Ibid., p. 159.

of the most important contributions made by these schools has been in the giving of women a status of dignity and usefulness that nobody had thought was possible at the turn of the century.

Besides pioneering health care and education, we have reasons to believe that the churches had also reached out to the poor as well. If a scene at a worship service, described by a former Anglican Bishop C.E. Ferguson-Davie, is indicative of the kind of people attending churches in early twentieth century Singapore, we have reasons to infer that at least the Anglican Church had attracted worshippers who fitted Huff's idea of the poor in colonial Singapore.[20] This is what Ferguson-Davie observed of a Chinese church:[21]

.... having regard to the humble status of the members of this congregation - rickshaw coolies, servants, cooks, water carriers (with a sprinkling of shopkeepers and others in the higher walks of life) - it is characterized by quite a remarkable degree of intelligence. On one occasion a rickshaw puller read the lessons, a cook played the organ, while another rickshaw puller preached the sermon....

Christians might be in the minority, but from Bishop Ferguson-Davie's observation of church life in a Chinese congregation, we have evidence that at least in one church, the poor had been embraced by the Christian family.

1.6 Japanese Occupation

For more than a century, besides attending to commercial development in a *laissez faire* economy, the British had assembled a formidable array of military hardware and built a substantial military complex on the island. But their military supremacy was about to be challenged by a rising Asian military power. Ominous signs had already appeared in the Far-eastern horizons when Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910. This was followed by

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[20] Huff, *op. cit.*, p. 277, "Impoverished rural population from South China and southern Indian came to Singapore and, in the absence of employment opportunities in the manufacturing sector or international services, were pushed into low-paid services. No figures exist for income distribution, but Singapore's many hawkers, rickshaw pullers and domestic servants, together with densely-packed Chinatowns, were indicative of a large gap between the rich and the poor."

[21] C.E. Ferguson-Davie, ed., *In the Rubber Lands*, p. 42.

Japanese occupation of Manchuria in northern China in 1931 before the Japanese military forces using flimsy ruses to destabilize China began their full-scale military campaign in China from 1937.[22]

Singapore, thought to be an impenetrable fortress, fell to the invading Japanese forces on 15th February 1942, about two months after Japanese airforce had dropped their first bombs on the island. On the first day of the Chinese New Year of the Horse, the remaining dispirited soldiers, supported by local volunteers, and commonwealth forces represented by Indian, Australian and New Zealand garrisons surrendered to the advancing Japanese army. An Asian colonial force had replaced a European power, and for three-and-a-half years of Japanese occupation, Singapore became *Syonan,* the Light of the South.[23]

2. The Second Period: 1945-1965

2.1 Malayan Union, the Dismantling of the Straits Settlements and Racial Tension.

The Japanese military adventure came to a disastrous end after the decimation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima by American atomic bombs in 1945. The immediate years following the Second World War saw the returning British trying to restore order and rebuild the war-ravaged Singapore. One major change which the British attempted to introduce, was a proposal for a Malayan Union which sought to revamp the administrative and constitutional system in Malaya, and to reorganize the way the Malay States together with the Straits Settlement should be governed. In the proposed union, people regardless of their ethnic background would enjoy similar civil rights, unlike the situation in the past when such civil rights had not been extended to non-Malays, even though most of them had by then been born and bred in Malaya, and they had accepted Malaya as their home.

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[22] See Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, pp. 656ff. and pp. 700ff.

Although the original plan for the Malayan Union first conceptualized in Whitehall during the war years had included Singapore, that idea somehow underwent drastic revision in London, so that by the time the British returned to Southeast Asia after the war, a different version of the Malayan Union was tabled that excluded Singapore.[24] Mainly because of pressure from Malay nationalists who rejected Singapore's inclusion in the proposed Union for fear that the Chinese from Singapore might tilt the racial balance, and also because it was in Britain's interest to maintain a manageable presence in Southeast Asia, Britain decided to retain Singapore as the sole crown colony. Penang and Malacca, the other key components of the Straits Settlements were allowed to join a revised Malayan Union set out in a White Paper, in 1946. It was fortuitous for Britain that their strategy to retain Singapore as a crown colony coincided with the reluctance of Malay nationalists in Malaya to receive Singapore back into the Malayan family.[25] Unfortunately, an opportunity for the emergent Malaya to negotiate for an inclusive multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society marked by justice and equality was lost when the British colonial office and Malay nationalists opted for a Malaya which would perpetuate Malay dominance, strengthen their claims to special rights and ensure Malay control of the political system.

2.2 Communist Insurgence, Labour Unrest, and Student Riots.

The Singapore conundrum and the proposed Malayan Union were not the only equations that ruffled Malay nationalist sensitivity. At the time when the Malay nationalists were gathering support to scuttle the plan for a Malayan Union, the communists were preparing to embark on an armed struggle for an independent Malaya. When violence broke out in 1948, the mainly Chinese-supported Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was

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[23] Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[24] Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 6. Cf. Turnbull, *op. cit.*, p. 216. For a detailed study see Albert Lau, *The Malayan Union Controversy 1941-1948.*

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proscribed and the British colonial administration with the support of the anti-Communist

Malay nationalists declared a State of Emergency which lasted twelve years.[26]

With the communists engaged in jungle warfare and instigating strikes and social

unrest, Singapore in the tumultuous 1950s has been described as [27]

simmering with discontent: There was widespread unemployment, housing was critically short, wages were low

and working conditions poor, and union agitation and ethnic animosity kept political tempers hot. In 1950, there

were riots over the future of a Dutch girl brought up as a Muslim by a Malay family (the Maria Hertogh riots),

and in 1954 police and Chinese students clashed violently over the British attempt to get Singapore males to

register for national service.....

Communist threats, racial riots, student unrest and labour strikes all tormented a

Singapore coping with a high rate of population growth[28] and widening poverty. In 1957, for

example, "19% of Singapore households and 25% of individuals were found to be in

poverty".[29]

2.3 New Challenges Threw Up New Leaders

Out of the turbulent years, 1954 saw two new political parties formed on time for

them to prepare for election to an enlarged Legislative Assembly (formerly Council) which

was scheduled to be held the following year. The Labour Front, a left-of-centre liberal party,

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[25] Drysdale, *op. cit.*, pp. 6f. Also Lau, *Malayan Union*, pp. 56ff and pp. 282ff.

[26] Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 29. Cf. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 705.

[27] Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, p. 47. See also Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 143, for the Maria Hertogh's case which "sparked off several days of rioting during which Muslim mobs in the street killed white men and women indiscriminately." On the student riots in 1954, cf. Fong Sip Chee, *The PAP Story - The Pioneering Years*, pp. 35f. Besides the so-called Maria Hertogh riots and the 1954 student riots, the other notable riots in the 1950s included the Hock Lee riots in 1955, (Drysdale, *op. cit.*, pp. 107ff., and Fong, *op. cit.*, p. 33f), and the 1956 riots which "left 13 dead, 123 injured, 70 cars burnt or battered, two schools razed, and two police stations damaged." Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 249, cf. Fong, *op. cit.*, pp. 48ff.

[28] Huff, *op. cit.*, pp. 292f.

[29] Ibid., p. 291.

was headed by David Marshall,[30] a London-trained lawyer who was to become Singapore's first Chief Minister. The other party was a socialist hodgepodge - the People's Action Party (PAP), led by Lee Kuan Yew,[31] a Cambridge-trained lawyer who later became the first Prime Minister of Singapore.

The founding leaders of the PAP were mostly drawn from two divergent groups of politicians, united only by their common anti-colonial drive. One group made up of mainly English-educated professionals with democratic socialist inclination included men like Lee Kuan Yew, K.M. Byrne, Goh Keng Swee, S. Rajaratnam and Toh Chin Chye, some of whom had first met as students in the United Kingdom,[32] and continued to meet at the home of Lee Kuan Yew for political discussion after they returned to Singapore.[33] The other group led by men like Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan, were Chinese-educated pro-communist political activists with strong grassroot support from the largely Chinese-speaking working class population. The English-educated leadership associated with Lee Kuan Yew, viewed as the non-communist wing of the party, needed the Chinese-educated pro-communist membership for their organizational expertise, vernacular oratorical skills and ability to mobilize mass support. On the other hand, the pro-communist Chinese-educated faction of the party needed the English-educated leadership and the PAP to

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[30] David Marshall of Jewish descent was born in Singapore. For a well-written work on his life and politics, see Chan Heng Chee, *David Marshall: A Sensation of Independence*.

[31] There are many books available on Lee Kuan Yew. Here is a selection representing a spectrum of views: James Minchin, *No Man is an Island*, T.J.S. George, *Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore*, Alex Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Crucial Years*, Han Fook Kwang, Warren Fernandez, and Sumiko Tan, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Man and His Ideas*, and the first volume of his projected two-volume memoirs, in Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, 1998.

[32] The important political organization for students from Malaya/Singapore was the Malayan Forum based in London where students would meet to discuss political development and issues. The founding members of the Malayan Forum were men like Maurice Baker, Goh Keng Swee, Toh Chin Chye and K.M. Byrne, and Tun Abdul Razak (later to become the second Prime Minister of Malaysia). Lee Kuan Yew was well-acquainted with the leaders of the Malayan Forum. He made an important political speech there in 1950. (Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 35). For a short biographical sketch of some of the key founding members of the PAP, see Minchin, *op. cit.*, pp. 51ff. A more detailed treatment of the early PAP leaders can be found in Lam Peng Er and Kevin Y.L. Tan, ed., *Lee's Lieutenants*.

[33] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

provide a respectable veneer for them to propagate their views and to push their radical left agenda. This strange mix of politicians in a marriage of convenience saw them using each other in their fight against British colonialism, while at the same time plotting to seize control of the party.[34]

2.4 PAP, Cadres, The Pope and His Cardinals

In the 1955 election to the Legislative Assembly,[35] the pro-British Singapore Progressive Party (SPP), which was expected to win enough seats to form a new government, was beaten when the Labour Front won ten of the twenty-five seats. At the Cairnhill constituency, David Marshall defeated C.C. Tan the leader of the SPP, and a favourite of the British establishment.[36] The PAP which decided to field only four candidates won three seats. Among those who won under the PAP banner was Lee Kuan Yew who captured the Tanjong Pagar constituency.

David Marshall's term as the first Chief Minister of Singapore lasted fourteen months. He resigned his post as the Chief Minister and was succeeded by Lim Yew Hock after he failed to persuade the British Government to grant Singapore greater self-rule, during the 1956 All-Party Constitutional Mission to London. Lim Yew Hock held the helm for the rest of the legislative term. It was a term marked by widespread violence on the streets[37] which led to the detentions without trial of influential leftist union leaders like Lim Chin Siong, Fong Swee Suan, Devan Nair, James Puthucheary, Sandra Woodhull and Chan

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[34] See Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, p. 47. Drysdale, *op. cit.*, pp. 83ff.

[35] Cf. Drysdale, *op. cit.*, pp. 172ff.

[36] Ibid., p. 96.

[37] Minchin, *op. cit.*, p. 77, and Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, p. 49. Also, Richard Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution in Singapore and Malaya, 1945-1963*, and Lee Ting Hui, *The Communist Organization in Singapore: Its Techniques of Manpower Mobilization and Management, 1948-1966*, pp. 317ff.

Chiaw Thor in 1956, many of them associated with the PAP.[38] However, more crippling detentions without trial were to follow. A decision taken by Lim Yew Hock to detain leading pro-communists, including five newly elected members of the PAP Central Executive Committee (CEC) on 22nd August 1957, would prove to be a critical turning point for the leadership struggle in the PAP.[39]

The radical pro-communist wing of the PAP had connived to seize control of the party by taking over the party branches, and in so doing, ensuring that they had the number of votes required to elect leaders of their choice to the CEC. They succeeded in getting half the number of seats to the CEC on 4th August.[40] But before the pro-communist members of the CEC could introduce their political agenda, their detention without trial gave the non-communist leaders of the PAP the opportunity to reorganize and tighten the party structure.[41] Having witnessed the plot of the pro-communists at close hand, Lee Kuan Yew was convinced that to prevent a radical left take-over of the party, it would be a "folly" to continue "adopting a democratic constitution that had left (PAP) open to capture through the penetration of its own branches."[42] He concluded that to prevent the radical left from seizing control of the party, rules had to be changed so that members of the CEC would in future be elected by PAP cadres whose numbers were controlled by the CEC and their membership kept secret by the same. Dr. Toh Chin Chye, for many years the chairperson of the PAP, in a recent interview disclosed that it was his idea that the cadre system should be implemented.[43] However, in his memoirs, Lee Kuan Yew claims that the idea for changing

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[38] Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

[39] Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, p. 49. Cf. Drysdale, *op. cit.*, pp. 182ff.

[40] Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 176, and p. 178.

[41] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, pp. 268ff.

[42] Ibid., p. 271.

the system of electing members to the CEC of the PAP was inspired by the Roman Catholic Church.[44]

The amended constitution established two classes of party membership: ordinary members who could join either directly through PAP headquarters or through the branches, and cadre members, a select few hundred who would be approved by the central executive committee. Only cadres who had been chosen by the CEC could in turn vote for candidates to the CEC, just as only cardinals nominated by a Pope could elect another Pope. This closed the circuit, and since the CEC controlled the core of the party, the party could not now be captured.

The cadre system was only introduced after the non-communist PAP leadership had seen the attempt of the radical left to usurp power falter when the key leaders were detained by the Lim Yew Hock administration. Still, what remains intriguing for students of Singapore's political development was the timing of the detention order. We know that the leading radical left were arrested at a time when PAP was vulnerable to a take-over by the pro-communist faction. Was their detention in August 1957, a coincidence? Drysdale[45] and Bloodworth[46] seem to imply that it was, but Milne and Mauzy, having raised the question themselves, disappointingly left it unanswered.[47]

Lee Kuan Yew himself has denied complicity in the detention of his leftist comrades. The real reason for Lim Yew Hock's action in detaining the pro-communists, argues Lee Kuan Yew, was that the Chief Minister was protecting his own power base, the

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[43] See Lam Peng Er, "The Organisational Utility Men: Toh Chin Chye and Lim Kim San," in Lam Peng Er, and Kevin Y.L. Tan, ed., *op. cit.,* p. 201. While Lee Kuan Yew was to draw on the Roman Catholic Church to rationalize his introduction of the cadre system, Dr. Toh recommended the cadre system not so much because he was inspired by the Roman Catholic Church, but by the organizational practice of "Leninist democratic centralism." (Ibid., p. 13).

[44] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.,* p. 287.

[45] Drysdale, *op. cit.,* pp. 183 ff.

[46] Bloodworth, *op. cit.,* p. 163.

[47] Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.,* p. 49.

Singapore Trade Union Congress from being "captured by Lim Chin Joo."[48] The truth of the matter however could be found not so much in denial, insinuation or suspicion, but perhaps in the records of Alan Lennox-Boyd, the former Colonial Secretary who dealt with the Singapore delegation negotiating for internal self-government. In a new biography on Lennox-Boyd written by Philip Murphy, the author, citing official documents, relates an incident in which Lim Yew Hock demanded that more radical leftists in Singapore should be detained without trial as a condition for putting his signature to the agreement for Singapore's self-government. We are told that Lennox-Boyd was astonished by Lim Yew Hock's request. He asked whether Lim had spoken to Lee Kuan Yew, a member of the delegation and someone clearly viewed by the British as a potential leader of Singapore, concerning what appeared to be a last minute extraordinary demand. According to Murphy, the Colonial Secretary was taken aback when "Lim told him that Lee was also a party to his demand."[49] This revelation, for the Colonial Secretary, was "a strange conspiracy."[50] If Lennox-Boyd's recollection was accurate, and we do not have any compelling reason to doubt its accuracy, then it is clear that Lee Kuan Yew had a hand in the plan to detain some of his radical left colleagues in the PAP.

2.5 Internal Self-Government, and a Warning to the Privileged English-Educated.

Singapore was granted internal self-government in 1959. Britain, however, continued to impose certain claims on Singapore. Matters pertaining to defence and foreign affairs would still be handled by the British, though the controversial issue of internal security would now be placed under a new tripartite Internal Security Council made up of three representatives each from Britain and Singapore, and one from Malaya. As if to

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[48] The younger brother of Chin Siong, and according to Lee Kuan Yew, a key figure in plotting to take control of the CEC of the PAP. Both of them were detained by Lim Yew Hock.

[49] Philip Murphy, *Alan Lennox-Boyd: A Biography*, p. 177.

[50] Ibid., p. 177.

remind Singapore not to forget who held the ultimate political power in deciding Singapore's destiny, Britain reserved the right to suspend the constitution should they judge that the situation in a volatile Singapore warranted such a suspension.[51]

When the 1959 election drew near, the PAP was expected to win after the party had gained control of the City Council in a separate municipal election held in 1957 which elevated PAP's charismatic Ong Eng Guan to the mayor post. The growing popularity of the PAP with keen grass-root support garnered mainly by the pro-communist wing of the party was further enhanced by PAP's exposure of illegal funding and corruption in Lim Yew Hock's party. [52]

With Lim Yew Hock's party in disarray, and the popularity of PAP on the ascendancy among the mainly non-English-educated majority, it was only a matter of time before the PAP captured sufficient seats to form the next government. As expected, the results of the election saw the PAP swept into power, gaining 43 of the 51 seats and taking more than 53 percent of the popular vote. The Singapore People's Alliance, a new party formed by Lim Yew Hock to replace a discredited Labour Front, took 4 seats, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) won 3 seats, and A.P. Rajah, an independent, won the other seat, while David Marshall and two other Workers' Party candidates failed to win any seat.

Yet far from being euphoric about the victory that put the PAP in power, Lee Kuan Yew, the new Prime Minister, recognized the massive challenges and problems which his government had to cope with and overcome. He was aware of the high unemployment rate, the rising expectation of a people that would want quick solutions to social ills, the lack of

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[51] Cf. Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 168. Also, Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[52] Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

proper housing for a growing population, and the need for new schools and medical

centres.[53] More troublesome for him was the fact that unless the inexperienced PAP were

able to govern fairly and deliver tangible benefits to the population, the pro-communists

through men like Lim Chin Siong would be able to subvert the PAP's effort and fan

discontent against the Government, especially among the poorer Chinese-educated

population.[54]

The youthful cabinet with an average age of thirty-seven,[55] led by Lee Kuan Yew as

the Prime Minister, Toh Chin Chye as the Deputy Prime Minister and Goh Keng Swee as

the Finance Minister had to attend almost immediately to a looming financial crisis,[56] and

other socio-economic problems besetting the new self-governing Singapore. They decided to

initiate some controversial programmes, among them, reducing the salaries and variable

allowances of civil servants,[57] freezing new employment in the civil service unless

permission was obtained beforehand from the minister to fill vacancies,[58] and taking a

voluntary pay cut for the newly installed ministers.[59] These measures were unpopular with

the mainly English-educated civil servants. As Lee recalls,[60]

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[53] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 306. Also, Lam Peng Er and Kevin Tan, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

[54] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 306. Lee had acknowledged that "the problems facing the .... government would be immense. Unemployment was around 12 per cent. Every year, another 62,000 babies were born. With our population growing at 4 per cent per annum, the economic prospects were grim. We had no hinterland, no large domestic market for new industries, and a bad climate of labour unrest. I was not at all confident we could withstand the communist assaults that would follow." Ibid., pp. 291f. "We feared the communists would soon be busy eroding public support, with Lim Chin Siong and Fong fomenting industrial and social unrest." Ibid., p. 315.

[55] Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, p. 53, and Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

[56] The Finance Minister, Dr. Goh Keng Swee had reported that the PAP had inherited a budget deficit of some 14 million dollars, and that the previous government had used up S$200 million from the reserve. Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 317. Cf. Drysdale, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-232.

[57] Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, p. 54. Cf. T.J. Bellows, *The People's Action Party of Singapore: Emergence of a Dominant Party System*, p. 36.

[58] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

[59] Ibid., p. 318. An idea proposed by Dr. Goh Keng Swee and agreed by Lee.

[60] Ibid., p. 318.

The English-educated believed that we had set out to punish them for having voted against us. That was not our motive. We wanted to show everyone in Singapore, especially the Chinese-educated majority, that for the public good, the English-educated were prepared to make sacrifices, led by the ministers. I thought it not unreasonable that they make this sacrifice to help us get the message across that, in this new era, we would all share hardships and joys equally.

If the English-educated had thought that the PAP was turning against them, they might have good reasons for harbouring such thought. At the public rally at the Padang[61] to celebrate PAP's victory the night before the PAP took office, Dr. Goh Keng Swee had rebuked the English-educated, generally considered as the more privileged group of people in society, for their lack of support for the PAP in the recent election, and for isolating themselves from the wider and poorer sector of society. Dr. Goh, himself an English-educated economist and a former top civil servant, warned them that they "must essentially lose the privileged position they enjoyed under British colonial rule."[62] He went on to add,[63]

In the future society we hope to bring about, the barriers between groups will have disappeared.... The English-educated must find his way back to the people. He must break out of the cultural and class isolation in which he now lives.... He must regard himself as one with the people, work with them, fight for the rights of the common man, make life more just and more decent for the hundreds of thousands who live in our slums.

He took umbrage at the English language press, particularly the *Singapore Standard* for "its hysterical anti-PAP campaign"[64] and he denounced the Roman Catholic Church[65] for taking sides against the PAP. The Roman Catholic Church had been clustered with the English-educated privileged class. And by naming the Roman Catholic Church for the political stand the church had taken, Dr. Goh who grew up in a Methodist family, revealed

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[61] A large open field fronting the City Hall.

[62] Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

[63] Ibid., p. 227. Drysdale describes Dr. Goh's speech as the "most significant speech" on that night. Cf. Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 309

[64] Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

PAP's sensitivity towards church involvement in the politics of Singapore, especially when the church took an opposing view from the ruling party.

2.6 Open Conflict and the Parting of Ways

Not long after assuming office, and while still adjusting to their unfamiliar responsibility as the government of a self-governing state, the PAP leadership had to deal with a series of crises emanating from within the party. The first crisis was triggered by the populist Ong Eng Guan. He forced a by-election crisis in his Hong Lim Constituency after he was relieved of his responsibility as the Minister for National Development for incompetence, then dismissed from the party for undermining the leadership[66] and subsequently censured by the Legislative Assembly for making an unsubstantiated accusation of nepotism in the Government.[67] He vacated his seat abruptly and stood for re-election as a candidate of a new United People's Party.[68] In a hard-fought acrimonious by-election, and despite sustained personal attacks by the PAP hierarchy questioning his competence and moral integrity,[69] the populist Ong Eng Guan, still very much a crowd-pleaser with strong following among the largely poor Chinese voters managed to retain the seat with 72 percent of the votes. Two PAP assemblymen, Ng Teng Kian and S.V. Lingam, who had supported Ong Eng Guan, crossed the floor to join the opposition bench.[70]

Before the controversy of the Ong Eng Guan affair subsided, troubles were already brewing from another front when the pro-communist faction rallied behind David Marshall[71]

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[65] Ibid., p. 227. Cf. Lee Kuan Yew *op. cit.*, p. 309.

[66] Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

[67] Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, p. 56, Drysdale, *op. cit.*, pp. 238ff, and Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

[68] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

[69] Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 248, Cf. Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

[70] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

[71] Bloodworth, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

who had stood as a candidate of the Workers' Party in the Anson by-election, occasioned by the untimely death of Baharuddin bin Mohammed Ariff, a young PAP assemblyman. With the open support of the pro-communists, David Marshall won the by-election by 546 votes, and in so doing further embarrassed the PAP which had not recovered from losing the by-election at Hong Lim.[72] Dissatisfied with the doubtful loyalty of the pro-communists within the ranks of the PAP, and wary of their radical left strategy to overthrow the non-communist leadership in the party, the Lee faction moved to exposed the pro-communists in the PAP.[73]

The final showdown between the two fractions came when the pro-communist group voted against a motion of confidence introduced by Lee Kuan Yew in the Assembly on the issue of merger with Malaya. When the vote was called thirteen PAP assemblymen and women opposed the motion. They were expelled from PAP and they went on to form the *Barisan Socialis* (Socialist Front) with Dr. Lee Siew Choh as the Chairperson and Lim Chin Siong, the Secretary-General. Lee's faction managed to get the support of 26 PAP members, just enough seats for them to hold on to power.[74]

2.7 Preparing for Malaysia

The issue of merger with Malaya had surfaced when Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister of Malaya, unexpectedly floated the idea in a speech, on 27th May 1961. He declared,[75]

Sooner or later Malaya should have an understanding with Britain and the peoples of Singapore, North Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak. It is premature for me to say now how this closer understanding can be brought about but it

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[72] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

[73] Ibid., p. 372.

[74] The events leading to the parting of ways between the pro-communists and the non-communists are more complex than we can portray here. See Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, pp. 370ff., Bloodworth, *op. cit.*, pp. 236f., and George, *op.cit.*, pp. 163f.

[75] Quoted in Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

is inevitable that we should look ahead to this objective and think of a plan whereby these territories could be brought together in political and economic cooperation.

That remark was to catch many people by surprise.[76] As we have seen, Malay nationalists generally had reservation about having Singapore as part of Malaya for fear that the ethnic Chinese from Singapore might upset the racial composition to the disadvantage of the Malays.[77] What made the Tunku float that idea, we do not know. Nevertheless, having a greater Malaysia which included not only Singapore but also the British Borneo protectorates, would ensure that the numerical supremacy of the Malays could be sustained without having to be concerned about the peril of ethnic Chinese domination. Needless to say, since the PAP had always talked about working for a merger with Malaya, when the Tunku made his thought known for a greater Malaysia, that idea was quickly seized by Lee Kuan Yew and his colleagues, many of them were born in Malaya and still had families there. They were to push for a merger amidst strong opposition from the *Barisan Socialis*, protest from the Philippines and military threat from Indonesia.[78] A crudely engineered referendum was held on September 1962, where voters were not given a say on whether Singapore should join Malaysia, but only to choose one of three options proposed by Lim Yew Hock, with PAP's support.[79] The options were:

A) Full Malaysian citizenship to all Singapore citizens with Singapore having autonomy on matters related to education and labour.

[76] Drysdale tells us that the Tunku had departed from his prepared text to make this remark about the possibility of a political merger. Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 260. Lee Kuan Yew refers to it as something "Out of the blue..", Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

[77] As recent as May 1960, the Tunku was still expressing reservation about having any closer political union with Singapore because the dominant Chinese population of Singapore might upset the ethnic equation in an enlarged federation. Cf. Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 362. See also Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

[78] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, pp. 492f.

[79] These three options were proposed by Lim Yew Hock and accepted by the Assembly. Lee Kuan Yew said that "I was delighted that Lim had proposed what I had planned to do." Ibid., p. 431.

B) Singapore would be a constituent state of Malaysia on the same terms enjoyed by former members of the Straits Settlements.

C) The basis for Singapore's participation would be "no less favourable than those given to the three Borneo territories."

The result of the referendum saw 71 percent supporting option "A," and 25 percent casting blank votes on the advice of the *Barisan*.[80]

There was one other major battle to be fought before Singapore finally joined Malaysia, and that was the general election in 1963. In spite of a tough and furious campaign weakened by the loss of most of the party branches to the *Barisan Socialis* after the pro-communists who were expelled from the party took the branches with them, the PAP was well prepared. They restricted the campaign period to the shortest possible time legally allowed. Long before the announcement to call for the general election was made, Lee Kuan Yew was already engaged in indirect campaigning.[81] And unlike the ill-prepared opposition parties, PAP had their campaign pamphlets and posters printed in Hong Kong in advance, knowing that the local printers would be too busy to take on new assignments when they had to meet urgent printing deadlines for Malaysia Day celebration held on the same month as the general election. However the decisive blow for the opposition parties, especially the *Barisan Socialis* which still enjoyed wide support from the poorer non-English-educated ethnic Chinese population, was the rounding up of alleged pro-communist subversives under an Internal Security Council sanctioned Operation Cold Store, in February 1963. Among those detained without trial in the 1963 mass arrest of some 115 persons, were 24 senior

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[80] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 452. The victory was commended by an American observer for the "Machiavellian brilliance of its strategy and tactics." The Russians thought otherwise. In a broadcast, Radio Moscow pointed to the referendum as "dirty tricks." Cf. Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

members of the *Barisan Socialis*.[82] That operation was to deprive *Barisan Socialis* of some of its influential leaders and it was to handicap its election campaign.[83]

On the plus side for the PAP, discerning voters would have noticed that after four years in government, despite PAP's robust strategy and undemocratic action against those they considered subversive,[84] there were growing evidence of the government's competency and commitment to building a prosperous progressive Singapore for the benefit of a wide section of people. As recounted by Milne and Mauzy, "Unemployment was less than 3 percent (as compared with 13.6 percent in 1959); the low-cost housing scheme was making an impact; schools, clinics, and hospitals were steadily being built; and Jurong industrial complex was a showcase."[85] The people would have also noticed PAP's unflinching effort against corruption, a widespread social disease afflicting many developing countries, when the government took a keen interest in the works of the Corrupt Practice Investigation Bureau to combat dishonest transactions and sleaze.

The PAP, helped both by the incarceration of leading opposition leaders and early indication of social benefits of their first term in office, won 37 of the 51 seats in the 1963 election. The Barisan, despite being handicapped by the detention of its key leaders, still managed to take 13 seats, while the enigmatic Ong Eng Guan whose support from the

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[81] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 484. Lee candidly describes how he spent ten months to "mobilise support for the next election," visiting constituencies, giving public speeches, attending to municipal concerns, in his attempt to win the heart and mind of the electorate.

[82] Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, pp. 58f. Cf. Minchin, *op. cit.*, pp.129f, Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore*, p. 28, Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, pp. 472ff, and Drysdale, *op. cit.*, pp. 318ff. There is a discrepancy regarding the number of people detained during Operation Cold Store. Milne and Mauzy give 107, Tremewan has 111, Drysdale states 113 and Lee Kuan Yew says 115. Whatever the exact number might be, it was a major operation sanctioned by the tripartite Internal Security Council, which originally had 169 persons targeted for detention. (Lee Kuan Yew *op. cit.*, p. 472). Some of the targets escaped and went underground. But among those arrested was Lim Chin Siong. He was to be imprisoned for 7 years before he was conditionally released after attempting suicide. Cf. George, *op. cit.*, 69.

[83] Minchin, *op. cit.*, p. 119, and Tremewan, *op. cit.*, pp. 153f.

[84] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

[85] Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

Chinese voters remained intact retained his seat at Hong Lim.[86] It would appear that this time round the English-educated voters, many of them had previously supported parties led by Lim Yew Hock and David Marshall, switched their support to the non-communist PAP. No one from Lim Yew Hock's SPA and Marshall's Workers' Party won a seat in the new Legislative Assembly.

2.8 Malaysian Experience and the Peril of Communal Politics

The merger with Malaysia, a political union which the PAP had fought so hard to realise, became a reality on 16th September 1963, minus oil-rich Brunei which decided to remain as a British protectorate. But the union, which was supposed to open a gateway to a common market and a brighter future for Singapore,[87] turned out to be a political nightmare marked by open conflicts, acerbic exchanges and growing animosity between the Singapore-based PAP and the Alliance Party[88] government in Kuala Lumpur. The PAP had led a loose coalition of opposition parties pressing for a "Malaysian Malaysia," demanding equal treatment to be extended to all Malaysians regardless of race or religion. The Malay nationalists interpreted such a call as a challenge to their special rights. Incessant insults and inflammatory speeches played up by *Utusan Melayu,* the UMNO-controlled Malay newspaper, fuelled racial suspicions and sustained ethnic prejudice, leading to the outbreak of two bloodied racial riots between Malays and Chinese, in July and September of 1964. Within less than two years, the relationship between the central government and Singapore was to deteriorate beyond repair, forcing the Malaysian Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman to decide that the best course of action to avoid further bloodshed in Malaysia was

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[86] Ibid., p. 59.

[87] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.,* p. 397.

[88] At that time an alliance of three communal parties, namely, United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC).

for Singapore to leave the battered political union. So it was on 9th August, 1965 that Singapore was ushered out of Malaysia.[89]

3. The Third Period: Post-Colonial Singapore from 1965

3.1 The Challenge of Governing Post-Colonial Singapore

On the morning of 9th August 1965, the radio station in Singapore interrupted its regular programme to announce the separation of Singapore from Malaysia. In a public proclamation, Lee Kuan Yew said that "Singapore shall be forever a sovereign, democratic and independent nation, founded upon the principles of liberty and justice and ever seeking the welfare and happiness of her people in a more just and equal society."[90]

Beyond the bravado and the brave assertion of a young country, the idea of Singapore as an independent republic was an oddity, no matter how noble the values she sought to build upon or how admirable the direction she hoped to move in. It is difficult to find another miniscule island which had declared independence in such an inauspicious manner. Singapore has no natural resources, and the bulk of the water supply required by the people to sustain life had to be purchased from Malaysia, putting Singapore at the mercy of her closest neighbour.[91] It did not help beginning life as an independent country in a volatile and unstable Southeast Asia troubled by growing communist threats, the escalating Vietnam War and Sukarno's adventurous confrontation. The leaders had the unenviable task of finding ways to circumvent the island's limitation as they sought to forge a cohesive society out of a fractious mix of ethnic communities, still smarting from recent racial riots,

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[89] Albert Lau, *A Moment of Anguish*, pp. 161ff.

[90] Lee Kuan Yew, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

[91] Ibid., p. 663.

while having to develop an economically viable and progressive country that would improve the livelihood of the people.[92]

3.1.1 Starting from Scratch

When Singapore became an independent country, the government decided on a representative democracy modelled loosely after the Westminster parliamentary democracy. But unlike Britain the parliamentary system adopted by Singapore is unicameral. Singapore also has a written Constitution which can be amended with at least two-thirds majority in parliament. However, on issues related, for instance, to the transfer of sovereignty, amendments to the Constitution can only be made by two-thirds majority in a national referendum.

Besides nominating a Malay as the first President of Singapore, very early on as an independent state, any lingering doubt about the ruling party's commitment to the rights of the minority groups was assuaged when the government introduced a Presidential Council for Minority Rights with representatives appointed from among leaders of the minority communities. The Council scrutinizes and ensures that legislations and supplementary bills passed by parliament do not discriminate against any race or religion. As a further open commitment to a society that is multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-lingual, Singapore opted for four official languages, namely, Mandarin, English, Tamil and Malay. Probably taking cognizance of the surrounding Malay world, and the importance to keeping alive a language widely used in the region, the Malay language was retained as the national language although it is now not widely used in Singapore. For practical reasons, English continues to be used as the language of administration, science, technology, higher

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[92] There were doubters. Writing in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, David Bonavia says, "The only sensible answer is a fresh accommodation with Malaysia to restore the natural economic relationship ... It is depressing

education, commerce and cross-cultural communication. English is *de facto* the *lingua franca* of the people.

3.1.2 The Making of a Dominant One Party State.

When Singapore became independent, the *Barisan Socialis* was still very much a formidable opposition party with a sizable support from the mainly non-English educated poorer sector of the population. The *Barisan* had won 13 seats in the 1963 general election, securing 33 percent of the votes. Except for two members who had fled to Indonesia in 1963, for fear of being arrested for suspected communist connection, the remaining eleven members of parliament resigned their seats in 1966.[93] The erratic behaviour of a weakened *Barisan* which dismissed Singapore's independence as "phoney," left many observers bewildered. Their decision to boycott parliament and to take to the streets for "extra-parliamentary struggle" against Singapore's "phoney" independence, opened the way for the PAP to dominate the parliament when the PAP captured all the seats vacated by the *Barisan*.

Despite keeping the repressive law allowing for detention without trial, and in spite of introducing other illiberal measures such as the tightening of the labour law in 1966, the legislation of the Employment Act and the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act of 1968 which spelled out the limits of labour unions and their rights to strike, the PAP was able to attract and retain overwhelming support in the four general elections held after independence.[94] New Zealand academic Chris Tremewan, formerly a Youth Secretary with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), attributes PAP's success to the repressive measures which the government had taken against opposition to its rule. It is no compliment when he says that there is no need for the PAP government "to resort to the ballot-stuffing

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to tour the wind-swept empty acres of site-land in Jurong today, and reflect on what it might have been." Quoted in Goh Keng Swee, *The Practice of Economic Growth*, p. 1.

[93] Bellows, *op. cit.*, pp. 96f.

or election violence of weaker governments."[95] He points out that the PAP has harassed the opposition using what he calls "party-state apparatus of control" like "political detention, to suppress all forms of organized dissent outside parliamentary politics."[96] He implies that because of PAP's harassment of the opposition parties, and PAP's ability to "extract political loyalty through welfare provision, notably housing and education",[97] Singaporeans were left with no choice other than to vote for the PAP.

There might be some truth in Tremewan's citicism. However, if the people voted for the ruling party the way they did, it need not be because they were compelled to vote for PAP, as the phrase "extract political loyalty" suggests. Instead of a sinister motive, the reason for voting the PAP might simply be because the thoughtful electorate appreciates the "welfare provision" which Tremewan referred to, unless perhaps Tremewan is saying that "welfare provision" is an effective tool for coercion. The PAP must have done sufficiently well for the electorate to re-elect the same party in 1972, 1976 and 1980, without sending a single opposition member into parliament, despite of the government's undemocratic "apparatus of control," and not because of it.

3.1.3 Ideological Hegemony/Consensus Between the Government and the Governed

A more credible interpretation of the electoral support which legitimized the PAP government is given by sociologist Chua Beng Huat. Drawing from a Gramscian idea of hegemony, he postulates an ideological hegemony/consensus which explains the people's support for the PAP.[98] According to Chua, so long as certain desirable goals are met, the

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[94] Rodan, Garry, *The Political Economy of Singapore's Industrialisation*, pp. 91f. Cf. Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

[95] Tremewan, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

[96] Ibid., p. 155, and also, pp. 163, 164.

[97] Ibid., p. 183.

[98] Chua Beng Huat, "Not Depoliticized but Ideologically Successful: The Public Housing Programme in Singapore," in Ong Jin Hui, et. al., *op. cit.*, pp. 310f. Chua's article is partly a critique of the

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electrate would voluntarily accept some form of interventions or constraints imposed by

the government if the interventions or constraints help to obtain those social goals.[99]

Though he did not use the term, there is a reciprocal relationship between the ruler

and the ruled in Chua's hegemony/consensus nexus. From the perspective of a reciprocal

relationship, hegemony is not strictly speaking a one-sided imposition of will of the

government that expects unquestioned acceptance from a compliant electorate. Nor is the

consensus a blanket approval given by the ruled to the ruler for the government to do what it

pleases. Significantly, Chua adds that the ideological hegemony/consensus cannot be forged

at the level of abstract ideological discourse alone. Abstract ideological discourse might

massage the minds of those who are intellectually inclined, but it is of little interest to the

majority of ordinary people who are more concerned about practical socio-economic well-

being. Ideological hegemony/consensus, so Chua tells us, [100]

cannot be maintained at the level of ideas alone but 'must also be economic'. It must necessarily be supported by

the ruling group's ability to improve the material life of the governed if the extant ideas and values are to retain

ideological currency. Moral leadership of the governing is therefore to a significant extent underwritten by the

leaders' ability to improve the economic well-being of the people. Indeed, the desire for economic growth may

itself be inserted into the ideological system, thereby justifying the need to rearrange existing social structures

and organisations to ensure growth. Subsequent economic success 'validates' and legitimises the ideological

concepts themselves.

"depoliticization" thesis elucidated by political scientist Chan Heng Chee who argues that the present lack of
open confrontational political debate, which was prevalent in the political arena of Singapore in the 1950s and
early 1960s, shows that the government had succeeded in depoliticizing the electorate. There is therefore a
general apathy in politics among the Singapore voters which could have explained the lack of support for
oppositional politics. It is beyond our scope to debate Chan's thesis or to give the detail of Chua's critique
except to note that Chua questions Chan's presupposition that politics has to be overt and confrontational.
Submergence of political discontent or an absence of overt confrontational politics do not necessarily mean
that depoliticization has taken place. Cf. Chan Heng Chee, "Politics in an Administrative State: Where has the
Politics Gone?" in Ong Jin Hui, et. al., *op. cit.*, pp. 294-306

[99] Chua Beng Huat, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*, p. 2.

[100] Ibid., p. 3.

The strength of Chua's hegemony/consensus explanation is that it recognises the voluntary role of the electorate, and their volitional ability to give thoughtful consideration to their choice of who should be empowered to form the government. In a representative democracy, social economic changes require a regular renegotiation for a new level of ideological hegemony/consensus so that what might have been valid contextual factors which elicited the willing support of the populace for the ruling party at a given period of time might not draw the same level of consent and consensus at another time.

3.1.4 New Electorates and Changing Aspiration

The ideological hegemony/consensus between the first generation PAP leadership and the original group of electorate, conjoined initially in the turbulent years after independence, but perhaps taken for granted by the ruling party in latter years, was to be tested in 1981. With the economy doing well, and basic social needs taken care of, a new generation of electorate signalled their desire to have additional voices in the parliament. They were shrewd enough to vote strategically for a limited number of opposition members into parliament without pushing the competent, though increasingly viewed as an arrogant PAP, out of office. An indication of the change of perspective and expectation from a better-educated generation of voters came about in a by-election for the Anson seat. The seat was made vacant in 1981 when the incumbent, Devan Nair, was nominated to be the new President of Singapore. It was supposed to be a safe seat for the PAP. But for the first time since 1965 the PAP lost the by-election which sent J.B Jeyaretnam the leader of the Workers' Party to parliament.

Despite the PAP's displeasure over the loss of the Anson seat, and their sometimes crude warning against voting for the opposition parties, which according to them might scare off potential investors, there was a 12 percent swing of votes away from the PAP in

the 1984 general election which saw Jeyaretnam holding on to his seat at Anson, and Chiam See Tong of the Singapore Democratic Party winning the Potong Pasir seat of the first time. The PAP might still be the dominant party in parliament, but its one-party stranglehold in parliament had been breached since 1981.

3.1.5 Modifying the Political Institutions

Probably because of their desire to hold on to power and in response to changing demands from a new generation of voters, the PAP introduced a number of innovations in the 1980s. The first innovation was the introduction of a new category of Non-Constituency Members of Parliament (NCMP) just before the 1984 general election. This provision allows for up to three NCMPs to represent the opposition voice in the Legislature. In PAP's plan, the NCMP seats are offered to the defeated opposition candidates who have secured the highest number of votes in the general election. The offer can be declined, as the Workers' Party did in 1984, but if it is taken up, the NCMPs who have a voice in parliamentary debate, had to work within certain restrictions. They are not allowed, for instance, to vote on matters related to finance, constitution and confidence.

The second innovation is the concept of Group Representation Constituency (GRC), introduced in 1988. In this scheme, three or more single-member constituencies might be combined to form a larger GRC. Each GRC will have at least three candidates forming a team, one of them has to be a member of the minority race. They would stand for election as a team and be elected *en bloc*. The stated aim of the government for introducing the GRC was to ensure that in a multi-racial society with a predominant Chinese population, minority ethnic groups like the Malays and Indians should not be under-represented in parliament.

The third innovation was the introduction of Nominated Members of Parliament (NMP) in 1989. The NMPs are supposed to be non-partisan voices who can contribute to the

quality of debate in parliament without having to oppose the government for opposition's sake. NMPs are nominated to serve a term of two years, and like the NCMPs they are not allowed to vote on fiscal, constitutional and confidence issues. Potential NMPs are nominated by the public, but the final selection rests with a special committee of elected MPs.

The fourth innovation introduced by the PAP government was to change the process for the appointment of the President. Whereas in the past, the President had been nominated by the cabinet and confirmed by parliament, a White Paper published in 1988 spelt out the need to amend the Constitution for Singapore to have an elected President. Part of the reasons for introducing this amendment was to transform the role of the President from one that was ceremonial to one that is custodial, thus adding an additional layer of checking mechanism into Singapore's political system. The elected President has the custodial responsibility of protecting the national reserves and assets.[101] The Elected President also has the power to prevent any government from appointing friends and family members to sensitive jobs in the civil service and the security forces.[102]

3.1.6 Criticisms against the Political Innovations

As is to be expected, the introduction of the various institutional innovations have attracted criticisms. The NCMP was considered a scheme designed to dampen the desire of the electorate to vote for a limited opposition presence in parliament. It has been speculated that if opposition members can be guaranteed a place in parliament via the NCMP route,

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[101] "On a per capita basis, Singapore's reserves are the highest in the world. Even then they are grossly understated (US$16.9 billion in 1988) because Singapore is said to value its instruments at purchase price rather than current value (for example, gold at US$35 an ounce rather than the current value of approximately US$ 376). Tremewan, *op. cit.*, 174. The total official reserves had increased from S$1,151 million in 1963 to S$107,751 million in 1996. Linda Low, *The Political Economy of a City-State*, p. 138. (As at January 2000, US$1 fetches approximately S$1.70, or 1 Pound is to S$2.65)

then there is no need for voters to worry about not having opposition voices. However, any lingering reservation about the NCMP scheme discouraging Singaporeans from voting for selective opposition members can be easily dispatched by pointing out that since its introduction, it had not stopped discerning electorate from voting into parliament two opposition members in 1984, and others in subsequent elections.

There are serious doubts expressed against the other three innovations as well, namely the NMP, the GRC and the Elected Presidency. Tremewan alleges that the NMP scheme was a "reversion" to a colonial practice that favours the rich and successful.[103] It is said to have brought back a practice of the British imperialist when the Legislative Council was saturated with and dominated by nominated members.

The GRC was said to have been introduced to protect the PAP from losing vulnerable constituencies by combining them with the safe seats.[104] Moreover by insisting that each GRC has to have a team of at least three candidates, and by the 1997 elections it was amended to at least four candidates, opposition parties which already had difficulties finding suitable candidates for the single-member constituency would now be put in greater disadvantage of having to identify additional candidates.[105] The disadvantage for the opposition is further compounded when the ruling party could place an established Minister as an anchor candidate in each GRC to "shield weaker candidates."[106] A more serious critique of the introduction of GRC is offered by Kevin Tan, a constitutional law specialist teaching at the National University of Singapore. He criticises the PAP on two grounds.

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[102] The elected President is also given other responsibilities which we do not have to deal with here. See Tremewan, *op. cit.*, pp. 174f.

[103] Tremewan, *op. cit.*, pp. 171f.

[104] Linda Lim, in Sandhu and Wheatley ed., *op. cit.*, p. 184.

[105] Tremewan, *op. cit.*, pp. 166f.

[106] Philip Jeyaretnam, "Singapore's Social Vices and Individual Virtues" in J.M.Nathan, ed., *In Different Voices: Reflections on Polity and Society,* p. 99

The first is the timing of the amendment to GRC boundary and related to that, the amalgamation of single member constituencies into the GRC without fair warning. He complains that although the PAP with the required majority has the constitutional right to legislate changes and introduce new political institutions like the GRC, the way the PAP had gone about legislating amendments to the Constitution had given the opposition parties insufficient "lead time" to prepare for elections. This, for Tan, is contrary to the "principles of natural justice (which) require that sufficient notice of major changes be given to all parties contesting general elections."[107] But the most problematic aspect of the GRC, for Tan, is that by insisting that each GRC should have at least one minority ethnic candidate, the government is in fact accentuating the ethnic divide.[108] In his view, a multi-racial Singapore should not highlight the race of the candidate, and just as there were candidates from different ethnic groups who were elected into parliament in the past, without the help of the GRC scheme, a multi-racial Singapore should have no problem electing candidates from various communities, on merit and not on the colour of one's skin. Surprisingly for a government which had expressed concern about freak elections, the PAP seems to ignore the likelihood that the GRC scheme, as Tan points out, could bring in a "freak" government with a large majority of parliamentary seats without securing a majority of popular votes.[109]

In spite of criticisms, when we consider the political innovations dispassionately, we might concede that there are some positive features in the various schemes introduced by the PAP government, in as much as there are some valid criticisms, especially those offered by Kevin Tan. However, contrary to what Tremewan says, the NMP scheme is not a "reversion" to a colonial practice and it is disingenuous to equate it with the "nineteenth

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[107] Kevin Y. L. Tan, "Is Singapore's Electoral System in Need of Reform?" J.M. Nathan, ed., *op. cit.,* pp. 110f.

[108] Ibid., p. 112.

[109] Ibid., p. 115.

century concepts of rule by the 'educated' rather than the 'ignorant'."[110] In modern Singapore, the NMPs form an extremely small percentage of the total number of MPs.[111] The NMPs also differ from those who were nominated for office in colonial time in another significant way, and that is, in contemporary Singapore potential NMPs are nominated by the general public and approved by an elected parliament, unlike the colonial practice which saw the unelected colonial administration filling the legislative council with their own nominees.

As for the GRC, demanding that at least one of the candidates should be a member of the minority race is another clear signal that in plural Singapore the interest of the minority has to be protected. If the GRC is a ploy by the ruling party to protect the party from losing vulnerable constituencies besides making it difficult for the opposition to field enough candidates, this ploy has a downside risk for the PAP as well. What the critics of the GRC have not commented on is that if the ruling party loses a GRC, it loses at one go at least four seats to the opposition. In an overwhelmingly Chinese-dominant society which has the numerical strength to send only ethnic Chinese to parliament, the GRC is a unique preferential affirmative action to ensure that the minority groups are represented in an inclusive legislature and that their voices are not muted.

Finally, the custodial role of the elected President should be welcome for the additional checks and balances it provides against possible mismanagement of public funds and misuse of power. Our criticism of the elected President scheme is that candidates can only be drawn from a very narrow pool of people. Strict criteria have been imposed which allow only those with experience as ex-Ministers, former Permanent Secretaries, and Chief

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[110] Tremewan, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

[111] For example, there were only six NMPs in a parliament of eighty-one elected MPs after the 1991 general election.

Executive Officers of government-linked companies or large public companies with multi-million dollars paid-up capital, to stand for election.

Theoretically other citizens could still offer themselves for election even if they failed to meet the stringent qualification spelled out by the Government. There is a parliamentary committee charged with scrutinising all presidential candidates who wish to offer themselves for election, and this committee has the power to grant clearance for candidates with less than the desired executive experience. However, in practice the bias is clearly in favour of the experienced person with proven record at the highest level of management in large establishments and conglomerates.

Critics of the Singapore government, like Tremewan, see the political innovations as additional measures introduced for social control, as well as unfair obstacles to incapacitate the opposition parties. While he may be right, it is not the business of any ruling party anywhere in this world to make things easier for other parties to win elections, though as Kevin Tan has reminded us, the "principles of natural justice" do require that the ruling party does not place the opposition in a crippling disadvantageous position. On balance, we are inclined to take Chua's view that the new political institutions introduced in the 1980s are responses of the ruling party to the changing expectation of the new generation of electorate who are more open to having oppositional voices in parliament, and they [112]

reflect a fundamental change in the perception of the PAP government. Instead of trusting the integrity of political leadership, it now sees the hitherto respectable leadership as a felicitous happenstance. Instead of trusting such good fortune to hold, it now emphasises the need for strong political institutions to hold the leadership in check, so as to better ensure continuity of economic well-being and social stability.

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[112] Ibid., p. 177.

3.2 Social Well-being and the Priority of Economic Development in Singapore

The top priority which exercised the minds of the PAP administration immediately after independence was economic development. The limitation of size, lack of natural resources, a meagre domestic market, and the failure of the Malaysian experiment on which Singapore had pinned her hope for a common market, forced Singapore to revise her economic strategy which had depended heavily on entrepot trade.[113] The man entrusted with the responsibility for reshaping Singapore's economic development was Goh Keng Swee, the brilliant LSE-trained economist.[114]

3.2.1 Export-Oriented Industrialisation

Against the norm of development economics which promoted the Import-Substitution Industrialisation (ISI) strategy adopted by many newly independent countries,[115] Singapore opted for the Export-Oriented Industrialisation (EOI) programme. In many ways Singapore had no choice.[116] The domestic market is too small to attract and sustain home-grown industries for the ISI to make any significant impact on the economic well-being of the country. ISI was also distrusted by Goh because of its tendency to protect inefficiency and reward uncompetitive local monopolies. Goh saw the EOI as the only viable option which would allow Singapore to attract the resources and expertise of Multi-national companies (MNC) for them to set up factories, create jobs, and export their products to the world market. Contrary to popular criticism levelled against MNCs,[117] Goh

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[113] Tilak Doshi and Peter Coclanis, "The Economic Architect: Goh Keng Swee," in Lam Peng Er and Kevin Tan, ed. *op. cit.*, p. 32.

[114] Singapore was also fortunate to have Dutch economist Dr. Albert Winsemius serving as a consultant to the government.

[115] Doshi and Coclanis, *op. cit.*, p. 31. Cf. Gerald Tan, *The Economic Transformation of Asia*, 1997, pp. 200ff.

[116] Gerald Tan, *The Newly Industrializing Countries of Asia*, 1995, pp. 102ff. Cf. Gerald Tan, *op. cit.*, 1997, pp. 227ff.

[117] Doshi and Coclanis, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

recognised that while the MNCs are no charitable organisations, they do provide Singapore with the jobs which the growing number of young Singaporeans needed, and they also brought into Singapore invaluable skills and technologies which Singapore on her own would not have been able to provide.[118]

That the EOI strategy has succeeded in Singapore is now well-documented.[119] It has been the strategy which helped to overcome some unexpected serious economic crises as well. The first test of its efficacy came soon after Singapore's independence when the Wilson government, in 1967, announced their intention to withdraw British forces from Singapore. That decision, which would wipe out 20 percent of Singapore's gross national product and force some 40,000 workers out of a job, threw Singapore into a major economic tailspin.

In 1973 just as Singapore was recovering from the economic impact of the withdrawal of the British forces, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries trebled the price of crude oil, from US$2 per barrel to US$6 per barrel. Singapore like most oil-importing countries suffered a severe problem in her balance of payments. The negative effect of the oil crisis on Singapore could be seen clearly in 1974 when the trade deficit for Singapore rose by 18.4%, while the rate of inflation for the same year shot up to 22%.[120]

Then in mid-1980 Singapore experienced another disastrous economic downturn. The cause had been attributed to an artificial increase in business cost which had outstripped the rate of productivity, brought about by what has been described as the second industrial

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[118] Goh Keng Swee, *The Practice of Economic Growth*, pp. 25f., 59f., and 182f. Cf. Augustine Tan, "Foreign Investment and Multinational Corporations in Developing Countries," in Devan Nair, ed., *Socialism That Works*, pp. 86-96.

[119] Besides Huff, *op. cit.*, pp. 299ff., see also Chia Siow Yue, "The Character and Progress of Industrialization," in Sandhu and Wheatley, et. al., *op. cit.*, pp. 250-279, Gerald Tan, *op. cit.*, 1995, pp. 132ff., and Linda Low, *op. cit.*, 1998.

[120] Gerald Tan, *op. cit.*, 1995, p. 166.

revolution, which saw the salaries of the workers deliberately adjusted upwards between 1979 and 1983.[121] The PAP government had intentionally pushed for the wage adjustment as a way of forcing industries, which had depended on cheap labour, to upgrade their production line and to train their workers for higher-skilled jobs. Unfortunately the cumulative effect of low productivity and rising cost in wages since 1979, plus an unexpected worldwide economic slow-down, saw a considerable number of people losing their jobs in 1985/86 when some businesses had to close and factories shut down.[122]

Twelve years on, in 1997 the economy of Singapore was affected by a sudden collapse of the financial market in East Asia which triggered a massive outflow of funds, forcing a drastic devaluation of currencies in some East Asian countries which had over-expanded and over-borrowed. It is because that region had previously attracted a lot of attention for the outstanding economic successes, touted as the "East Asian Miracle,"[123] that some pundits began to wonder whether the 'miracle' was a 'myth'[124] and whether there was indeed an Asian 'model' for economic development.[125]

The real reason for the East Asian economic collapse is probably a combination of multi-faceted factors which could only be known with greater certainty after the dust

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[121] Ibid., p. 178.

[122] See Gerald Tan, *op. cit.*, 1995, pp. 166ff. He tells us that "In 1985 and 1986, Singapore's GNP growth registered -1.2% and -1.8% respectively, the first time in 20 years that the economy experienced negative GNP growth .... Between 1980 and 1985, manufacturing employment fell by 13% .... Some 90,000 jobs were lost in 1985 alone." Ibid., p. 170. *The Straits Times*, May 25, 1987, p. 17, reported that there was a loss of 102,000 jobs in 1985.

[123] See a book with the same title sponsored by the World Bank and published by Oxford University Press. Also, Jon Woronoff, *Asia's 'Miracle' Economies*, and Gerald Tan, *op. cit.*, 1995.

[124] As early as 1994, Paul Krugman had published an article, "The Myth of Asia's Miracle," in the November/December issue of the Foreign Affairs, which later appeared as chapter 11 in his book, *Pop Internationalism*, pp. 167-187.

[125] For example, Francois Godement, *The Downsizing of Asia*, Callum Henderson, *Asia Falling*, Robert Garran, *Tigers Tamed*, and Victor Mallet, *The Trouble with Tigers*. On the internet, there is a homepage with an extensive compilation of articles from scholarly journals, news magazines and newspapers maintained by Thomas Brister of the University of Virginia. See his http://www.people.virginia.edu/ ~teb7c/asian_economic_crisis_home.htm.

churned up by the economic storm has settled. Nevertheless, it would appear that for most of the affected countries the worst of the 1997 downturn is over. If lessons are to be learned, the financial collapse has re-emphasised the vulnerability of countries exposed to unregulated speculative international financial markets and the need for government "to pursue fiscal and monetary prudence in the face of the growing globalisation and interdependence of economies."[126] One has also to be vigilant against systemic corruptions which contributed to the ease with which some of the economies crashed. That said, while the EOI exposes countries like Singapore to the vacillation of international financial markets and greedy speculators, on balance the EOI strategy has served the Newly Industrialized Economies[127] well. By contrast the ISI which had promised much, in the main had failed to deliver the economic returns which some newly-independent countries had put their faith in. As economist Tilak Doshi and economic historian Peter Coclanis tell us,[128]

By the early 1970s, it was clear that the economic performance of the vast majority of developing countries in Asia and Africa left much to be desired. Poor growth in incomes, widespread poverty, balance of payments crises, inflation and, above all, corruption, characterised many developing countries. The difficulties associated with ISI also became obvious. Protected infant industries failed to mature. Polices [sic] to promote ISI discriminated against export-oriented activities through higher factor costs (as resources flowed to protected sectors), higher-priced intermediate inputs, and less competitive exports. They also introduced a high degree of price distortion, as effective rates of protection varied widely across industries. Most damaging of all, ISI policies often led to the entrenchment of business and labour groups, which committed resources to retaining domestic monopoly privileges rather than to raising productivity and competing for world markets.

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[126] W. Fernandez, "1997: The 5Cs and how they will shape the future," in J. M. Nathan, ed., *In Different Voices: Reflections on Polity and Society*, p. 8.

[127] Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, sometimes referred to as the Four Tigers or Four Dragons of East Asia.

[128] Doshi and Coclanis, *op. cit.*, pp. 31, 32. Cf. *The East Asian Miracle*, p. 3 for a comparative table of GDP growth for 60 countries between 1960-1985.

3.2.2 Virtues, Social Economic Measures and Tripartite Cooperation

In addition to the EOI, the government has adopted a prudent financial practice which encouraged savings and avoided deficit budgeting. Goh Keng Swee, the architect of Singapore's economic strategy, has a Weberian fascination with virtues like prudence. He makes his point when he criticises the delusion of economic planners in some "backward" countries who tried to spend their way out of poverty:[129]

Deluded by the notion that if only they can increase their rate of capital investment, they will increase their growth of national income, development planning authorities in backward countries try to beg, borrow or steal the capital they believe they need. In course of time, the governments accumulate enormous debts and find, to their surprise and dismay, that far from being richer they have, in fact, become poorer. Any small-time grocer in Chinatown can tell you that if you borrow money, unless you intend to abscond, it is prudent to put it to some use which will yield sufficient income to enable you to repay the loan with interest. Somehow or other, this elementary precept of prudence has been considered to be beneath the dignity of economic planners.

Tongue in cheek, in his address to the members of the Malayan Economic Society, he advised them "to throw away all the books published on economic growth since World War II." He went on to suggest that they should "read the essays of Samuel Smiles - his exhortations to thrift, industry, ambition, honesty, perseverence [sic], etc." According to him,[130]

The economic planners (in some "backward" countries) have manifestly failed in their job simply because, I suspect, they have not realized that at the stage of development of their country, the injunctions of Samuel Smiles, however offensively sanctimonious they may be, are more in keeping with the needs of their times and their countries than all the stuff that econometricians are producing.

If prudence, thrift, industry, ambition, honesty, and perseverance are desirable virtues that underpin sustainable economic development, at the practical level the PAP

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[129] Goh Keng Swee, *The Economics of Modernisation*, p. 33.

backed up their economic strategy by setting up agencies like the Economic Development Board (EDB), the Jurong Town Corporation (JTC), and the Development Bank of Singapore (DBS) to court investors, particularly the MNCs. New industrial estates were opened, low-rental factories were offered, bureaucratic procedures minimised and special tax incentives given to investors in return for job creation, opportunities for learning new skills and transference of technologies.[131] In this way, the government accepts a selective form of social market system that encourages free enterprise. Yet it is not afraid to put aside free market purist demand by intervening in the market place and providing for support of externalities such as health services, education and public housing.[132] Furthermore, in contrast to the practice of free market capitalism, the government acquired large expanse of land from private land-owners at prices below market values,[133] and initiated direct investment in industries like housing, telecommunication, marine engineering, airline, and petro-chemicals, which others might not have the resources to manage or were unwilling to risk ploughing substantial start-up capital in a small country with an uncertain future.[134]

The National Trade Union Congress (NTUC), initially under the leadership of PAP stalwart Devan Nair, and working closely with the PAP, moved away from a confrontational strike-prone industrial relationship between employers and employees which characterised the industrial scene in the 1950s and early 1960s, to one that sought to solve problems

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[130] Ibid., p. 35.

[131] Cf. Goh Keng Swee, *The Practice of Economic Growth*, pp. 59f, pp. 182ff, Goh Keng Swee, *The Wealth of East Asian Nations*, pp. 12ff.

[132] Goh Keng Swee, *The Practice of Economic Growth*, pp. 94ff.

[133] The Land Acquisition Ordinance of 1955, amended in 1966, which empowered the government to acquire lands from private owners, has allowed the government to play the role of a corporate "Robin Hood," according to Linda Low in *op. cit.*, p. 180. Taking over vast piece of land made it possible for the government to launch large scale low cost housing projects, and to lease out unused sites with commercial potential at high profit.

[134] Goh Keng Swee, *The Economics of Modernization*, pp. 182ff. Cf. Gerald Tan, *op. cit.*, 1995, p. 70.

through negotiation, consensus-building and arbitration.[135] To help spread benefits to the ordinary working class people, and moving beyond the traditional role of negotiating for wages and job security, the modernised NTUC owns a fleet of taxis, runs a chain of supermarkets, provides child-care programmes, manages an insurance co-operative, builds apartments, and develops family holiday resort centres which are made available to the general public.[136]

Together with the government, the NTUC helped to set up a tripartite National Wages Council (NWC) in 1972 to regulate wage increase.[137] The NWC is made up of representatives from the government, the employers and the unions.[138] Since its inception, it has recommended annual wage guidelines that took into consideration the overall economic health of the country and the prevailing worldwide economic trend. The annual negotiations, held in private and discussion kept confidential to avoid public political posturing, ensured that whatever the level of wages recommended, they would reflect the interest of, and take into account the input from the three parties. Although the NWC's recommendation is not mandatory, whatever recommendations it has made over the years, have in fact been endorsed and adopted by the government and most of the employers.

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[135] Cf., Noeleen Heyzer, "International Production and Social Change: An Analysis of the State, Employment, and Trade Unions in Singapore," in Peter S.J. Chen, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 122.

[136] Cf. Raj Vasil, "Trade Unions," in Sandhu and Wheatley, et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 161.

[137] The function of the NWC, and the issues it had to grapple with, have been discussed in three articles written by its chairperson, Prof. Lim Chong Yah. See his "NWC: Targets and Goals," *Accounting and Business Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (Singapore: July 1997), pp. 165-185; Lim Chong Yah, "NWC: The Politics of Consensus," *Accounting and Business Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (Singapore: July 1977), pp. 187-199; and Lim Chong Yah, "NWC: Issues and Initiatives," *Accounting and Business Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (Singapore: January 1988), pp. 1-24.

[138] Hilton L. Root, *Small Countries, Big Lessons*, pp. 48ff.

3.2.3 Critics of Singapore's Economic Strategy

The government is aware that the EOI strategy inevitably plugged Singapore into the world economic system and therefore exposed Singapore, and the welfare of the workers, to the caprice of the world market. Besides exposing Singapore's economy to the fluctuating fortune of the world market, critics like Tremewan sees a sinister side to Singapore's EOI strategy. He alleges that the economic strategy of Singapore is an alliance between the PAP-state and foreign capital to perpetuate the exploitation of the working class in Singapore. According to Tremewan, this alliance has also extended their exploitation to the surrounding regions when Singapore is used as a base for investments in the neighbouring countries to "skim off the surplus."[139]

Contrary to Tremewan's insinuation, beneficiaries of the economic strategy of the PAP government are not persuaded that the government's economic strategy is necessarily exploitative or anti-labour.[140] It was not long ago when there were more job-applicants than jobs available, and housing meant for many families cramping into a small room in a house where they had to share a kitchen and insanitary toilet facilities with other families. When Singaporeans have seen their social well-being improved considerably since independence, it is not unreasonable for them to accept tolerable trade-offs, such as the stringent labour laws, for a stable society and an enhanced well-being. No political party in a parliamentary democracy can hope to garner sufficient support to form the government, if the people who have the right to vote feel aggrieved and exploited by policies which discriminate against them or undermine the common good. It is therefore unlikely that a regime that is judged

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[139] See, for instance, the second chapter in his book, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-44. Here Tremewan couches his criticism of Singapore's economic strategy in neo-Marxian terms like "skim off the surplus," (p. 35) "securing the surplus," (p. 40) and "rake off the surplus." (p. 41).

[140] It is neither anti-labour or anti-capital, but pro-development says sociologist Tan Ern Ser. See his "Theorizing the Dynamics of Industrial Relations and Trade Unionism: Lessons from the Singapore Case," in Ong Jin Hui, et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 402ff.

exploitative or anti-labour as critics like Tremewan has claimed, would have won more than 60% of the popular votes in successive elections. The accusation of exploitation in neighbouring countries, in connivance with foreign capital, makes sense if we assume that the governments and citizens of those countries were incapable of protecting their own national interest and that tiny Singapore had the leverage to exert influence far beyond her size and economic stature without being taken to task or ostracized.

3.2.4 Measuring Social Economic Well-being and Building a Stakeholding Society

How do we know that a country has done well, and that the social benefits derived from economic successes have been fairly distributed? One common practice is to look at the per capita income of that country. If we use this tool, the per capita income of Singapore had already exceeded those of Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Greece in 1990, and was expected to overtake the per capita incomes of New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom by the mid-1990s.[141] The problem with this uni-dimensional measurement is that it does not show a true picture of the distribution of wealth and figures can be distorted to cover up social injustice.[142]

Other non-monetary tools have to be used as well, to give us a more balanced gauge of the socio-economic well-being of a country. Gerald Tan, for instance, uses a table that measures life expectancy, adult literacy rate, infant mortality rate, ownership of telephone, number of persons per television set, number of persons to a doctor, calorie intake and human development index. In his table, Singapore did well when compared with similar

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[141] Gerald Tan, *op. cit.*, 1995, p. 8.

[142] Gerald Tan, *op. cit.*, 1997, pp. 6f. Cf. Victor Anderson, *Alternative Economic Indicators*, pp. 21ff.

socio-economic indices of seventeen Asian countries, based on statistics compiled in early 1990s.[143]

A life expectancy of 76 years, an adult literacy rate of 92%, a low mortality rate of 5 deaths per 1000 infants, a share of 2 persons to a telephone, 3 persons to a television set, a ratio of one person to 699 doctors, an intake of 3198 calories per person per day, and a high human development index of 87.8, do show that there is a reasonable level of material comfort, health care and education, accessible to the general public.[144]

There is another sense in which we could measure the share of socio-economic benefits among the people of Singapore. Here we have in mind a system of enforced savings which requires all employees to put aside a percentage of their monthly salary into the Central Provident Fund (CPF), matched by monthly contributions from their employers.[145] Savings in the CPF provide assured income support for retirees. Over the years, regulations have been changed to allow CPF savings to be released for financing the purchase of apartments built by the government-run Housing and Development Board (HDB).[146] The scheme was later extended to finance purchase of private properties.

As the economy prospered, the government also introduced other asset-enhancement projects such as the Share Ownership Top-Up Scheme which deposited funds, usually surpluses from current accounts, into the accounts of CPF holders for them to buy

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[143] Gerald Tan, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 21.

[144] Ibid., pp. 20ff. Compare this with the figures provided by Tamney. He relates: "In 1960 there was one doctor for every 2,573 persons; by 1985 the ratio was one doctor for every 972 citizens. In 1960, 13.2 percent of the workforce was unemployed; the figure in 1990 was 1.3 percent. At the time of independence, more than half of the population lived in slums, and only 9 percent lived in subsidized public housing, compared with 85 percent today." Tamney, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

[145] For a fair account of the multi-faceted role of the CPF as an instrument for social security, funding health care, housing, and education, and asset-enhancement in a stakeholders' society, see Linda Low and T.C. Aw, *Housing a Healthy, Educated and Wealthy Nation through the CPF.* Cf. Lester Thurow, *The Future of Capitalism*, p. 108.

[146] Linda Low, *op. cit.*, pp. 179ff.

shares in government-linked companies. The CPF now incorporates and manages Medisave, a saving scheme which can be used for medical treatment either in a government-run hospital or a private hospital, and Medishield, a supplementary health insurance scheme to take care of catastrophic illnesses which require long-term expensive medical care. So that no one is excluded from health care, a Medifund scheme is made available as a fund of last resort for those who are unable to provide for their own health needs.[147]

In many ways, the asset-enhancement projects and the CPF facilitated home-ownership and health care schemes have made Singapore a stakeholding society, long before the term was made popular. The most successful feature of the stakeholding project has been the provision of a range of affordable and well-maintained apartments built by the HDB which now housed more than 85 percent of the total population.[148]

3.3 The Political Ideology of the Ruling Party

Since its founding the party has at various times been described as socialist, democratic socialist, authoritarian, neo-conservative, Confucian, pragmatic, elitist and communitarian.[149] If the variety of political labels and ideologies associated with the PAP are confusing, they do at least suggest that the party refuses to be dogmatically pigeon-holed

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[147] Chris Ham, "Learning from the Tigers: Stakeholder Health Care," in David Gladstone, ed. *How to Pay for Health Care*, pp. 23-29.

[148] Tremewan refers to the housing programme as "working-class barracks," in Tremewan, *op. cit.*, pp. 45ff. He takes a cynical view that the public housing provided by the HDB is part of the government's extensive policing network to spy on and control the population. He considers the CPF home-ownership scheme as an exploitative project to keep the occupiers of HDB apartments indebted to the government. See also his "Welfare and Governance: Public Housing Under Singapore's Party-State," in Roger Goodman, Gordon White and Huck-ju Kwon, ed., *The East Asian Welfare Model*, pp. 77-105.

On the other hand, sociologist Chua Beng Huat sees the evolving Singapore-style public housing (which he compared with the USA models and a model offered by Poland and Hungary) as a successful government project that fosters a stakeholders' society. See Chua Beng Huat, *Political Legitimacy and Housing: Stakeholding in Singapore*.

[149] Cf. Raj K. Vasil, *op. cit.*, pp. 56ff, Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, pp. 109ff, John Clammer, *Singapore: Ideology, Society, Culture*, pp. 159ff, Chua Beng Huat, *op. cit.*, 1995, pp. 9ff, Joseph B. Tamney, *op. cit.*, pp. 57ff, Christopher Lingle, *Singapore's Authoritarian Capitalism*, Thomas J. Bellows, *op. cit.*, pp. 12ff, and Devan Nair, ed., *Socialism That Works*.

into one particular ideology, but it is open to, and has been shaped by, a juxtaposition of ideologies drawn from different sources and given different emphasis at different time.[150]

3.3.1 "Socialism that Works"

One ideology which the PAP has openly associated itself with is socialism. Reflecting its lack of precision in definition, socialism in PAP is used inter-changeably with social democracy and democratic socialism, but not communism. Lee Kuan Yew had described himself as an "unrepentant socialist."[151] Yet his form of socialism departs in a substantial way from the socialism understood and practised in other countries. Under the PAP-styled socialism, there was no nationalisation of the means of production, and it was not the policy of the socialist PAP to levy "penalising taxes"[152] against the rich for redistribution to the poor. Besides, as we have seen, the socialism of the PAP did not stop the government from legislating stringent labour laws to encourage enterprise and curb militant industrial actions, even though the government has acquired land to build affordable houses for the people as a way of re-distributing wealth.[153]

Instead of taking a doctrinaire interpretation of socialism, the leaders of the PAP understood that the long-term well-being of the people depended not on a populist promise of generous subsidies for welfare services or taking an anti-enterprise stance, but to work on sustainable economic growth within a social market framework. As the political scientist Vasil puts it, at the time of independence, "The key question was whether to abide by the

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[150] According to Milne and Mauzy, "the PAP does have a set of ideas, plans and beliefs, drawn from several sources, but these are not traceable to a single, logically consistent, and orthodox dogma." Milne and Mauzy, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

[151] In Han Fook Kwang, et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 388.

[152] Ibid., p. 161.

[153] This and the fact the PAP continued to retain the law which allows detention without trial had not endeared the PAP to the international socialist fraternity. In 1977, under pressure from the radical left membership of the Dutch Labour Party, the PAP resigned from the Socialist International.

socialist dogmas and divide up the existing wealth (or poverty as some would say) of the country to provide for immediate satisfactions, or concentrate on economic expansion and growth, decidedly offering social justice and more to all in the future."[154] The route taken by the PAP was a market socialism that gave priority to sustainable economic development.

3.3.2 Lee and Hayek's Critique of Socialism

In recent years, after guiding Singapore into four decades of unprecedented economic growth and delivering tangible socio-economic benefits to the people, the PAP has been reticent about its association with socialism. Lee Kuan Yew the "unrepentant socialist" has become disillusioned with Fabian socialism.[155] On the other hand, he has veered towards the political right.[156] Just how far the socialist Lee Kuan Yew has moved away from socialism can be seen in his open acceptance of Hayek's analysis of socialism. He tells us that he has found in Hayek's critique of socialism[157]

what I had long felt but was unable to express, namely the unwisdom of powerful intellects, including Albert Einstein, when they believed that a powerful brain can devise a better system and bring about more 'social justice' than what historical evolution, or economic Darwinism, has been able to work out for centuries.

Odd as it might seem, while he accepts Hayek's criticism of socialism and denunciation of social justice, he has not given up socialism nor is he devaluing social justice. What he has rejected, he tells us, is the radical left and their demand for equality of rewards. His socialism stresses more on the equality of opportunities than the equality of outcome, which he says is not viable in the long run for it penalises the industrious and

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[154] Vasil, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

[155] In Han Fook Kwang, et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 159.

[156] See Tamney's discussion of PAP's neo-conservativist inclination, in Tamney, *op. cit.*, pp. 173ff.

[157] Han Fook Kwang, et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 159. The work cited by Lee was Hayek's *Fatal Conceit.*

rewards the unproductive.[158] For someone who has openly commended Hayek's critique of socialism and social justice, Lee Kuan Yew is clearly not a Hayekian in politics or economics in substantive ways. It is easy to locate a major difference between Lee Kuan Yew's socialism and Hayekian libertarian ideology. Hayekian ideology privileges individual freedom and is critical of state intervention in the market place. Lee Kuan Yew's PAP is critical of unbridled individualism and although the government rejects any form of unsustainable welfare programmes that drain the treasury, encourage dependency and discourage enterprise, it has nevertheless selectively intervened in the market place to provide for some form of social securities for the people.

3.3.3 Religious Knowledge, Confucian Ethics and Asian Values

The economic success which the PAP has brought about and the social well-being it has generated, have given the PAP leadership a predicament. There are signs of shifting expectations, among younger Singaporeans, opened up by universal education and intensified by their exposure to the values and worldviews made accessible by travel, the entertainment world, international media, the internet and trade.

In an attempt to discourage Singaporeans from adopting the pervasive American liberal lifestyle, value-system and abrasive political culture, the PAP began to reframe its ideological discourse in terms of a rejection of the so-called Western values and the promotion of some form of Confucian or Asian values.[159] The West, understood mainly as

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[158] Ibid., p. 161.

[159] Two critical voices opposing American cultural imperialism are Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia and the Japanese politician/writer Shintaro Ishihara. See their book, *The Voice of Asia*. In this book, Christian values are unfortunately lumped together with the negative liberal values (seen as the permissive moral, drug culture, excessive individualism, cultural arrogance) of the West. From their writing, it is clear that although the target of their displeasure was directed against Western cultural hegemony, they revealed a deep-rooted distrust of the Christian faith as well.

For a less acerbic approach to the debate, see Tommy Koh, *The Quest for World Order*, and Kishore Mahbubani, *Can Asians Think?* For criticisms of the so-called Asian Values, see Christopher Lingle, *op. cit.*,

American, has been portrayed as having decadent moral values, with the people and the press too pre-occupied with defending individual rights.

It is obvious that their portrayal of the West is simplistic and borders on caricature. But that serves the PAP well. It was a way of conveying a concern, in stark language, to capture the attention of the ordinary people, although the simplistic propaganda approach has invited criticism from thoughtful Singaporeans.[160]

In a concerted attempt to ward off the influence of a value system that promotes excessive individualism, religious studies and moral education were re-introduced into the school curricula as examination subjects. Senior secondary school students were allowed to choose either Bible Knowledge, Islamic Religious Knowledge, Buddhist Studies, Hindu Studies, Sikh Studies, Study of World Religions or Confucian ethics for their moral education class. Although there were seven options available to the students, it was clear that Confucian ethics was given government imprimatur. Eight leading Confucian scholars were invited to Singapore to give lectures, conduct seminars and advise the government on curriculum development in 1982.[161] A major conference was also convened to explore Confucian teachings and their relevance for a modern Asia.[162]

However in 1990, the experiment with Religious Knowledge was abandoned when it became clear that religious sessions were used for proselytisation and propagation of

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1996, pp. 37-60; Amartya Sen, "Human Rights and Asian Values" http://www.sintercom.org/polinfo/ polessays/ sen.html; Chris Patten, *East and West*, pp. 146-172, and Victor Mallet, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-55. For a neutral comment on the issue see, John Gray, *False Dawn*, p. 167.

[160] For example, Chua Beng Huat, *op. cit.*, 1995, pp. 147ff.

[161] The eight scholars were Tu Wei Ming, James Hsiung, Wu Yuan-li, Tong Te-kong, Wu Chen-tsou, Yu Ying-shih, Chin Chen-oi, and Hsu Cho-yun.

[162] For instance, an international conference was held in 1987 on the theme, "Confucian Ethics and the Modernisation of Industrial Asia."

faith.[163] To the disappointment of the government, despite Confucian ethics being widely promoted and given well-publicised government support, only a small percentage of students opted for that subject.[164] Besides, other problems related to the promotion of Confucian ethics had also begun to surface. The bias for Confucian ethics roused suspicion among members of the minority ethnic groups who do not have any affinity to the Confucian tradition.

There was another problem with the promotion of Confucian ethics. Confucianism in its long and chequered history had been misused as a political ideology by despotic governments to legitimise their hold on power. The abuse of politicised Confucianism[165] in ancient China led thoughtful Singaporeans to ask whether the promotion of Confucian thoughts might not have been a PAP agenda to ensure political longevity. Perhaps because of the disquiet among non-Chinese, and the scepticism of PAP's intention in propagating Confucian values, the political discourse shifted away from an overtly Confucian ethics to the generalised and ill-defined Asian values, a term carrying too grandiose a claim, since Asia is too wide and too diverse a continent for there to be an all-encompassing system of Asian values. As the debate continued on the merit of the so-called Asian values,[166] the government initiated a search for a National Ideology, later rephrased as Shared Values, in which the people of Singapore regardless of their ethnic or religious backgrounds could identify with and embrace. In the ensuing discussion on shared values, a word used widely

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[163] Cf. Tamney, *op. cit.*, p. 27. The government expressed concern that proselytisation might threaten religious harmony. There was also fear that religious studies might feed fundamentalism and religious conflict.

[164] Ibid., p. 40.

[165] When Confucianism is politicised, or when Confucianism becomes a political ideology, that "ideology forces people into obedience for no reason other than to protect the interest of the small minority. Such a system is coercive. I would be the first to reject that kind of project." So advises Prof. Tu, in Tu Wei Ming, *Confucian Ethics Today*, p. 23.

[166] Prof. Tommy Koh carried the debate to the international press and a series of lectures at Stanford University. See Mallet, *op. cit.*, p. 292, and Tommy Koh, *The United States and East Asia*, p. 114.

to capture the essence of the Asian values which Singapore is supposed to expound is communitarian.[167]

3.3.4 Communitarian Virtues: National Pledge and Shared Values

Since it is difficult to determine the dominant ideology of the PAP government, a problem complicated by imprecise definition of terms, perhaps the best way to get a sense of the PAP's ideological commitment is to look at two statements[168] drawn up by the PAP government which encapsulates for us the core of the PAP's belief and values. The Singapore Pledge reads:

"We, the citizens of Singapore,

pledge ourselves as one united people,

regardless of race, language or religion,

to build a democratic society,

based on justice and equality,

so as to achieve happiness, prosperity

and progress for our nation."

The second statement is a summary of what the PAP government has distilled as representing the common values shared by the different ethnic groups in Singapore. It says:

Nation before community and society above self.

Family as the basic unit of society.

Community support and respect for the individual.

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[167] See Chua Beng Huat, *op. cit.*, 1995, for a discussion of communitarianism in Singapore. Cf. Lingle, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

[168] Ng Poey Siong, ed. *Singapore Facts and Pictures 1996*, p. 5.

Consensus, not conflict.

Racial and religious harmony.

This list of five Shared Values is said to represent the common ground on which the people of diverse religious and racial traditions can build on and work together, in fostering the common good. The communitarian nature of the Shared Values, plus the value of social harmony and reciprocity at different levels of social relationship, are emphasised, though the needs of the individuals are not ignored. While it may be expected of the people to place the interest of the country above group pride, and while it is expected of the citizens to place the interest of society above self-interest, the emphasis on the interest of the wider community is balanced by the affirmation that there should be "Community support and respect for the individual." By stating "respect for the individual," the author of the Shared Values appears to have deliberately avoided the language of rights.

3.4 Church and Politics in Post-Colonial Singapore

Christians have always been in the minority in Singapore, just as they are in the minority throughout the whole of South and East Asia, except for the Philippines and East Timor. Yet Christians in Singapore are members of a privileged minority. In the main they are better educated than the average Singaporean, enjoying a relatively larger share of the national wealth and occupying positions of power and influence in the civil service, business world and reputable professions.[169] In a recent study of religious trends in

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[169] The privileged position of Christians did not escape the press. Picking on a report on religious trends in Singapore, based on the 1980 population census, the local newspaper carried a headline "Christians dominate high pay, well-educated group." *The Straits Times*, April 13, 1989. A few days later, an editorial in *The Straits Times*, April 19, 1989, opined that "The latest report from the study gave Singaporeans some figures to mull over and pointed out that Christians 'exert an influence greater than the proportion of the population they represent'. The ministry's first report in February was even more precise in its warning when it said: 'There will be serious implications when religious differences, which already overlap to some extent with ethnic boundaries, coincide with social class differences. Religious strife may then become, at the same time, an issue of class conflict." See Bobby E.K. Sng and You Poh Seng, *Religious Trends in Singapore*, pp. 58f., and Clammer, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

Singapore based on statistics compiled in the 1990 population census, sociologists Eddie Kuo and Tong Chee Kiong made this observation:[170]

.... Christianity has gained strength in both the number and proportion of followers since 1920s. It is a religion associated with those of higher socio-economic status (in terms of education, income, and occupation). It is a religion with considerable social and political influence, disproportionate to its number of less than 13 per cent in the population. Perceived as a religion of modernity and prestige, Christianity will continue to attract converts, especially among the young and better educated. Judging from the trend between 1980 and 1990, its growth will continue to be slow but steady.

Kuo and Tong overstate the political influence of Christians in Singapore, though they are right in acknowledging the significance of social influence exerted by the churches, even if Clammer, another sociologist, seems to think that social outreach in Singapore is nothing more than "a kind of auxilliary [sic] social work or ...a preoccupation with that most liberal of ideas 'community'."[171]

Since the arrival of churches, Christians have often pioneered social services and provided care to people in need and in so doing, helping to enrich community life and enhance community well-being. What they did was not an adjunct to the demand of the Gospel, as "auxiliary" might imply, but integral to the demand of the Christian faith. Yet, despite the evident benefits which the churches have contributed to the welfare of Singapore, Christian social engagement is not always appreciated. There have been times in

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The 1990 population census showed the percentage of Christians in Singapore had increased to 12.5%. See Eddie C.Y. Kuo and Tong Chee Kiong, *Religion in Singapore*, (Singapore: Census of Population, 1990 Monograph no. 2, 1995), p. 5. There was also a marked increase in the percentage share of Christians who had received a university education, from 35.8% in 1980 to 39.4% in 1990. (Ibid., p. 20) The percentage of Buddhists and Taoists who had gone to a university dropped to 15.1% and 7.4% respectively. (Ibid., p. 20) Not surprisingly, Christians continued to command good jobs that draw higher salaries, (Ibid., p. 22) and although 85% of the total population now live in apartments built by the HDB, the majority of the owners of the more expensive private flats, condominiums, and houses are Christians. (Ibid., p. 23).

[170] Ibid., p. 58.

[171] Clammer, *op. cit.*, pp. 163f.

the past when the government had found certain expression of Christian social concerns anathema to their political agenda and vision.[172]

We shall offer two examples of Christian engagements in the post-colonial political arena which put the churches at loggerheads with the government. By citing these two examples, we are trying to spell out the problems which Christians face in doing Christian social ethics in a plural post-colonial society, analyse certain pitfalls which well-intentioned Christians should avoid, and at the same time critique the government's response. The first example is the work of the Jurong Industrial Mission (JIM), a largely Protestant ecumenical project, and the other is the work of a group of mainly Roman Catholics who were accused of being a part of a Marxist Conspiracy against the government.

3.4.1 Jurong Industrial Mission

Started in 1966 as the Singapore Industrial Mission, JIM sought to minister to the needs of people working and living in the newly opened Jurong Industrial Estate.[173] JIM was launched a year after Singapore's traumatic exit from Malaysia, at a time of socio-economic uncertainty when Singapore was struggling to stand on her own feet as an independent island republic. The JIM committee was made up of laity and clergy from different churches associated with the Council of Churches of Malaysia and Singapore. They shared a common concern for the welfare of workers and residents in new industrial and housing estates, notably at Jurong, a former swamp reclaimed by the government and redeveloped as a massive showpiece site for factories and apartments. In 1968, Mr. Ronald Fujiyoshi, a Japanese American, experienced in community organisation and industrial mission, was

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[172] The mistaken view of the government, one that is commonly held by politicians, [Cf. William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, p. 29] is that "true religion expresses itself publicly never through politics but only through charity." See Tamney, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

[173] Nyce, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Nyce talks about the Singapore Industrial Mission (SIM), an earlier name for JIM.

invited to head JIM. However, while JIM achieved some successes in their community outreach,[174] the political pressure applied by JIM, using the highly confrontational community organization method,[175] increasingly generated ill-feelings between JIM and the government.[176] The fact that JIM had an American missionary running the project, in an era when nationalists were still highly suspicious of neo-colonial agenda, did not endear the organisation to the government who saw them as arrogant agitators out to harass the civil servants and trying to subvert the government's embryonic economic project by causing labour unrest.[177]

Looking back, it is to the credit of Christians in Singapore who were once again, in the forefront, pioneering social outreach to disaffected workers through JIM. Yet it was unfortunate that when the staff adopted the American community organization approach to problem-solving, without considering contextual difference between America and Singapore, they chose an adversarial approach which put them at odds not just with the government but also with members of their own management committee and the local

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[174] Ibid., p. 59.

[175] See Saul Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*.

[176] The committee members of the JIM seemed to have understood this point better than Ron Fujiyoshi and the staff trained by him, among them Vincent Cheng who was later to be involved with what the government conveniently labelled as a "Marxist conspiracy." By September 1971, there was sign of strain in the relationship between the staff and committee members of JIM. In the minutes of a meeting of JIM held on 1.9.71, there was a lengthy record which showed the concerns of the committee members regarding the methods used by the staff in their social outreach programmes and methods. Perhaps in response to the staff's impatient and confrontational methods, the committee advised them that "the Government and Trade Unions must be given time to sort out some of the problems relating to workers at Jurong." The then chairperson of JIM, Mr. Edwin Chan reported that he had also met with Ron Fujiyoshi, and that "Mr. Fujiyoshi had agreed that C.O. (community organisation) in Singapore need not be patterned along the style of Saul Alinsky..." Despite what was discussed at the 1.9.71 meeting, concern over the methods adopted by the staff was brought up again at another meeting held on 21.9.71. It was reported that "The chairman called attention to the different point of view of staff and committee. There was much discussion. The committee said that they all agree that they should stand for the oppressed but may differ with the staff on the methods used." JIM's minutes are kept with the National Council of Churches in Singapore.

[177] It was much later in 1987 after the government had arrested 16 so-called Marxist conspirators (see next section) that the government revealed that the JIM and some of the staff, among them Vincent Cheng and volunteer, Tan Wah Piow, had been watched by the Special Branch. A Ministry of Home Affairs statement would say that Cheng and Tan knew each other since early 1970 "when they were both involved in the Jurong

churches which had initially supported them. They should have known that their abrasive approach would only irritate a battle-hardened government determined to solve Singapore's larger socio-economic problems without allowing outsiders to derail their political agenda or undermine what they had resolved to do for the general well-being of Singapore. Under pressure from the government[178] and with little support from the churches, Fujiyoshi quit, and JIM, an industrial mission project with commendable aims and some notable achievements,[179] was disbanded.[180]

3.4.2 The Roman Catholic Church and the so-called Marxist Conspiracy

Singapore in the 1980s had made impressive strides in her social-economic development despite a major economic down-turn in mid-1980. The economic boom of the late 1970s had already drawn in large numbers of Malaysians to Singapore to work in the factories scattered around the island. By 1985 Singapore had begun to attract other workers from 'non-traditional sources' like Thailand to work in the construction sites. A large number of Filipinas came over from the Philippines to work as child-minders and maids.

The welfare of foreign workers and the working conditions of local low-paid workers began to attract the attention of Christians, especially from the Justice and Peace Commission of the Roman Catholic Church. A number of Roman Catholic lay-workers and

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Industrial Mission (JIM), purportedly to promote workers welfare but which was used by leftists, Maoists, and Marxists to stir up industrial unrest in the Jurong factories." *The Straits Times*, May 28, 1987, p. 11.

[178] The minutes of the JIM committee meeting held on 20.8.71 reported on a meeting between three representatives of JIM and Mr. S.R. Nathan, the acting Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs on 19.8.71. Mr. Nathan had expressed concern that community projects could be "abused by some agitators" and that JIM should work with and seek support from the MP of Jurong and the appropriate government ministries and agencies working at Jurong. It was also reported that Ron Fujiyoshi had given notice of his desire to leave JIM.

[179] Ibid., p. 59. Nyce was generous with his positive assessment of the work of Ron Fujiyoshi, ignoring the abrasive approach adopted by Fujiyoshi, and the negative response the approach had engendered.

[180] The minutes of a meeting of JIM held on 15.11.72 recorded the decision of the committee to close the JIM "with effect from 31st December 1972." The reasons given were 1) lack of funds, 2) lack of tangible results,

young professionals supported by sympathetic priests started to draw attention to the plight of some maids and workers. They also began to critique the market-driven economic system of Singapore, and the ill-effects which such a system might have brought to the people, especially the under-class who were expected to work long hours with inadequate break and compensation.

Led by former Roman Catholic seminarian Vincent Cheng,[181] who used to work with Ron Fujiyoshi at JIM, but now informed and influenced by Latin American and Filipino liberation theologies, young Roman Catholic activists and their supporters offered neo-marxist criticism of the government in Church publications and study groups. They also set up a centre, partly financed by the CCA,[182] to provide refuge for maids who needed shelter from abusive employers. Their neo-marxist critique roused the ire of the government who had unhappy experience with the MCP. Clearly not familiar with the subtlety of theological reflection, and the variety of liberation theologies,[183] the PAP government pointed to what they considered as Marxist vocabulary employed by the group,[184] and alleged that the methods used by the Roman Catholic social activists were similar to the agitation and indoctrination methods of the MCP and their united front organisations.[185] The government initially detained sixteen persons on 21 May, 1987 without trial, under the

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3) "JIM had acquired a bad image amongst the R.A., the trade unions and the government and was therefore ineffective." And 4) "lack of communication and solidarity between staff and committee ..."

[181] He was described as "a 40-year-old Marxist who is a full-time Catholic lay worker." *The Straits Times*, May 27, 1987, p. 14.

[182] Ron O'Grady, *Banished*, p. 83.

[183] For example, the simplistic attempt by Rajaratnam, a former Minister for Foreign Affairs, to explain liberation theology as if there is only one uniform understanding of this school of theology, led O'Grady of the CCA to ridicule that "Rajaratnam is still in the kindergarten when it comes to understanding theology." Ibid., p. 46.

[184] S. Dhanabalan, Foreign Affairs Minister and a devout Christian, was quoted as saying that "The kind of statements quoted by the government statement were not just those on helping the poor. The kind of phrases used were Marxist phrases." *The Straits Times*, June 2, 1987. Cf. O'Grady, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

[185] See for example the view expressed by S. Rajaratnam quoted in Ron O'Grady, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

dreaded Internal Security Act, and accused them of being involved in a Marxist Conspiracy to overthrow the government.[186] Six more people were detained on 20 June.[187]

On 27 May, 1987, the Straits Times carried the headline: "Marxist plot uncovered" with the subtext reading, "16 held last week involved in conspiracy to overthrow the Govt., says ministry." Besides the front page report, three other pages were devoted to articles about this alleged conspiracy to depose the government.[188] A Ministry of Home Affairs press release on 28 May 1987 explained what the government perceived the so-called "Marxist conspirators" were doing against Singapore.[189]

(They) targeted their attacks against Singapore's economic system and industrial policies. In their articles, they adopted familiar communist arguments to denounce the existing capitalist system as 'unjust', 'exploitative' and 'repressive', distort the working and living conditions of workers, and exaggerate the disparities between the upper- and lower-income groups. In the 15 Sep 85 issue of the 'Catholic News', Vincent Cheng alleged 'wrongful beating up of workers by the police' and went on to suggest that the 'poor are never born poor, they are made poor' by the existing system ...[Other] articles attacked the role of the MNCs in our economic prosperity .... No mention was made of the MNCs providing employment and bringing new ideas and technology. Instead, the articles adopting the communist line, denounced MNCs for allegedly exploiting the people and bringing misery to the country. With such distortions, it is only a matter of time before industrial strife will resurface.

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[186] See Francis T. Seow, *To Catch a Tartar*, pp. 67ff. The main character, Vincent Cheng was accused of linking up with Tan Wah Piow, a former university student leader and one-time colleague in JIM but now exiled in England, in a Marxist plot to depose the government. This is a charge denied by Tan. See Tan Wah Piow, see his, *Let the People Judge*.

[187] O'Grady, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

[188] *The Straits Times*, May 27, 1987, pp. 14, 15, and 16. The paper printed a statement released by the Ministry of Home Affairs which warned, among other things, that "Singapore now has to contend with new hybrid pro-communist types who draw their ideological inspiration not from Maoism and Marxist-Leninism, but also from the ideas of contemporary militant leftists in the West. They augment traditional CPM (Communist Party of Malaya, used to be called MCP) tactics with new techniques and methods, using the Catholic church and religious organisations. This marks a new phase in the unceasing communist efforts to subvert the existing system of government and to seize power in Singapore."

[189] Quoted in Tremewan, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

Hard as they might have tried, the explanation given by the government for the arrest of the so-called Marxist conspirators was considered unconvincing by discerning Singaporeans. One does not have to be a communist to denounce the exploitations of MNCs or to use terms like "unjust," "exploitative" and "repressive." It did not help when the propaganda machine of the government, aided by a government-controlled television station and a PAP-sympathetic press,[190] worked over-time to give an one-sided view that attempted to rationalise the internment of the sixteen social activists without offering space for considered response from those who disagree with the allegation of a Marxist plot, said to be led by Vincent Cheng, and orchestrated by Tan Wah Piow, an exiled ex-student leader based in England.

3.4.3 Silencing the Priests and Expelling the CCA

There were other casualties when the government acted against the "Marxist conspirators." The Roman Catholic Archbishop Gregory Yong was called up by Lee Kuan Yew and was told that the church should not be involved in politics. He was shown a copy of Vincent Cheng's 'confession' written while in detention without trial. A few days after Archbishop Yong's meeting with the Prime Minister, four Roman Catholic priests who were named by the government for their involvement in politics and were closely associated with the "Marxist" group, resigned.[191] They also gave up their responsibilities in various Church-related agencies.[192]

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[190] Over a period of a few months, the Straits Times continued to carry reports, from the government's perspective, of the so-called 'Marxist conspiracy." The state-owned television station also showed a pre-recorded interview with Vincent Cheng who had 'confessed' to being involved in the 'Marxist conspiracy.' Friends of the detainees set up an "Emergency Committee on Human Rights in Singapore," based in New Zealand, to provide update and information on the detainees. The committee maintained a website rallying support for the detainees and releasing news on the plight of the detainees, information which the media in Singapore did not carry. See http://www.pactok.net/docs/singapore/ txt_1/spore_txt/shra_txt/upd1.htm.

[191] O'Grady, op. cit., p. 39.

[192] The Straits Times, June 5, 1987.

Outside the Roman Catholic Church, there was another fall-out from the so-called "Marxist conspiracy." CCA based in Singapore since 1974, was summarily expelled from the country. The government accused the CCA for supporting the prime suspect, Vincent Cheng, and for using Singapore as a base to promote radical leftist politics and to advocate Marxist inspired liberation theologies through its programmes and publications.[193] The office of the CCA was closed by the government on 30 December, 1987 and the expatriate staff deported.

3.4.4 The PAP, Religious Groups and the Religious Harmony Bill

The detention of the "Marxists conspirators" and the expulsion of the CCA should be seen against the background of one particular event in late 1986. The PAP was apparently caught unprepared by widespread reaction of Muslims in Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia and Singapore to an official visit of President Chaim Herzog of Israel to Singapore in November 1986. Muslims in Singapore, mainly the Malay population, joined fellow Indo-Malayan Muslims in the neighbouring countries to protest against Singapore for hosting an Israeli President. Protesters took to the streets to denounce Singapore's close tie with the Israelis, a relationship forged in the late 1960s when Israeli military experts were enlisted to help train Singapore soldiers.

The extent of protest against the Israeli visit involving Singaporean Malays once again raised the spectre of how easy it is for religion to be exploited to disrupt the peace and destroy societal well-being. It also highlighted Singapore's vulnerability to Islamic agitation and pressure from her immediate neighbours. O'Grady, formerly of CCA, suggests that the "greatest single threat" to the social well-being of Singapore might come from disenchanted

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[193] The expulsion of CCA and CCA's response to the Singapore government's allegation of its support for Vincent Cheng and involvement in the politics of Singapore is documented in O'Grady, *op. cit.*. Cf. Tamney, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

and disenfranchised Muslims and the "possibility of a Malay/Moslem [sic] uprising drawing in the (Indo-Malayan Islamic) neighbouring countries."[194] According to O'Grady, the detention of Christian activists and the expulsion of the "expendable" CCA, were perhaps measures taken by the government to calm the ruffled feelings of the Muslim population.

There is another plausible explanation. The government had uncovered a plot by certain militant Muslims bent on creating social unrest. The widespread demonstration within Singapore and around the neighbouring countries against the Israeli visit had perhaps made it politically suicidal for the government to act against the leaders of an obscure militant Islamic group planning to incite violence. Since the emotional temperature heightened by President Herzog's visit was still explosive, it is not unreasonable to suggest that to protect themselves from an Islamic backlash and to give them a cushion to neutralise possible accusation of unfair treatment of Muslims, the government deliberately chose to act against the so-called "Marxist conspirators" first. Christians are after all a minority, and Singapore is not surrounded by large Christian neighbours for the government to be too bothered about possible protest from churches in distant lands.

About a week after the government announced the arrest of the so-called "Marxist conspirators," and after the press had been fed, almost on a daily basis, with all manner of exhortations against religious groups getting involved in the politics of multi-religious Singapore, on 4 June, 1987, readers of the Straits Times were drawn to the headline, "Four detained for race-riot rumours." The report mentioned that the four had in fact been detained earlier, though the news of their detention had been embargoed. They were members a Malay pugilistic group said to be "actively preparing for clashes."[195]

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194 O'Grady, *op. cit.*, pp. 26f.

195 *The Straits Times*, June 4, 1987.

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No matter how we might read the unfolding drama and the timing of the arrests, by acting against both the Catholic group and the Malay pugilists, the PAP was in fact sending a signal that the leaders would not flinch from their responsibility of taking on any challenge posed by any person who, or any religious group which, might be tempted to exploit religion to incite ill-feelings and cause social unrest. To prevent religious enmity and to avert racial or religious violence, the re-elected government pushed for and proceeded with the controversial legislation of the Religious Harmony Bill in 1990. According to a White Paper published on 26 December 1989, the new law would empower the government to[196]

act promptly and effectively against persons whose actions or words threaten this (religious) harmony. When someone deliberately incites his congregation to hatred of another religious group, the Minister can prohibit him from repeating such inflammatory or provocative statements. If he violates this Order, he will be prosecuted in a Court of law to be subject to a fine or jail sentence.

The proposed law would take to task anyone accused of [197]

a. Causing feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility or prejudicing the maintenance of harmony between religious groups;

b. Carrying out activities to promote a political cause, or a cause of any political party while, or under the guise of, propagating or practising any religious belief;

c. Carrying out subversive activities under the guise of propagating or practising any religious belief; or

d. Exciting disaffection against the President or the Government of Singapore.

Though it is commendable to protect religious harmony, the weakness of the new law is that at a critical level, the government has failed to understand that in the context of a religious community that nurtures faith and transmits virtues, the doctrine that forms lives

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[196] Ibid., p. 92.

[197] O'Grady, *op. cit.*, 92.

and guides behaviour cannot be defined by parliamentary legislation. When there is a fundamental conflict between the belief of a religious group and a particular law of the nation that seeks to regulate moral behaviour, no devout Christian, Buddhist, Taoist or Muslim would betray his/her religious conviction to appease the demand of the state law. How can a Christian, for example, stay silent if there is widespread injustice? There is another concern. Just as the government is worried that irresponsible people might exploit religions to further their political ambitions, our fear is that the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Law could also be abused by irresponsible politicians to silence their critics, under the guise of protecting religious harmony.

Conclusion

From what we have discussed and the questions we have raised, it is clear that any Christian social ethic which seeks to address and grapple with the socio-economic challenges in a plural society like post-colonial Singapore, will have to take into consideration certain contextual factors peculiar to the island republic. 1) It is a prosperous small island placed in the middle of a relatively poor but resource-rich region. 2) It is a small Chinese-dominated society surrounded by two large Indo-Malayan-dominated neighbours. 3) While it is Chinese-dominated, Singapore is a multi-religious society, whereas the Indo-Malayan-dominated neighbours are predominantly Islamic. 4) Christians are in the minority, but they are the privileged minority. 5) Christianity may have attracted the better educated, but it is still viewed by many as a religion of the West. 6) Singapore's economic well-being is plugged into the world market, yet the country is wary of the concomitant exposure to libertarian philosophy of excessive individualism. 7) Post-colonial Singapore may be a modern city-state, but it is still undergirded by, and is proud of, the values derived from her rich ancient Asian traditions. 8) There may be peace and order in

Singapore, nevertheless recent history has taught Singapore that harmonious living in a multi-racial and multi-religious society cannot be taken for granted.

Chapter Two

An Appropriate Christian Social Ethic for Singapore

Part Two of this thesis will examine, in detail, the social theology of Ronald H. Preston, interacting with the issues raised by other scholars and theologians. The task of this short chapter is to present a preliminary explanation of why we judge Preston's social theology to offer the promise of congenial resources from which we can adapt and develop an appropriate contextualized Christian social ethic for a plural post-colonial Singapore.

1. The Need for a Contextual Christian Social Ethic

It is clear from the historical survey of Singapore that the Church lacks a Christian social ethic that is responsive to the contextual concerns of that city-state. There is a recognizable need for a contextual Christian social ethic that would allow Christians to speak with integrity, both as Christians and as citizens who are not ashamed of their faith or their Asian heritage, and contribute to the common good of Singaporean society. This need for an appropriate contextualized Christian social ethic is evident when we consider the two failed attempts by Christian groups which sought to engage in the politics of post-colonial Singapore.[1] Some of the problems with the failed experiments can be attributed to the failure of the activists to heed the contextual concerns of Singapore when they adopted an open confrontational approach, instead of exploring other culture-sensitive options available to them. Had the activists been culture-sensitive and culture-sensible, they would have realised that in an Asian context, permeated by a Confucian culture that expects respect for elders and legitimate authority, confrontation can be interpreted as showing disrespect. It is

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[1] See section 3.4 in Chapter One.

unlikely that a properly constituted authority will back down from such a confrontation. No elected government will permit anyone or any group, particularly a religious group associated with the West and with a relatively insignificant number of followers, to challenge the authority of the government openly. When the two groups used confrontational approaches, with JIM led by an American expatriate adopting the abrasive method of Saul Alinsky, and the Catholic group adopting a confrontational liberationist critique of the government, they inevitably invited robust responses. Both JIM and the Catholic group could have expressed their valid Christian concerns for the well-being of the poor and marginalised without being abrasive and without being too presumptuous about the correct way in which complex societal problems can be resolved.

2. Two Schools of Theology

In the course of our assessment of Preston's social theology, at the appropriate junctures, we will take into account the contributions and critiques of other scholars, particularly from Liberation Theologians and Ecclesiological Ethicists. At the outset we should acknowledge that Liberation Theologies and Ecclesiological Ethics have positive contributions to make to a social ethic which we hope to develop for the Singapore context. We will, in fact, draw from these two schools additional theological resources to supplement what we find deficient in Preston's social theology. Nevertheless, although Liberation Theologies and Ecclesiological Ethics have positive contributions to make to our search for a contextual social ethic, at a critical level there are crucial problems, both theological and tactical, which rule them out as inappropriate for a small, multi-religious and insecure Singapore. We can spell out straightaway, in summary, the reasons why we consider the Liberationist approach and the Ecclesiological Ethics problematic for Singapore.

2.1 Liberation Theologies.[2]

2.1.1   A major weakness of Liberation Theologies, for a country like Singapore which has first hand experience of communist insurgency, is that their association with, and dependence on Marxist social analysis, political posturing and militant rhetoric, make their approach anathema not just to Singapore, but also to Singapore's immediate neighbours, still carrying the scars of communist-inspired industrial strife and armed struggle against communist uprising. Even if Singapore is open to Marxist revival, the larger Islamic neighbours would be wary of any hint of communist infiltration and subversion.

2.1.2   Liberation Theologies tend to read situations as an unambiguous conflict between the oppressors and the oppressed, when in reality, the distinction is not so clear at all. In the real world, there is usually a plurality of social groups with competing interests and overlapping demands. Not every government is pro-rich. Not every successful business is exploitative and evil.

2.1.3   Perhaps because of a tendency to see the world as a contest between the oppressed and the oppressors, Liberation Theologians from the Two-Thirds World and their sympathisers, have often blamed the former colonial masters from the West for the social ills of their countries. We grant that Western colonial powers are in many ways responsible for plundering the riches of their former colonies. But the world has moved on, and it does the theologians from the younger churches no credit if they continue to harp on the crimes, both real and imagined, of past colonial masters without accepting that many of the present problems have been caused by avarice, incompetent governments and widespread corruption.

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[2] For Preston's critique of Liberation Theologies, see Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 151ff, *Church and Society*, pp. 90ff., and *Future*, pp. 183ff. Ian Linden, *Liberation Theology: Come of Age?* is a recent sympathetic appraisal of Liberation Theologies.

2.1.4 A fundamental problem with Liberation Theologies is that they have not been able to provide a satisfactory answer to the question, What are the people liberated for? Liberation Theologians have not convinced us that what follows after liberation is not the introduction of another oppressive regime or the disintegration of civil society.

2.1.5 The failure of communist economic systems and the opening up of countries like Vietnam and China to some form of market economy raise serious questions about the validity of Marxist economics favoured by Liberation Theologians. It also casts doubt on the viability of their critique of the market economy.

2.2 Ecclesiological Ethics

2.2.1 Theologians like John Milbank, Stanley Hauerwas, William Willimon and John Yoder in recent years have argued for the Church to dissociate herself from any direct political engagement in the world at large. Their concern is that the Church in the West has lost ground to the so-called Constantinian forces and the Enlightenment project. There is now a renewed call for the Church in the West to be the Church, and to be the peculiar tradition-transmitting community that nurtures virtues and builds character; tasks which the Church in the West had neglected if not compromised. Hauerwas, the most prolific writer among these theologians, asserts that "the first social ethical task of the church is to be the church - the servant community. Such a claim may well sound self-serving until we remember that what makes the church the church is its faithful manifestation of the peaceable kingdom in the world. As such the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic."[3]

2.2.2 Hauerwas rejects the label that his social ethics is sectarian. In a robust defence against an accusation levelled by James Gustafson, he retorts, "What I find

disconcerting about that claim [that he is a sectarian] is the assumption that the one making the charge has the argumentative high ground, so that the burden of proof is on me. But where is the generally agreed criterion for the use of this term, 'sectarian'?"[4] It is obvious that Ernst Troeltsch's typology of 'Church' and 'Sect' is an inadequate classificatory tool to apply to Hauerwas' project. Hauerwas is also not happy to have his Ecclesiological Ethics labelled as "Christ against Culture" in H. Richard Niebuhr's typology. To be sectarian or "Christ against Culture" gives the negative impression of a deliberate withdrawal from the wider world into the safe confine of familiar ground. Withdrawal is not what Hauerwas advocates, though he concedes that the Church is surrounded by what he terms "constantinian power" and "liberal universalism".[5]

2.2.3 Despite his protest, even if we accept his rejection of being labelled a sectarian, there is no escaping that when he uses terms like the Church being surrounded, there is a sense of siege-mentality in his Ecclesiological Ethics. His idea of the Church is definitely more inward-looking and segregated than he might be prepared to concede. Moreover his version of an ecclesiocentric approach shows little appreciation of the grace of God at work in the life of people of other faiths and in the social structures outside the Church. Yet to be fair to him, we have to be wary of courting with and accepting the agenda of the wider world which undermines the teachings of the Church. His suspicion of the Enlightenment project is therefore understandable. In fact, he has pointed out that the liberal philosophy ushered in by the Enlightenment has subtly consigned religion to the private sphere, a move which he rejects. The irony, however, is that in calling the church to be the church, and in rejecting direct involvement of the Church in the public square, Hauerwas

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[3] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 99.

[4] Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, p. 7. Cf. Hauerwas, *After Christendom?*, p. 16.

[5] Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom?*, p. 18.

has given an additional lifeline to the liberal agenda by opening the back door for the privatization of religion.

2.2.4   When a Church is judged to have lost her identity and vision, it is understandable that attempts will be made to develop a theology to restore what she has lost. Yet Christians outside the Euro-North American domains do not necessarily share the same level of anxiety that one finds in Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* and Hauerwas' *After Christendom*? Christians in Asia, for example, have no history of an unfragmented moral world where the Church informed by Greek philosophies, particularly Aristotelian conceptual tools, held sway in dictating moral values and the curriculum for the cultivation of virtues. There is something dubious about the assumption that the Church before the Enlightenment was a homogenous unified Church.[6] To borrow MacIntyre's Augustinian metaphor, the Barbarians are with us. But that is nothing new, though we would loathe to describe non-Christian presence and non-Aristotelian traditions as Barbaric. The point to make is that fragmentation and diversity of traditions did not appear at the dawn of Enlightenment. Enlightenment might have accentuated the difference. Nevertheless, the diversity of traditions has always been there, and we cannot presume that God is not there with them. Neither can we presume that traditions other than the particular variety of Christianity which Milbank advocates are necessarily violent.[7] Furthermore, why should the Aristotelian language be the favoured conceptual tool for articulating the Christian faith and vision?

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[6] See Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice*, pp. 115-118. Cf. Malcolm Brown, "How Can we Do Theology in Public Today?" in M. Brown and Peter Sedgwick, eds., *Putting Theology to Work*, p. 27.

[7] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 262. His assumption that other than Christianity and perhaps Judaism, "all other myths, or narrative traditions, affirm or barely conceal an original primordial violence," has been described as a dubious claim by Jean Porter, in her *Natural and Divine Law*, p, 301. She cites the essay by Ninian Smart, "Hinduism" in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 7-14, to show that the "original primordial violence" cannot be applied to classical Hinduism. We might add that it cannot be applied to certain classical Taoist traditions as well.

2.2.5 While there is genuine fear among certain theologians that the Church in the West has been Constantinized, we should remember that in many ways the Church in East Asia is still going through a pre-Constantinian stage, and so the dispute about the Church being compromised by Constantinian powers is not an issue that demands attention. The Church is East Asia has not been converted by the State, neither has the Church laid claim to the throne or the seat of government.

2.2.6 In the context of Singapore, where the Church is still young and in many ways vibrant, there is no urgency for the Church to push for a social theology which seems interested in purifying herself, preoccupied with rediscovering and stressing her peculiar identity and creating an artificial religious ghetto. In any case the deliberate portrayal of Christians as "Resident Aliens"[8] as Willimon and Hauerwas have strongly argued and which Richard Neuhaus endorses,[9] will in fact be counter-productive in a plural Asian society like Singapore. It cannot be overemphasized that the idea of "Resident Aliens" when pressed too hard will confirm once again to the already suspicious and sceptical populace that Christianity is indeed a foreign religion.

3. The Promise of Preston's Social Theology

The strength of Preston's social theology is that while it draws on the rich theological traditions represented by theologians like William Temple and Reinhold Niebuhr, it is very much informed by a doctrine of creation that recognizes the grace of God at work in every sphere and social structure of human life. Preston's social theology, as we will see, takes seriously the plural world in which we share with people of other faiths and those with no religious belief. He accepts that while there might be diversity of views in our

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[8] W. Willimon and S. Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens.*

[9] R.J. Neuhaus, in George Weigel and Robert Royal, eds., *Building the Free Society*, p. xviii.

fragmented world, the fragmentation is not irreparable or fatal. There are values which the multi-faith and multi-racial community shares in common. In a world that is prone to conflict and violence, his social theology provides the resource and stamina for Christians to work with others in our search for consensus and the common good, even if such consensus is at times provisional. We will show that Preston's social theology does not ignore the plight and problem of the poor, or evade the political and economic issues of the world. Instead it allows for, and in fact encourages active Christian participation in the public square, in fostering human flourishing. Though much criticized, the middle-axiom approach to decision-making favoured by Preston reminds Christians not to claim too much in spheres where they lack expertise or on complex issues where there are conflicting claims, not just between Christians and others, but also among Christians.

Preston's social theology appreciates the ambiguities of life and is distrustful of any easy answers to the complex problems of the world. Though there is a place for radical or even revolutionary response to social injustice, as we will find out, yet such a response is rarely required. In that sense Preston's social theology approaches the challenges of social issues in a constructive-critical spirit without being pretentious or unnecessarily abrasive.

4. Supplementary Theological Resources

By saying that Preston's social theology holds promise for an appropriate social ethic for a plural Singapore, we are not suggesting that it is enough for us to depend solely on Preston's works. Preston's social theology is not without its problems. There are deficiencies and these will be identified when we assess his social ethics. It is in the area where we detect certain deficiencies that we will have to look elsewhere for support. For example, despite the problems which Ecclesiological Ethics presents for the Singaporean context, much can still be retrieved from theologians like Hauerwas regarding the integrity

of the Gospel, the importance of Christian witness, church life, character formation and the cultivation of virtues. And from Liberation Theologies, we learn what it is to be conscienticized with a passionate commitment to the plight of the poor and powerless. They have also alerted us to the forces of structural evil, and the need for a hermeneutics of suspicion. It must be said that Preston does not neglect these concerns. In many ways, in response to the critiques of Ecclesiological Ethicists and Liberation Theologians, he has readily affirmed such concerns, and openly promotes, for example, the use of a hermeneutics of suspicion. What he has not done, nevertheless, is to give sufficient emphasis to these vital aspects of Christian social ethics which we think are valuable components of what should be an appropriate Christian social ethic for Singapore.

5. The Task Ahead

Our task, in Part Two of this thesis, is to set out our case for Christian social engagement in the Singapore's political arena, and to argue for an appropriate contextual Christian social ethic adapted critically from the works of R.H. Preston with supplementary resources incorporated from other theologians. The appropriate contextualized Christian social ethic should be one that is responsible and responsive to the Gospel and the peculiarity of a plural post-colonial Singapore for it to contribute to enriching the life of the Church and the overall social well-being of the city-state.

Part Two

In the next six chapters, we will offer a critical assessment of Preston's social theology as it deals with plurality, politics, and economics. We will also examine the middle-axiom method favoured by him. Seen as a whole, Part Two is an attempt to build a cumulative case for a Christian social ethic for Singapore, adapted critically from the social theology of Preston. We will point out the relevant aspects which might benefit Singapore and the deficiencies which might need to be remedied by other theological resources.

Chapter Three

The Social Ethics of Ronald H. Preston

Having considered the plural context of Singapore and the multifarious challenges the Singaporean Christian minority have to face, we will now extrapolate from the works of Ronald H. Preston[1] a Christian social ethic which will serve as an appropriate model for Christian witness and social engagement in Singapore. Preston has been described as "the leading Christian social ethicist in Britain,"[2] and according to Professor David Brown of Durham University, "no person in England has made a more sustained and substantial contribution to the field of Christian social ethics in the post-war period than Ronald Preston."[3]

Preston studied at the London School of Economics, where he was taught by R.H Tawney, a man whom he admired and continued to keep in touch long after graduating with a B.Sc. in economics in 1935.[4] Besides Tawney, William Temple and Reinhold Niebuhr were to exert great influence on him and his social theology. Before his appointment as the first Samuel Ferguson Professor of Social and Pastoral Theology at Manchester University in 1970, he was the Canon Theologian of the Cathedral at Manchester from 1957-71. In his younger days, he had worked as a full-time staff with the Student Christian Movement and during the war years, he served a stint as a priest at St. John's Park, in "one of the most

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[1] For a biographical sketch of Ronald H. Preston, see John Atherton, "Profile: Ronald Preston: Ecumenical Theologian of the Modern World," Epworth Review, vol. 22, no. 2, 1995, p. 23-32.

[2] John Atherton, *Christianity and the Market*, p. 172.

[3] In his review of Preston's *Confusions in Christian Social Ethics*, in vol. 9, no. 1, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, p. 109.

[4] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 3, and Preston, *Persistence*, p. viii.

disadvantaged parishes in Sheffield."[5] In his life time, Preston has witnessed the 1929 collapse of the Wall Street stock exchange, two world wars, the dismembering of the British Empire, the humiliation of the American armies at the hands of Vietnamese forces, the unprecedented spread of communism, the unexpected failure of the Soviet experiment, the emerging voices of the younger vibrant churches, the phenomenal growth and power of multi-national companies, the unstoppable technological revolutions, genetic engineering, mass destruction of the environment, and widespread poverty in a world of plenty. His works, mainly written and compiled after his retirement as an university don in 1981, reflect his interest in the events which he has witnessed and the social ethical issues such changes and events raised for the Church.[6]

Needless to say, it is not desirable nor is it our intention to adopt every aspect of Preston's social theology for Singapore. We have to be mindful that, though Preston[7] has been involved with the World Council of Churches (WCC), the primary context in which Preston has worked out his theology and the issues which preoccupy his mind are understandably peculiar to where he is located, and that is the Euro-North American world which has a long history of Christian presence and influence, even if the majority of contemporary Europeans have lost interest in the Church. What we will do is to assess his works in a critical-constructive manner, rejecting what might be unsuitable, and building on what might be worth pursuing and adapting. Clearly our focal point is the writings of Preston. Yet our study of his works will be done, not in a vacuum, but by interacting with the works of, for example, Liberation Theologians, Feminist Theologians, and others like

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[5] Atherton, *Profile*, p. 26.

[6] Preston, "Looking back on the 20th Century: Christian Ethics," in *Expository Times*, October 1999, p. 4.

[7] "I am a white, elderly, ordained priest of the Church of England, wholly English in my antecedents and career, though laced with a lifetime's concern for, and involvement in the ecumenical movement." Preston, *Explorations*, p. 145. Cf. Preston, *Expository Times*, October 1999, p. 4.

William Temple, Jacques Maritain, Reinhold Niebuhr, Stanley Hauerwas, John Rawls and F.A. Hayek.

We will begin by examining the basic theological framework that informs Preston's social theology. This will be done in two parts. One in this chapter and the other in the next.

1. Basic Theological Framework (1)

Every Christian social ethicist works within a theological framework that informs and guides the ethicist's theological reflection and social engagement. Some of them spell it out in sufficient detail.[8] Many of them,[9] however, do not tell us what their theological framework might be, not necessarily because they do not have any theological frame of reference, but more likely because they do not see the need to provide a detailed systematic treatment of their framework in one place. Preston is one such ethicist who does not offer us a detailed and systematic treatment of his theological framework.

Although Preston has not given us a detailed exposition of his theological framework, he has nevertheless left hints of what might constitute his theological frame of reference and this can be found in many inter-related words employed by him in his books. In *Religion and the Persistence of Capitalism*, for instance, he uses the word "orientation" when he declares that "everyone has a basic orientation, explicit or implicit[10], through which he interprets the basic 'facts' of life. Mine is the Judaeo-Christian one."[11] In the same book, he uses another word "considerations" to point to his theological framework for social

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[8] For example, Joseph L. Allen, *Love and Conflict*, Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, and Philip Wogaman, *A Christian Method of Moral Judgment.*

[9] We can think of Stanley Hauerwas, David Hollenbach, and Duncan Forrester.

[10] Or "avowed" and "unavowed," in Preston *Explorations*, 1981, p. 46, and "open or unavowed" Preston *Church and Society*, p. 72.

[11] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 2.

ethics. The choice of words changes in his other books. He talks about "intellectual map,"

and "frame of reference," in *Explorations in Theology 9* where he intimates that,[12]

It is the task of the Christian to show that his frame of reference makes the best sense of life as we

know it in living it. This means relating it critically and constructively to other frames of reference

and, more important, thinking theologically about the different spheres of human life in a way which

respects their autonomy and allows them to react reciprocally with theology.

He then refers to "basic beliefs"[13] in *Church and Society in the Late Twentieth Century*;

"basic orientation,"[14] "considerations"[15] and "criteria"[16] in *The Future of Christian Ethics*;

and in *Religion and the Ambiguities of Capitalism*, he refers to "insights of fundamental

importance"[17] and "Christian insights."[18]

If we have to give a summary of Preston's theological framework, we could

describe straightaway that his framework is trinitarian. He reveals as much in a credal

statement that refers to the "roots of Christian social ethic" when he affirms that

(i) God who as creator is actively involved in the world in nature and history, where human beings

made in his 'image' are to be found and who are intended by him for eternal life with him and one

another in him; (ii) God the redeemer or restorer who has brought into being a community - the

church - of those who are being radically renewed in responding to his kingly rule, and having become

aware through Jesus the Christ of what is the divine plan for mankind are joyfully responding to it;

(iii) God the sanctifier or strengthener who does not leave himself without some witness in the heart of

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[12] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 46.

[13] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 72.

[14] Preston, *Future*, p. 8.

[15] Ibid., p. 140. He explains on the same page and in his footnote no. 2, p. 267, that the sense in which he uses words like "considerations" and "criteria" to refer to basic theological foundation or framework, is the same as what Philip Wogaman has in mind when he refers to theological "presumptions."

[16] Ibid., p. 142.

[17] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 102.

[18] Ibid., p. 107.

every person in every land. The whole activity of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - towards the whole world is to humanize it; to make it a sphere where true humanity flourishes.[19]

As a part of his trinitarian belief, we could also say that, befitting his Anglican heritage, his theological framework is incarnational, although in his critique of Tawney's moral theology he expresses the need for one's theological framework to be both incarnational and eschatological.[20] At one point he even garners the full spectrum of the "classical division of Christian theology", namely, Creation, Fall and Original Sin, the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God, the Priority of Grace, the Church, the Sacraments, and the Last Things, to show how Christian doctrine can be brought to bear on politics.[21] On another occasion, in his commentary on the political philosophy of the New Right, he declares that his theological considerations include his belief in the equality of human beings "in the sight of God",[22] a "preferential option for the poor",[23] and the "corruptions and sins in human life".[24]

How then are we to make sense of Preston's dispersed references to a wide range of theological considerations and his credal summation? In the absence of strict rules for us to adopt in formulating theological frame of reference, we will try to make sense of Preston's theological framework, as it informs his social ethics, by organizing it under the following themes and in the following sequence. For the rest of this chapter we will consider, 1) the Person-in-Community, 2) Original Sin and Original Righteousness, and 3) Equality, Love and Justice. In the next chapter, which is a continuation of Preston's theological framework,

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[19] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 135.

[20] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 110.

[21] Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 118, 119.

[22] Preston, *Future*, p. 140.

[23] Ibid., p. 141.

[24] Ibid., p. 141.

we will look at the themes of Natural Law, Common Good, and the Orders of Creation. It should be apparent that running through these themes is an awareness of the loving presence of God and the sustaining presence of God's grace in the whole creation. And if there is a major theme that holds all the whole theological framework together, it is Preston's reliance on the doctrine of creation.

1.1 The Person-in-Community

What we are looking at, in this section, is Christian anthropology. Preston, following the traditional teaching of *imago dei*, affirms the uniqueness of women and men as God's crowning creation and vicegerents. Every person, as God's unique creation, has a common equality before God. And as Preston explains it, it is a common equality that "is far more significant than the differences between (women and men) in sex, physique, intelligence or skills."[25] The moral implication of this God-endowed uniqueness means that human beings are to be loved and respected and no person should be abused or exploited.

Yet it is not enough to accept the uniqueness of the human being, important though this is for Preston's social ethics, without also considering other critical aspects of human nature. Failure to take into account human inclination to sin and human inter-relatedness, for example, will distort our understanding of human character. We will treat the subject of sin in another section. What we will present shortly is the cumulative case offered by Preston for a deeper theological understanding of human nature that places human uniqueness in the context of human relationship and community life.

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[25] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 118.

1.1.1 Biblical Teachings on Human Inter-relatedness

Preston has often questioned the validity of drawing direct lessons from the Bible to solve complex problems.[26] Even though he harbours strong reservation about the adequacy of relying on the Bible for direct teachings on ethical issues, he nevertheless accepts that when the Bible is interpreted responsibly, employing the critical hermeneutical tools available to us, it can yield certain broad support for social ethics. He acknowledges, for example, that scriptures do attest to the importance of community life and human inter-relatedness. He sees in the Old Testament God's dealing with the Israelites as a community whom God had chosen to be his people. It is clear that the various covenants made between God and the Israelites at the different stages of Israel's turbulent history were not made for the exclusive benefit of an individual, but for the well-being of the people called by God.

In the New Testament, Jesus' open invitation for people to join him and the Kingdom of God is an invitation to become members of a re-constituted covenant community. Preston also notes that Paul's frequent use of "in Christ" is a reference that identifies Christian membership in the new community ushered in by Christ.[27] Elsewhere in the New Testament, the importance of strengthening the corporate life of the new covenant community is reinforced by Paul's pastoral advice for Christians "to love one another," "to bear one another's burdens," "to encourage one another," and "to build up one another."[28]

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[26] See e.g., Preston, *Explorations*, p. 61, and his chapter on "The Bible, Doctrine and Economic Issues" in Preston, *Future*, pp. 95-109. His reluctance to use the Bible for direct ethical lessons has been questioned by Donald Hay and Nigel Biggar in "The Bible, Christian Ethics and the Provision of Social Security," *Studies in Christian Ethics*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1994, pp. 43-64. That article elicited a response from Preston, reasserting his reservation about the usefulness of drawing direct lessons from the Bible to attend to the complicated issues of our modern world. See his reply in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1995, pp. 92-95.

[27] Preston, *Future*, p. 174.

[28] So Preston says, "The Greek New Testament is full of *syn*-words, stressing the togetherness of Christians with Christ and with one another." Preston, *Persistence*, p. 70.

Even Peter reminds Christians of their new-found status as "a chosen people; a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God."[29]

Preston is aware that certain theologians like Moltmann, Meeks, and Leonardo Boff[30] have formulated their cases for understanding the character of God and human inter-relatedness from a social trinitarian perspective. Nevertheless, he is suspicious of a trinitarian construal of society,[31] and he suggests that instead of mustering a social trinitarian formulation, the Christian idea of *Koinonia*[32] offers a less convoluted, yet sufficient theological support for Christians to develop a social ethic that both recognizes and advances human solidarity and community life.

Apart from the general examples just cited, there is one particular phrase which Preston is fond of quoting to demonstrate his case for understanding the social character of the humankind, and that is, "Freely you have received, freely give".[33] He sees this advice, on one hand, as furnishing the basic motive for Christians who have "freely received" God's grace to avail themselves of the cultivation of character "within the Christian community, with the aim of growing together towards our full maturity in Christ."[34] On the other hand, to give freely is to open ourselves not just to the present time or to the Christian community

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[29] Or someone close to Peter, if we take the view that the two letters bearing his name were not written by him. The quotation is taken from 1 Peter 2:9.

[30] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist*, and Leonardo Boff, *The Trinity and Society*.

[31] The trinitarian language, Preston reminds us, evolved over a period of time. It was deployed by the early church to make sense of their monotheistic belief. (Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 104.) But the recent "revival of a 'social' doctrine of the Trinity, stressing a quasi-social unit of what gets to being thought of as a society ...." has left him bemused. He wondered, "What has happened? We search for an analogy from human life to apply to God and then derive back from it a pattern for society, as if a new source of illumination had been discerned." (Ibid., p. 105). See also, Preston, *Confusions*, p. 176. If the trinitarian language presents a problem for Preston, one could ask Preston why he continues to use the traditional and controversial language of "Original Sin" in his social theology? Preston seems to have rejected the trinitarian formulation too hastily.

[32] Cf. Preston, *Confusions*, pp. 8, 15, 34, 170, 177, 182.

[33] Matthew 10:8. Cf. Preston, *Future*, pp. 9, 46, and Preston, in *Expository Times*, October 1999, p. 4.

[34] Preston, *Future*, p. 9.

which we belong, but also to the future, accepting the challenges and tackling the issues which the future may bring, both within and outside the Christian community.

This understanding of opening ourselves to God's grace, in the act of receiving and giving, is important to Preston for two reasons. Firstly he seems to be responding directly to recent calls by Hauerwas,[35] and other theologians,[36] for the Church to reclaim her central role in character formation and Christian witness. He shows that in some ways, he shares Hauerwas' concern that the Christian community is a character-forming community nurtured by the Story of Jesus Christ and the tradition it has engendered. Nevertheless, without playing down the primary importance of character formation shaped by the Christian Narrative, he distances himself from Hauerwas by refusing to accept that we have to concentrate on the cultivation of character within the Church alone. Since Preston's social ethics is also informed by an underlying doctrine of creation and a strong sense of God's grace at work in the created orders, it is to be expected that, apart from the Christian community, the "community of giving and receiving"[37] must include our shared membership in the wider world around us. With such recognition of the grace of God at work in the world, it is understandable that Preston should encourage unhindered Christian participation in contributing to the well-being of the "communities of greater mutuality in giving and receiving."[38]

1.1.2 Conditioning and Determining Factors

We have seen that Preston's Christian anthropology has broad support from doctrinal and biblical teachings for human sociality and inter-relatedness in the context of

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[35] Preston mentions Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom.*

[36] Notably, John Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, and John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory.*

[37] Preston, *Ambiguities,* p. 64.

[38] Preston, *Future*, p. 219. Cf. Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 101.

the Christian community and social structures. Yet even without depending on biblical or doctrinal teachings, it is evident from general observation that while a person may be a member of a basic community, that person, at the same time, is also a member of other significant overlapping communities, within which relationships are formed and values transmitted through reciprocal "receiving and giving."

Establishing that human beings are persons-in-community however raises a serious question about the socializing effect of community life on human freedom. Preston acknowledges that though it is in the immediate community and other significant social structures that a person's life is initially shaped, those factors that shape a person's life are, what he calls, "conditioning factors."[39] He takes care to point out that the social forces at work at every stage of a person's life, within different social structures, have the effect of "conditioning," but not "determining" a person's character and world view. Understandably, he refuses to use "determining factors" to describe those social factors that influence a person's life. He deliberately uses "conditioning factors" to explain the socializing effects which a community has on the person.

This differentiation is crucial for Preston because by refusing to use the term "determining factors" he is rejecting the fatalistic conclusion of hard social determinism.[40] Human beings, created in God's image, can still rise above themselves and the factors which might have shaped their lives. For this reason, Preston adds that although a person may be

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[39] Preston, *Future*, pp. 49, 168f

[40] Sociologists have usually worked on the assumptions that humankind are "by their nature, social beings," and that "Individuals are, for the most part, socially determined." Assumptions like these can be found in D. Stanley Eitzena and M. B. Zinn's *In Conflict and Order*, pp. 2ff. Though they use the term "socially determined," they also took care to say that they do not accept "a total social determinism," or "hard" determinism, as identified by Preston (*Persistence*, p. 170). They would, I am sure, agree with Preston's differentiation between "conditioning factors" and "determining factors" to distance themselves from advocates of 'hard' determinism. According to them, "While the members of society are shaped by their social environment, they also change that environment. Human beings are the *shapers* of society as well as the *shapees*." (Eitzena and Zinn's, p. 4)

affected by the melange of social "conditioning factors" there will come a time, when that person is able to critique, in a critical-reciprocal manner, the social structures and the values they represents. This happens in maturity; more so in those moments when one discovers, and is prompted by, the enabling gift of transcendence[41] inherent in every human being.

1.1.3 Against Possessive Individualism

Preston's theological emphasis of locating the person within the context of the community should also be seen against the backdrop of a larger disenchantment with, and reaction against a post-Enlightenment Western world that has a propensity to embrace individualistic values which promote and sustain a liberal ideology of "possessive individualism."[42] Again, here Preston is not alone in his critique of the liberal ideology of individualism. As we have indicated, in different ways and adopting an approach that stresses the particularity of the Church and the central role of the Christian Narrative in character formation, Hauerwas' critique of the liberal democracies represents one formidable reaction against, and critique of, liberal individualistic ideology.[43] Besides theologians, there are other critics, among them sociologists like Amitai Etzioni[44] and philosophers like Charles Taylor,[45] Alasdair MacIntyre,[46] John Macmurray[47] and Jacques

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[41] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 25. And in the same book on page 42 Preston says, "In maturity we are able at least partially to transcend these structures, to evaluate them (for they are all ambiguous), and to ask ourselves how far they need reform, and how we should use what influence we possess to reform them." Preston does not say so here, but our ability to transcend is part of our being human, and in a sense it is God's gift which is not totally dependent on one's maturity, if by maturity one thinks in terms of maturity that comes with age.

[42] A term favoured by Preston, but coined by C.B. Macpherson. Cf. Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 69ff.

[43] Additional examples, Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, and *After Christendom*? And with William Willimon, *Resident Aliens*.

[44] Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community*.

[45] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

[46] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

[47] John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*. This is in fact the second volume of his Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of Glasgow in 1953 and 1954.

Maritain.[48] Both Maritain and Macmurray, but more so Maritain than Macmurray, have influenced Preston's construal of the "person-in-community."[49] This influence can be seen in another of Preston's deliberate choices of word and his preference for the term 'person' over 'individual,'[50] in his social ethics. Furthermore, while Preston's idea of "person-in-community" may have scriptural support and doctrinal backing, the phrase "person-in-community" is not borrowed from the Bible or extricated directly from any traditional doctrine. Following William Temple, it is adopted from the works of the French moral philosopher, Jacques Maritain. In his introduction to the reissue of Temple's *Christianity and Social Order*, Preston reveals [51]

From basic Christian beliefs about God and man he (Temple) draws what he calls primary and secondary principles. The primary one amounts to respect for persons, or rather the person-in-community, because of the inherently social character of man. With Jacques Maritain he draws a sharp distinction between the person and the individual, and influenced by them I have for a long time striven to banish the term individual from my Christian vocabulary.

1.1.4 The Person and the Individual

Since Preston has openly declared his indebtedness to Maritain, and since he has not offered any nuanced elucidation of the difference "between the person and the individual", we will look to Maritain for an explanation of what it means when he speaks of the "individual" and the "person." Maritain, we should note, works from a Thomist philosophical tradition. It is from his Thomist background that he offers what he sees as a neglected metaphysical reading of the human as encompassing the individual and the

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[48] Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism*, and Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*.

[49] Occasionally, Preston uses "persons-in-relation" cf. Macmurray.

[50] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 61. In a footnote on p. 169, he explains, "'Individual' suggests a replaceable unit, 'person' what is unique." This explanation is repeated in *Ambiguities*, p. 64.

[51] Reprinted in Preston, *Explorations*, pp. 82f.

personal. In his *Person and the Common Good,* Maritain maintains that each human being

has a personal dimension and an individualist dimension; the personality and the

individuality. These two dimensions are "two poles," the material and the spiritual, working

within the person. Individuality, described as the "shadow of personality"[52] tends to move

towards what he terms as the material, while personality tends to move towards the spiritual,

the source of "liberty and bountifulness."[53] For Maritain, the two metaphysical properties of

human beings, that is the individuality and the personality, must not be seen as separate

entities. "There is not in me one reality, called my individual, and another reality, called my

person. One and the same reality is, in a certain sense an individual, and another sense, a

person."[54] So in a person's freedom to act as a moral agent,[55]

his action can follow the bent either of personality or of material individuality. If the development

occurs in the direction of material individuality, it will be orientated towards the detestable ego whose

law is *to grasp* or absorb for itself. At the same time personality, as such, will tend to be adulterated

and to dissolve. But if the development occurs in the direction of spiritual personality, man will be

orientated towards the generous self of the heroes and saints.

The person is not a solitary creature. Maritain stresses that the person, while a

unique creation with a freedom and dignity derived from being made in the image of God,[56]

is also a social being whose "personality tends by nature to communion."[57] He offers two

reasons why the person seeks to relate to the society of persons. The first reason is because

the person's "very perfections, as person, and (the) inner urge to the communications of

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[52] Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, p. 33.

[53] Ibid., p. 33.

[54] Ibid., p. 43.

[55] Ibid., p. 44.

[56] Ibid., p. 42.

[57] Ibid., p. 47.

knowledge and love ... requires relationship with other persons."[58] The second reason

attends to the "needs or deficiencies" of the material individuality. It is through the society

of persons that needs and deficiencies can be overcome when the person is "integrated in a

body of social communications" and in so doing, the person is given the social environment

to "attain the fullness of ... life and accomplishment."[59]

The distinction made by Maritain between the 'person' and the 'individual' allows

Preston to do two things. Firstly, Preston could argue for the priority of the community or

society over the individual[60] and secondly, in a simultaneous sense, he could affirm the

uniqueness of each person and that person's claim to freedom and human dignity. Maritain

is explicit about his project. He sees it as a way of rejecting individualism, which one finds

in liberal ideology, without the consequence of demeaning the integrity of the person who is

endowed with human dignity, for example, in the way a person might be demeaned and

subjugated within the community and confine of a totalitarian society. To suppress the

person while promoting the community is to push for an extreme form of society which is

tyrannical. The person in such a situation, as Preston has warned, is lost in the community.[61]

Maritain's project avoids the tyranny of communistic suppression of the person, and at the

same time takes care of the inherent human need for the person to relate to the community.

1.1.5 Communitarian Emphasis

Following Maritain's differentiation, Preston develops a communitarian framework

which rejects individualistic ideology. While extreme individualism is abandoned, it is

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[58] Ibid., p. 47

[59] Ibid., p. 48.

[60] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 42. "Society is much more than a statistical aggregate of individuals engaged in voluntary economic and cultural exchanges. Society is greater than the sum of individuals who compose it. Society is prior to the individual."

[61] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 77.

important to keep in mind that Preston's communitarian schema does not allow for corporate suppression of the person. This he makes clear when he warns against social structures that are "hierarchical," and "paternalistic,"[62] in the negative sense of allowing "hierarchicalism" and "paternalism" to become an oppressive ideology, since he is wary of political structures[63] that suppress the person.[64]

Preston's social ethics interacting with, and building on the insight offered by the idea of Maritain's person-in-community, gives a clue to what I have construed as a "communitarian"[65] emphasis in his social ethics, even though Preston himself does not use that term to refer to his social theology.[66] To describe his social ethics as having a communitarian emphasis is to say three basic things. Like those arguing for ecclesiological ethics,[67] communitarian theological emphasis rejects the philosophy of individualism. Like ecclesiological ethicists, Preston's communitarian ethics emphasizes the cultivation of

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[62] Ibid., p. 77.

[63] Agreeing with William Temple, he highlights the importance "that structures should be humane and just because of their effects on persons." Preston, *Explorations*, p. 84.

[64] Ibid., p. 77

[65] Although there is a recent interest in communitarianism as a political philosophy, (e.g., Shlomo Avineri and Avner de-Shalit, ed., *Communitarianism and Individualism*), this term has also been used widely by Roman Catholic theologians to describe their moral theology. See C. Curran, *Tensions in Moral Theology*, p. 126. In the Roman Catholic Church, the word communitarian gives emphasis to the social character of humankind. And it is in the sense used by the Roman Catholic Church that we employ communitarian as a term to describe Preston's anthropology.

[66] He has used the word "communitarian" in his discussion of communism and "chiliastic sects." This can be found in *Ambiguities*, pp. 50. He has of course used the word "communal" to argue his case for a community-focused ethics. "Communal" was used in *Future*, pp. 132 and 133; and in the verb form "communalized" on pp. 134 of the same book. My preference is for communitarian instead of communal for two reasons. Firstly, this is a term now widely used among theologians, and sociologists in America calling attention to the need to move away from pre-occupation with extreme individualism to the common good of the community. Secondly, and for me a more critical point is that the word "communal" carries with it a negative connotation in the political discourse in Singapore. It has always been associated to racial chauvinism, and a narrow definition of race-related political agenda and party. Communitarian cuts across the divides of race and racism. It is therefore a preferred term.

[67] A broad term used here to describe the social ethics of theologians like Hauerwas, Yoder, and Milbank. It is the same as "ecclesial ethics" in David Fergusson's reference to the ethics of Hauerwas. David Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*.

virtues and the shaping of character.[68]   There is however a critical point of departure between Preston's communitarian emphasis and the ecclesiological ethics of Hauerwas. As we have mentioned earlier, whereas Hauerwas concentrates his interest in moral development mainly within the bound of the Christian community, Preston takes a broader and more inclusive view that recognizes our membership in multi-layered significant communities where God's grace is also at work.[69]

1.2 Original Sin and Original Righteousness

Still on Preston's Christian anthropology, we shall now probe the dilemma posed by the human propensity to sin and ask how this understanding of human sinfulness might affect a person's multilateral social relation in overlapping communities. We are not just interested in the problem of sin and its distortion of life at the personal or micro level, important though this is. We are also interested in exploring sin at the macro level and in showing how sin at such a level might damage the larger group relations and community life. As we will show, the problem of sin is an issue which we cannot evade if we are concerned about doing responsible Christian social ethics. Yet we do not want to dwell too much on sin so that what is on offer is in fact a social ethic that ends up with a fatalistic view of human nature. Sin should therefore be viewed together with the human potential for being good and doing good. Preston's social theology considers the dynamic interplay of

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[68] See Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 138, Preston, *Future*, p. 1, Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 61, and Preston, *Expository Times*, October 1999, p. 4.

[69] Preston is critical of Hauerwas' approach: "Stanley Hauerwas has recently criticized a concentration on moral quandaries, ambiguous situations, and hard cases; after a stress on the autonomy of moral judgment and a needed universalizability in moral judgments he thinks Christians end up with the same conclusions as non-religious moral philosophers. This does not seem necessarily a cause to worry. It would be odd if they were greatly at variance with the range of opinions among moral philosophers, if moral reasoning is one of the three basic elements in Christian ethics. Also his concentration on shaping our desires and aspirations within the context of the Christian community makes it hard for Christians to participate in public dialogue on moral issues with those of other religions and religious persuasions. A balance has to be kept between the two approaches." Preston, *Future*, p. 9.

both sin and hope in the context of his discussion of the doctrines of Original Sin and Original Righteousness.

1.2.1 Original Sin

The ineluctable dilemma of sin in the life of a person and in the wider society has not escaped Preston's attention. He refuses to avoid its pervasive impact by evading the issues, nor is he convinced by the liberal notion that as the human progresses sin will lose its relevance if not its grip on human nature. Preston follows and builds on the tradition of Christian realists like Reinhold Niebuhr and William Temple when he uses the doctrine of Original Sin to explain the reality of sin in human life. This move is of course not without risk. Original Sin is a controversial doctrine. It takes a confident person to acknowledge that this doctrine may still provide a coherent explanation for human frailty and flaws without conceding to sin a decisive role in determining human life and societal well-being.

To have a feel of the controversies surrounding this doctrine, one needs only turn to N.P. Williams' 1924 Bampton Lectures.[70] Williams gave a comprehensive survey of the doctrine of Original Sin by tracing the genesis of the doctrine to Paul, though he acknowledged that Paul himself did not use that term. It was Augustine who gave that doctrine some prominence with his recourse to concupiscence informed by a biology peculiar to his time. And while the Augustinian view of Original Sin is no longer tenable, there remain some competing interpretations of how this doctrine should be construed. Yet despite varied interpretations, the doctrine has continued to be used by theologians such as Temple, Niebuhr and now Preston, to explain the pervasive and persistent presence of evil in the world, and the flaws in human character. And in spite of some reservations, mainly to do with the fear that such a controversial doctrine might be interpreted literally, Preston still

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[70] N. P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin.*
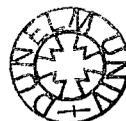
finds in the doctrine of Original Sin an adequate theological language to explain the prevalence of sin in human nature and the concomitant need for us to take sin seriously in social ethical reflection. As his view on Original Sin has been largely influenced by Niebuhr and Temple, we shall turn to them to help us understand how Preston has explicated this doctrine for his social theology.

1.2.2 Niebuhr's Understanding of Original Sin

In Niebuhr's ethical construct, the human predilection to sin expressed as a corruption of power, a tendency to protect one's self-interest but primarily as pride both at the individual and corporate levels, led him to turn to the doctrine of Original Sin for resources to develop a Christian anthropology for his social ethics. Needless to say, Niebuhr did not embrace the Augustinian idea of concupiscence which sought to link the sin of humankind to the Adamic myth via procreational transmission, although the word "original" might suggest such an idea. Even without accepting the obsolete Augustinian interpretation, there are serious theological questions which anyone who continues to deploy the doctrine of Original Sin has to answer. For instance, where is free-will in the doctrine of Original Sin? Should a person be held responsible for an "ineluctable fate,"[71] which the term Original Sin seems to imply? If sin is so persistent, is it not a flaw of creation, and therefore the fault of the creator?

Niebuhr was aware of such predicaments confronting anyone who attempts to use the doctrine to explain the sinfulness of humankind. He sought to overcome the problems of agency and responsibility by offering an interpretation of Original Sin which he explained this way: "Original sin, which is by definition an inherited corruption, or at least an inevitable one, is nevertheless not to be regarded as belonging to his essential nature and

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[71] Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 1., 1941, p. 241.

therefore outside his realm of responsibility. Sin is natural for man in the sense that it is universal but not in the sense that it is necessary."[72]

Differentiating sin as "inevitable" but not "necessary" allowed Niebuhr to emphasize the persistence of sin in human nature, without absolving humankind from being responsible for their own sins. His idea of sin not as "necessary" but as "inevitable" locates human inclination to sin in what he described as the existential nature, and not the essential nature of the human being. Sin surfaces as part of a person's existential predicament and it is not a defect inherent in the essential nature of humankind. When a person "inevitably" succumbs to sin, it is a result of that person's existential dilemma, and not because the person qua person has to sin. This way of explaining takes away the blame for sin from God and our forebears, and places it on the shoulder, as it were, of the person who commits it.[73]

1.2.3 Occasion for Sin

Niebuhr explains his view on sin and a person's existential dilemma further by recourse to psychology rather than the ancient biology of Augustine. A person, unlike other creatures, is both nature and spirit, that is to say, every human being is both finite and free, a view which Preston also stresses in his own understanding of human nature.[74] It is this essential nature of humankind that sets the person apart from other creatures, in that unlike

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[72] Ibid., p. 242.

[73] Milbank, however, is not impressed with this Niebuhrian explanation. He berates Niebuhr for confining his explanation of Original Sin to the "biographies of individuals" without giving accounts of the "historical explanations of the deep-rootedness of human sin." By this he means that Niebuhr seemed to be more interested in explaining the sins of the persons in the existential here and now, and in so doing ignored the resources of the "biblically validated" explanations found in the Genesis. Milbank is not pushing for a literal interpretation, but merely chiding Niebuhr for not providing an explanation that captures the true paradox and the tragedy of sins, rooted not just in the present, but also in the past. Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, p. 243. Milbank is right, and that is to say that the biblical accounts and Christian traditions do provide us with the resources which can be appropriated for a deeper understanding of the tragedy of sin, but the strength of Niebuhr's explanation is that it clearly places the responsibility of sin on the perpetrator without being diverted by discussions on the interpretations and validity of interpretations of the relevant biblical texts, which must also take into consideration the diverse traditions of the Church.

other creatures, a person has the capacity for self-transcendence, and an inbuilt sense of ought. Niebuhr's social theology locates the root of sin in the anxiety engendered by the pull and push factors of freedom and finitude. It is in the existential tension of human life that one is tempted to sin.

In Niebuhr's social ethics, the most prevalent sin is that of pride which arises when a person is tempted to seek after the elusive security in freedom, by disregarding one's finiteness. Besides the sin of pride there is also what he considers as the sin of sensuality when one loses oneself to the pull of the vitalities of nature by suppressing the freedom of transcendence. The sin of pride and the sin of sensuality are attempts to find security in the self and natural vitalities instead of finding security in God. On both counts the security which one seeks is misplaced.

1.2.4 Feminist Critique of Niebuhrian View of Sin

Preston shows an affinity to Niebuhr's analysis when he uses terms like finiteness and freedom to point to the existential tension humankind has to face. However it is surprising that he has not engaged with the criticism by feminist theologians who questioned Niebuhr's explication of Original Sin and his emphasis on the sin of pride, although Preston is familiar with what women find as Niebuhr's inadequate portrayal of love as self-sacrificial.[75] Feminist theologians have accused Niebuhr of depending too much on a masculine perspective of psychology[76] where sin arises when a person over-asserts his freedom in his search to dominate.

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[74] Preston uses terms like "fallen and free" and "finite and free" in Preston, *Explorations*, pp. 32, 42, 44, and 102.

[75] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 160.

[76] See for instance, Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin, and Grace*, and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*.

Feminist theologians do not discount the need to take sin seriously. What they are critical of is the traditional interpretation of sin which came out of masculine experience, that is, the experience of the dominating gender, with little regard for input from the feminine experience, that is, the experience of the marginalized gender. Feminists tell us that the predominant sin from their experience is not the sin of pride but the sin of "hiding."[77] This sin is not located in a person's assertion of freedom, but in a person's entrenchment in her finiteness; or to use Niebuhr's psychology, in a person's lapse into sensuality.[78] Suchocki offers this criticism,

The feminist scholars see the sin of pride as describing the sins of the powerful who refuse to recognize the rightful boundaries of others, and the sin of hiding as the refusal of the responsibility to become a self that is often the plight of women and men who are not in positions of power. In the process, they effectively show that Niebuhr's one-sided treatment of sin through the notion of pride demonstrates the bias of his culture and gender, and therefore the particularity rather than universality of his description of sin.

She adds,

Niebuhr, writing from the perspective of the powerful, sees all sin as a striving to be God or to replace God. The feminists, writing from the perspective of the marginalized, find the problem of sin rooted in the challenge of becoming oneself. Their point of reference is not a command of God which one defiantly violates, but the demeaning demands of social custom which one feels powerless to violate. The frequent equation drawn by persons in authority between rebellion against God and rebellion against any authority, particularly their own, increases the problem. For the oppressed, the problem is not defining limits, but defying limits.[79]

The sin of hiding is a structurally conditioned sin that prevails in a male-biased culture. It should be noted that this insight provided by feminist theologians such as Suchocki, is not a problem encountered by women alone. Suchocki has also noted that the

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[77] Suchocki, *Fall to Violence*, p. 31.

[78] Suchocki provides an excellent summary of feminist critique besides offering her own from a perspective of a feminist theologian informed by process thought. Suchocki, *op. cit.*, pp. 31ff.

[79] Ibid., p. 32.

marginalized and disenfranchised in society, regardless of their gender, face similar plight as well. For the feminist and those who are marginalized, pride is not the critical sin. It is the sin of hiding that is the major concern which needs to be overcome.

The feminist critique has raised a new level of awareness on gender-related concerns which has enhanced the quality of theological reflection in recent years. Yet it is not fair to criticize too harshly past theologians who had operated from a level of sensitivity that is different from ours.[80] We could of course defend Niebuhr by saying that the issues highlighted by feminist theologians were not at the forefront of the political agenda when Niebuhr wrote his books. Like other theologians of his time, he did not anticipate the critique of feminist theologians. We shall not speculate on what he might say to his critics or how he might adjust his description of sin in response to present-day criticism, although looking at his over-all concern for justice, he would probably have been sympathetic to what the feminist theologians have said.

From hindsight, we could say that part of Niebuhr's pre-occupation with the sin of pride could have been brought about by his concentration on treating sin as an aberration of freedom, and a failure to see that the sin of sensuality has an oppressive structural dimension that makes it difficult for the marginalized to break free. Fortunately for us, theologians today could include the substantial input from feminist scholars to help them appreciate the multi-dimensional facets of sins, and to construct a more inclusive social theology that is not unjustly gender-biased.

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[80] Suchocki, for example, has said perhaps a little too harshly that "Niebuhr himself may have fallen into the sin of pride, since it is the nature of pride to absolutize oneself, ignoring the claims of others." Ibid., p. 31.

1.2.5 Original Sin as a Myth

Aside from the valid criticism proffered by feminist scholars, it should be evident that though Niebuhr used the traditional language of Original Sin, he was nevertheless careful not to interpret that doctrine literally. He adopted that term in a technical sense as a myth to explain the reality and recalcitrant nature of sin. In his mature years, Niebuhr must have felt that he had not been successful in holding on to that term without causing confusions which distracted others from seeing the force of his argument, that is to take sin seriously without committing the error of a distorted and literal interpretation of Original Sin. In his later writings, while still holding on to his belief in the pervasive power of sin in human nature, he dropped that term to avoid being misunderstood. In his preface to the first volume of his Gifford Lectures, Niebuhr explained,[81]

I believed and still believe that human evil primarily expressed in undue self-concern, is a corrupting of its essential freedom and grows with freedom. Therefore every effort to equate evil purely with the ignorance of the mind and with the passion of the body is confusing and erroneous. I used the traditional religious symbols of the "Fall" and of "original sin" to counter these conceptions. My only regret is that I did not realize that the legendary character of the one and the dubious connotations of the other would prove so offensive to the modern mind, that my use of them obscured my essential thesis and my "realistic" rather than "idealist" interpretation of human nature.

Besides the confusion brought about by a literal interpretation of the doctrine, there is another confusion which has led one interpreter of the doctrine to assume that to hold that doctrine would necessarily lead one to hold a conservative philosophy of politics. This is a fallacy identified by Preston in his review article on E.R. Norman's *Church and Society in England, 1770-1970.* He thought Norman had misunderstood the doctrine, and he argued against Norman's assumption that a belief in the doctrine of Original Sin should lead one to

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[81] Niebuhr *Nature and Destiny*, p. viii.

a "conservative rather than a radical stance."[82] Yet while confusions abound with regard to the doctrine of Original Sin, and theologians continue to argue over interpretations of what it means to talk about Original Sin and how this might affect one's understanding of two other related doctrines, that of the Fall and *Imago Dei*, Preston unlike the later Niebuhr continues to use that term to explain the persistent presence and ill-effect of sin in human nature. To be sure he has his misgivings about that term. Yet despite its ambiguity and the danger of being misunderstood,[83] he has not given up using it. Niebuhr, as we have noted, avoided that term in the later years of his life with no adverse effect to his thesis. One wonders whether Preston's concern for the reality of sin and its impact on human life could also be served just as well without having to use the controversial term. That he has not dropped the term is probably because he is not convinced the controversy is so damaging that it cannot be used.

1.2.6 William Temple and Original Sin

The Niebuhrian sense of Original Sin is clearly influential in Preston's social ethics. But there is another person who has exercised significant influence on him, and that is William Temple. Preston expresses appreciation for Temple's short commentary on the doctrine found in the latter's tract *Christianity and Social Order*, which he praises as "the most effective popular exposition of that doctrine confusingly called 'original sin' which I have ever read."[84] In a short anecdotal style, Temple explained Original Sin as a state in which we are in, and that is the human inclination to be self-centred: "So each of us takes

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[82] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 125. He also tells us that the "doctrine is unfortunately named, as unfortunate as Natural Law, so that it is widely misunderstood. Reinhold Niebuhr, in whose thought it played a large part (as did original righteousness), gave up using the term because of the endemic misunderstanding it caused among his readers."

[83] Robin Gill highlighted the problem of divergent views in R. Gill, *The Cross against the Bomb*, pp. 33ff.

[84] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 83, Cf. William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, p. 60. Elsewhere in Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 167, he repeated his praise in different words, "The clearest interpretation of original sin known to me ...."

his place in the centre of his own world. But I am not the centre of the world, or the standard of reference as between good and bad; I am not, and God is. In other words, from the beginning I put myself in God's place. This is my original sin."[85]

Impressed though Preston is with Temple's succinct pastoral exposition, it is nevertheless in Niebuhr's more detailed discussion of sin in his Gifford Lectures that Preston finds, "probably the most searching analysis of sin of any theologian of this century."[86] What Original Sin stands for, according to Preston, is "the fact that created life as we experience it is not what we think it ought to be. There is a gap between what is the case and what our moral judgment tells us ought to be the case."[87] Preston retrieves this doctrine from disuse and offers it as a theological explanation for the reality of sin in human nature. Sin is a crucial factor which has to be included in any viable framework of social ethics. Ignoring the reality of sin or down-playing its distorting effect on human life would lead to an idealized view of humankind, resulting in a social ethic that is likely to be utopian in outlook[88].

1.2.7 Three Categories of Sins: Sensational, Subtle and Systemic

To get a deeper sense of the prevalence of sin and its distorting effects on character and social relationship, we shall now categorize sin as sensational, subtle and systemic. This categorization is an aid to help us have a clearer understanding of the various expressions of sins. Nevertheless, to be fair, we have to keep in mind that there will be overlaps and we should not be surprised to find, for example, a sin that is both subtle and systemic, or a sin which have all three characteristics.

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[85] Temple, *op. cit.*, p. 60. See also, Suggate, *William Temple*, p. 53f.

[86] Preston, *Future*, p. 205. Cf. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny*, 1941, 1943.

[87] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 118.

When we talk about sensational sins we have in mind those that make front-page news and sell newspapers. They are the sins that attract gossip and arouse emotions of disbelief, anger, and anguish. Preston calls such sins flamboyant sins, and he makes known that his main concern is not in the sensational or the flamboyant, but the subtle forms of sin which tend to escape our attention. Preston is more concerned with those sins which people do not quite talk about and may not even recognize as sins. So that sin is not trivialized, and the gravity of subtle sins is not ignored, he has called attention, on more than one occasion, to those forms of sin which focus not so much on vices but on what he warns as the corruption of virtues.[89] He explains:

The subtlest point about sin is that it feeds on virtues.... The dramatic sins of temper, robbery, sexuality and violence are obvious. We can be delivered from them. The same applies to less dramatic ones like sloth or meanness, or some in the realms of sexuality. They, too, can be overcome. It is the pride of virtues which is the snare. The subtle sins are the hardest to recognize or admit, and they are the ones which corrupt virtues.[90]

Although Preston does not say so, and indeed it might not even be his intention, yet it would appear that by discussing the corrupting power of sin on virtues, he is providing an appropriate counterbalance to the current interest in virtue ethics which emphasizes the need to cultivate virtues and nurture character; an ethics associated with the influential works of MacIntyre and Hauerwas. Preston, as we have said, does not discount the need to cultivate character. When he points to the subtle forms of sin as the corruption of virtues, he is not renouncing the need for Christians to be virtuous people. He is merely warning against a form of sin likely to be found in those who focus too much on the cultivation of virtues

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[88] "The Christian understanding of men and women does not idealize them. It is well aware of the corruption and sins in human life," says Preston in *Future*, p. 141.

[89] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 118. Cf. Preston, *Future*, pp. 146, 222, 223, and Preston, *Ambiguities*, pp. 39, and 107.

without giving thought to the subtle danger of sin's corrupting power on virtues. In other words, he is saying that a relentless preoccupation with virtues has its vices. Pride, for example, might set in when one thinks one is more virtuous than others.

However, in focusing on subtle sins, we wonder whether Preston might not have taken too lightly the seriousness of sins considered as sensational. In the passage quoted above, he gives the impression that because the more sensational sins can be easily handled, they might be less serious than subtle sins. But sin is sin, and sin is serious, whether sensational or subtle,[91] even if we grant that not all sins are of equal severity and there is a difference in the ease with which different sins might be overcome.

What we have discussed so far are sins, both subtle and sensational, which might be characterized as personal. While personal sin might be considered as an aberration in a person's character, sin can take on, and it has taken on, a complex characteristic beyond the personal. We have in mind systematic sin; sometimes referred to as structural sin which liberation theologians and feminist theologians have been assiduous in bringing it to our attention.

Sin is systemic when a society is so organized that the people who are poor and powerless are under-represented in the decision-making process which continues to favour the already rich and powerful. It could also be a political system adopted by the state to perpetuate the interest of a particular race by discriminating against other races, even if the

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[90] Preston, *Future*, p. 214.

[91] The Catholic tradition used to make a distinction between sins that are venial and those that are mortal. This is not what we have in mind when we talk about sins which are sensational and those which are subtle. Venial sins, in Catholic teaching, are those sins which are not serious enough to merit condemnation, whereas mortal sins go against God's love and are thus condemned. Generally speaking, the Protestant traditions do not divide sins into such categories mainly because all sins, no matter how we may apportion the degree of seriousness, *vis-a-vis*, for instance their effects on others, are nevertheless equally wrong in God's sight, and should be condemned. The saving grace is that though we are sinners, God forgives those who confess their sins, and grace is also a resource for us to forgive the sins of others.

control of the government is in the hands of a privileged minority, like the former apartheid

regime in South Africa.[92] Systemic sin is in Preston's mind when he discusses the problems

of collective interests and group conflicts, especially when he points to the political

ideology which fed the "synthetic barbarism" of Nazi Germany and the resultant

holocaust.[93] His critique of systemic sin bears the mark of Niebuhr's warning of the peril of

collective egoism and the oppressive power of group pride, articulated principally in *Moral*

Man and Immoral Society. Clearly, one has to be constantly alert to the insidious presence

of systemic evil and structural sin. And while one should be concerned about the sin of a

person, subtle or sensational, it is imperative that one should also look beyond the person

who is a sinner to condemn the unjust structures which have conspired to sin against the

sinners.

1.2.8 Original Righteousness and Hope

That the doctrine of Original Sin is an essential part of Preston's theological

framework is beyond dispute, but that is only one part of his critical theological framework.

He does not want us to have an idealized view of human nature when he directs our

attention to human susceptibility to sin. However, to leave Preston at his theological

explication of Original Sin might give a lopsided impression that his social ethics informed

by this sometimes misleading doctrine is in fact pessimistic.[94] So that he is not

misunderstood as a purveyor of pessimism in the guise of realism, he has deliberately

presented his discussion of the doctrine of Original Sin alongside the doctrine of Original

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[92] As implied in Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 130. Cf. Preston, *Confusions*, p. 30.

[93] That he has systemic sin in mind is clearly seen in the example he gives in p. 215 of *Future*, when he points to the Nazi ideology which corrupted the German culture.

[94] Critics have hurled similar accusation on Niebuhr's Christian realism. See for example the three critics named in Harland, *The Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr*, p. ix.

Righteousness.[95] By doing that, he is in a way making a strategic move to pre-empt criticism of his social theology as one so preoccupied with sin that it has no eschatological hope. Moreover, by bringing into his social theology an aspect of hope which he describes as realistic hope, he is counter-criticizing the utopian tendencies in the idea of hope suggested by the social theologies of continental European political theologians, as we shall see shortly.

Preston is, of course, insistent that in as much as we need "to take Original Sin seriously, (we have) to take Original Righteousness equally seriously", although he has not given equal space to his discussion of Original Righteousness. He puts forth his case for what he construes as a more realistic hope grounded in Christ and in the presence of good and the potential for greater good in humankind, by employing the doctrine of Original Righteousness. Like Original Sin, and following the approach of Niebuhr who had given a more detailed theological discussion on *Justitia Originalis* in the last chapter of his first volume of *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Preston refuses to make a literal interpretation of Original Righteousness. He is aware of the varied interpretations offered by various theological traditions but does not deal with them with the same depth Niebuhr did. Be that as it may, and in spite of the fact that he recognizes the ambiguities of such terms, he continues to accept the doctrines of Original Sin and Original Righteousness as integral to his social ethical framework, asserting for instance, in his essay on "The Politics of Imperfection and the Politics of Hope," that "the terms stand for a fundamental reality in human existence and experience which is of great significance for politics."[96] Beyond that essay, if we consider Preston's works as a whole, we might add that the "significance"

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[95] Preston, *Future*, pp. 215 ff., and Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 56.

[96] Preston, *Future*, p. 214.

mentioned here covers more than politics, for it impacts on the whole realm of social ethics as well.

That there is hope in the framework of Preston's social theology, there is no doubt. He points out that responsible theologians have often critiqued the *status quo* and events in society because they believe that life can be better than what is going on. The fact that great theologians like Niebuhr and Barth had regularly spoken up against social injustices and critiqued the *status quo*, so Preston argues, is for him a convincing indication that Christian ethicists do believe that no matter how serene or chaotic a society might be, we should not be too contented or too short-sighted by readily embracing the *status quo*. Besides, we should not accept uncritically what is happening both around us and within the whole gamut of society as fated. The *status quo* is not our fate. Hence we are not fated, as it were, to accept it. It is hope that demolishes fatalism, and to emphasize his belief in hope, Preston insists that "Original Sin is not the heart of the Christian gospel. It is not the good news. There is in (the Christian gospel) the concept both of Original Righteousness and of a new hope in Christ."[97]

What then is this Original Righteousness which has sometimes been associated with a time in antiquity when Adam and Eve had lived before their banishment from Eden, however one might read that creation account in Genesis? How does Preston retrieve that doctrine for his social ethics?

To be sure, Preston has already made clear that he does not accept a literal interpretation of the Original Righteousness.[98] Just as the doctrine of Original Sin

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[97] Ibid., p. 215. He also says that "original righteousness is an encouragement to realize that there is something positive in us on which the indwelling presence of God's spirit can build if we live in the context of Christian community and worship." Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 56.

[98] Preston, *Future*, p. 214.

illuminates the pervasive reality of sin in the nature of humankind, Original Righteousness points to the presence of goodness in human nature and the presence of the grace of God in the life of humankind, even if this goodness and the grace of God are not often recognized or acknowledged.

Original Righteousness as the presence of goodness and as the potential for greater good in human beings, though tarnished but never extirpated by the mythic Fall which led to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, is nevertheless an indispensable part of human nature and destiny. It can be rekindled and restored through Christ when a person is re-created by him and initiated into God's Kingdom. Furthermore the fullness of the somewhat marred Original Righteousness can be recovered through the freely available grace of God, even though Preston does not differentiate for us the different senses in which we may understand the richness of God's grace. While he might not have been explicit about it, it would appear that Preston's idea of the presence of God's grace in the life of a person, might be better understood when we see it as both prevenient and sanctifying grace. The prevenient grace of God is always present and at work in the life of a person even if that person is not aware of it. Sanctifying grace is actively at work in the life of a person re-created, to use another of Preston's oft repeated words, by Christ for his Kingdom. One might even argue that in the Kingdom of God, sanctifying grace is a catalyst for and a conscious process of character formation, the nurturing of virtues, the development of the being, usually within the community of believers as Hauerwas would argue, and Preston would agree,[99] but not entirely within the church, as Preston would insist.

The gospel offers great encouragement. From it we understand that God's graciousness is present everywhere and at all times. Moreover it is free grace. It does not have to be earned before it is received. And it is constant and not rare. Christians believe they know more about it because of what

they have learned through Jesus Christ and have, therefore, through no merit of their own, greater possibilities of drawing upon it within the life of the Christian church. But their joy is to recognize signs of it at work in the multitudinous life of human beings. Christian do not live in an alien world where God's grace is not operative until they bring it. [100]

This gift of God's grace helps us to cultivate the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. [101] Preston reminds us that adumbration of these theological virtues can also be found in the followers of other faiths and those who may not have any religious affiliation. [102] That should not surprise us since God's prevenient grace is also at work in the life of people who may not name Jesus as the Christ. It is therefore not surprising that while acknowledging the reality of sins and the corruption of virtues in human life, it is in the adumbration of goodness and the human potential for greater good that form the basis for his theology of hope.

How else are we to understand hope in Preston's social ethics informed by Original Righteousness? We could say right away that the hope Preston argues for, mainly within the context of the political arena, is a "realistic hope." [103] It is nourished by grace, and grounded in Jesus Christ and in his teachings on the Kingdom of God. [104] A realistic hope does not ignore the past when we open ourselves to the future which has already been initiated by Christ. Indeed without an openness to the future we may become slaves of a "fossilized attitude to the past," [105] and end up holding onto some obsolete structures and ideas which do not meet the needs of our time, or address the pressing issues brought about by a fast-

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[99] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 56. Also implied in his recent essay in the *Expository Times*, October 1999, p. 4.

[100] Preston, *Future*, pp. 215, 216.

[101] Cf. Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny*, 1941, pp. 280ff.

[102] Preston, *Future*, p. 214.

[103] Ibid., p. 216.

[104] Ibid., p. 215.

changing world. Our life should therefore be defined, so Preston tells us, by an eschatological openness to the future already inaugurated by Christ, and also by a critical appropriation of our past which holds the treasured deposits of our personal story and the shared history of the community.[106]

In offering what is for Preston a realistic understanding of hope, he is presenting a Christian realist's alternative to an understanding of hope found in certain political theologies which he thinks is not "sufficiently realistic."[107] Preston is particularly critical of Moltmann's theology of hope, and he has in mind Moltmann's theology when he refers to those who offered a hope that is unrealistic.[108] In a six-point discussion[109] which engages his realistic hope with Moltmann's theology, he identifies some areas of agreement and common concern, and he critiques what he finds as weakness in the theology associated with Moltmann's project.

With the theologians of hope, he agrees on these points: that hope is an "openness to the future,"[110] that "God is ahead of us; he is the power of the future mastering every present"[111] and that "Christ in his resurrection is a proleptic revealer of the future."[112] On the last point about Christ and his resurrection, he expresses reservation with regard to using the term 'resurrection';[113] a reservation which is misplaced. If we take into consideration the

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[105] Ibid., p. 216.

[106] Ibid., p. 217.

[107] Ibid., p. 216.

[108] Ibid., p. 275.

[109] Ibid., pp. 216ff.

[110] Ibid., p. 216.

[111] Ibid., p. 217.

[112] Ibid., p. 217.

[113] Preston thinks that "exaltation" is a better choice, in place of "resurrection" for fear that the latter might be misunderstood because of "differences of interpretation." Preston worries too much. There will always be differences of interpretation. The important task before every theologian is to argue her case and make clear

use of that word, for example, in Oliver O'Donovan's critical work, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, we could see how that term can be used successfully without fear of being misunderstood. In fact, O'Donovan's explanation of resurrection as a vindication of creation, if pursued by Preston, could have strengthened Preston's theological framework which builds on an underlying doctrine of creation.[114]

His reservation about using the word 'resurrection' aside, Preston parts company with the theologians of hope on some substantial issues. He disagrees with them in their emphasis on the future as the decisive defining factor for humankind, without giving sufficient consideration to the appropriation of the past as an equally important defining factor. Both the appropriation of our past and our openness to the future gives us the creative tension to recognize both the limitation of our finiteness and the promise of our freedom, and also to avoid crafting a false hope or falling into the quagmire of despair. As to be expected from one who includes in his theological framework the reality of sin in human nature, Preston is critical of the political theologians who under-estimate the corrupting power of sin. He criticizes them for not including sin, both personal and structural, as a crucial factor in envisioning hope and in doing social theology.

The world tarnished by sin can do with more messages of hope if we are not to be overwhelmed by an oppressive power of hopelessness. In Preston's appropriation of the doctrine of Original Righteousness and the presence of God's grace, we have shown that Preston's social ethics is not pessimistic or insular. There is hope, an eschatological reserve, in his social theology and in his understanding of human nature.

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what she means when using contentious terms. There is little proof that "exaltation" is less controversial than "resurrection."

[114] "The resurrection of Christ in isolation from mankind would not be a gospel message. The resurrection of mankind apart from creation would be a gospel of sort, but of a purely gnostic and world-denying sort which is

We may summarize his theology of hope as one that is realistic, in that it does not disregard human propensity to sin which distorts life and corrupts character, nor does it capitulate to the power of sin. His realistic hope is grounded in Christ and in the potential of humankind empowered by God's grace to be good and to do good, derived from an interpretation of the doctrine of Original Righteousness. It is a hope still traceable in the adumbration of the human potential for excellence and in the visible signs of virtues, seen for instance in the "sense of justice as fairness" and in the evidence of "faith, hope and love" found in human life.[115]

1.3 Equality, Love and Justice: A Triad of Virtues

We shall now look at a triad of virtues which plays significant role in Preston's social ethics. Though three in number they are not the theological virtues of faith, hope and love, as one might expect, but the virtues of equality, love and justice. Love and justice are virtues, broadly understood,[116] which no serious social theologians would exclude in their discussion of social ethics. Preston follows the tradition of most social ethicists in offering these two virtues as essential elements for the fostering of human flourishing. The influence of Niebuhr and Temple on the social theology of Preston continues to be evident in Preston's discussion of love and justice. And probably persuaded more by his teacher R.H. Tawney than anyone else, he includes equality and gives prominence to it in his vision of a just social order. While they did not discount the desirability of equality, that virtue does not

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far from the gospel that the apostles actually preached. So the resurrection of Christ directs our attention to the creation which it vindicates." O'Donovan, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

[115] Preston, *Future*, p. 215.

[116] In traditional usage, the language is quite precise when it comes to identifying virtues. There are seven virtues, four cardinal and three theological which include justice and love. Love is classified together with faith and hope as being part of the theological virtues. Using "virtues" broadly means that we are not confined to the traditional sense of referring only to the seven virtues, allowing us to include other excellences like equality and altruism.

feature highly in Niebuhr and Temple's works. Preston convinced by Tawney recognizes it to be of sufficient significance for him to integrate it with his discussion of love and justice.

1.3.1 Equality

Preston's main discussion on equality is found in his article on "R.H. Tawney as a Christian Moralist."[117] His evaluation of Tawney's treatment of equality drawn primarily from the latter's books, *Equality* and *The Acquisitive Society*, and secondarily from Daniel Jenkins' *Equality and Excellence*,[118] is basically positive. He quotes Tawney approvingly, and calls on the church to accept Tawney's challenge against what he refers to as the "conventional Christian position" on equality[119] which is inadequate and unhelpful. Preston is not happy with two conventional views, one held by those he refers to as "Liberal Christians of the more sentimental type," and those he groups together rather imprecisely as the "more orthodox Christians."[120] According to him, the former group puts more emphasis on love than on equality, while the latter has a tendency to treat equality as impractical and irrelevant, probably attainable only in the world to come. Tawney's challenge is that we should move away from such positions which do not address sufficiently the widespread inequality found in society. There are areas where equality can be improved upon, and he mentions, for example, the gross inequality found in property ownership exacerbated by the fact of perpetual control of ownership through inheritance and a low property tax which favours the rich land-owners.[121]

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[117] Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 97 ff.

[118] Ibid., These books are mentioned on p. 98.

[119] Ibid., p. 100.

[120] Ibid., p. 100.

[121] Ibid., p. 101.

But why bother about equality at all even if one is convinced that there is widespread inequality? What led Preston to argue for equality in the first place? To answer these questions, we have to go to his Maurice Lectures on "Christianity and a Just and Sustainable Society" where he makes plain his "conviction that the basic equality of all men in the sight of God, and the belief that Christ died for all, is more fundamental than the things in which they are unequal. This fundamental equality has to find expression in the structures of society so that men will feel at home with one another."[122] Preston's conviction is derived from a doctrine of creation that affirms the equality of humanity "in the sight of God" as much as it is also located in his communitarian view of "human togetherness."[123] Not to hold such a conviction would mean rejecting the theological understanding of human uniqueness and person-in-community, a move that will encourage selfish individualism.

It should be kept in mind that nowhere in his social theology does Preston argue for equality as an absence of income disparity or vocational differentiation. That would be holding on to an impractical, if not an idealistic view of equality.[124] The truth is that there will always be uneven distribution of wealth and benefits in this imperfect world. The equality he has in mind is the equal status we inherit in our common humanity as people created in God's image. This should be translated into ensuring that there is easy access to basic needs and acknowledging the right of each person to be heard in the decision-making process.[125]

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[122] Ibid., p. 48. He returns to this "conviction" again in Preston, *Future*, p. 140.

[123] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 48. In the same paragraph where he declares his conviction on equality, he adds, "A corporate sense of human togetherness is fundamental to Christianity and calls into question an individualistic philosophy."

[124] Nor does he want us to hold on to a "literal, wooden" view of equality. See Preston, *Future*, p. 141.

[125] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 52.

While there will indeed be disparity of income and benefits among people, it is not a *status quo* which we should be resigned to, especially in a social system which continues to perpetuate unjust distribution of wealth.[126] This equality which speaks of our "equal significance in the sight of God,"[127] should make us abhor philosophies and practices which dehumanize people and promote greater disparity of wealth and social benefits. In a crucial move, he offers the virtue of equality as a criterion which we may deploy to assess public policies and their effects on the different segments of the population. Equality as a criterion to test social policies will help us to ascertain how just or unjust those policies might be especially in their effects on the weak and the more vulnerable.[128] The burden of proof on how just a society is, is not so much whether there are visible evidence of equality in that society, though that is an important criterion. In Preston's view, "the burden of proof for Christian must always lie with inequalities."[129] Where there are blatant inequalities justice is likely to be found wanting.

As can be seen, Preston's social theology advances the idea of a just society as one that ascends towards equality. Or in his words, it is a society with a "built-in tendency towards equality."[130] Besides offering equality as a criterion to test social policies and to ascertain approximation of justice in society, Preston accepts Tawney's emphasis that equality is needed "for the sake of fraternity."[131] In a sense, one cannot talk about or envisage a society that fosters common good and human flourishing without the presence of human sharing and fraternity. Solidarity with fellow humans requires a certain level of

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[126] Ibid., p. 98.

[127] Preston, *Future,* p. 140.

[128] This point is made in Preston, *Persistence*, p. 100. The same point is repeated, but this time explicitly related to economic policies and their impact on people, in Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 137.

[129] Ibid., p. 100.

[130] Ibid., p. 101.

[131] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 137.

sharing of the common good that will contribute towards societal well-being. And Christians as followers of Christ, in the considered view of Tawney and Preston, are well-placed to show the way in sharing gifts, promoting human solidarity, and advocating equality.[132]

We have revealed in another section that Preston is wary of the corruption of virtues as a form of subtle sin. Equality like any virtue can be corrupted when we lose our vigilance. To take precaution against its corruption, there is another crucial point made by Preston, with regard to equality, which should be noted. The demand for equality, he warns us, can be easily overtaken by envy. Of course in an ideal situation, equality should not be fuelled by envy, although in situations where there are glaring inequalities, it is difficult for those who are deprived not to be envious. It is only wise, therefore, to be alert to dubious invocation of equality, by the envious, as an excuse for a destructive spree against the prosperous. When the call for equality is corrupted by envy, it will have catastrophic results. What Preston suggests is that when we have to press for equality, it should not be done as "a politics of envy or levelling down, but as a basis of a proper way for human beings to relate to one another in the social order."[133] Equality, through Preston's welfare-egalitarian perspective,[134] is about levelling up where the poor and deprived are given assistance, encouragement and opportunities to move upwards, and not levelling down where the successful are punished for their industries. This insight has implication for the way socio-economic order should be organized and education policies structured.

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[132] "We cannot regard men as brothers unless in some sense we share their lives," says Preston. He adds, "Tawney is surely right that the Christian faith should have a major contribution to make at this point." Preston, *Persistence*,   p. 99.

[133] Preston, *Future*, p. 141.

[134] Amartya Sen tells us that there is no one who is anti-equality, as such. The question of interest to him in his *Inequality Reexamined*, is not so much why equality, but equality of what? Libertarians like Nozick, for instance, would be concerned about equality of individual rights and liberty. Preston, in the Christian socialist tradition of Tawney, would be considered as being a welfare-egalitarian, that is, someone who is mainly, though not exclusively, interested in equality of basic welfare for all, for the sake of fraternity.

Equality, as we have mentioned, is part of a triad of virtues that includes love and justice. Interestingly, Preston places equality "in an intermediate position between love and justice."[135] In that location, equality assesses and promotes justice, and since it is positioned "between love and justice," although not mentioned explicitly, it presumably assesses and advances love as well.

1.3.2 Love

Love and justice are often considered together in Preston's discussion of them.[136] If they are discussed separately, it is usually followed up by attempts to relate them to each other, influenced perhaps by Outka's seminal work on *agape*.[137] Love, of course, is a recurrent theme in Christian teaching. It is a fundamental virtue which Christians have been advised to obtain.[138] In its purest form, this is the love that led God to give us his Son for the salvation of humankind.[139] Christians, as recipients of God's love, are commanded to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." And to "love thy neighbour as thyself."[140] And according to Paul, love is the greatest of all the theological virtues.[141] Since love is so central to the Christian gospel and moral teachings, it is little wonder then that Preston should include love in his theological framework. Not surprisingly too, in Preston's social theology, the primary source for understanding love is

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[135] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 100. This is an important observation made by Preston that takes Niebuhrian realism a step further. Niebuhr has maintained that love as the impossible possibility is not a helpful criterion for social ethics. His preference is for justice to be used in group relations. (See Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*.) Here Preston contributes an "intermediate" criterion, one which can be employed to test the presence or absence of justice in the community.

[136] E.g., Preston, *Persistence*, p. 128, Preston, *Explorations*, pp. 69f., Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 103, Preston, *Confusions*, p. 126.

[137] Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*, especially his chapter on Agape and Justice, pp. 75ff.

[138] 1 Cor. 14:1a.

[139] John 3:16.

[140] Matthew 22:37-40.

[141] 1 Cor. 13:13.

embodied in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. It is captured vividly in Paul's poem on love in his first letter to the church in Corinth.[142] It is in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ that we see what love as *agape* is like in its highest manifestation. This is the love that led to the Cross, a love described by Preston as the "radical and inexhaustible love of God, transcending realization in the life of any single person (bar Jesus), still less any social structure."[143]

We have to remember that when Preston, following Niebuhr, concedes the difficulty of fulfilling or realizing radical love in "any social structure," he is saying that the claim of radical love, as an ethic of the Kingdom of God, is suited more to inter-personal relationship than to the relationship between social groups and larger communities. This does not mean, nevertheless, that love has no place to play in the conduct of group relationship within and between larger groups. Part of the problem with Preston's ambivalence regarding the role of love in inter-group relationship is that he does not quite differentiate the various notions of love which *agape* allows for, not that he is unaware of them. Outka, for instance, has classified *agape* as 1) equal regard, 2) self-sacrifice and 3) mutuality.[144] Had Preston been more exact in differentiating love, he would have stated that *Agape* seen as self-sacrificial love is probably the radical love which he has in mind, when he expresses reservation about whether such love can be realized in "any social structure." This "non-reciprocal"[145] love is rare. It is what Niebuhr referred to as the love that "refuses to participate in the claims and counter-claims of historical existence. It portrays a love 'which seeketh not its own.'"[146]

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[142] See Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 102. It might have been worth the effort to point to an Old Testament source, i.e., teaching of *Hesed*, a word usually translated as "loving-kindness" and on a number of occasions appeared together with "justice and righteousness," as virtues which Yahweh required of his people.

[143] Preston, *Future*, p. 57.

[144] Outka, *Agape*, pp. 9-44.

[145] Preston, *Future*, p. 57.

[146] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny*, vol. 2. p. 72.

What we should not discount is that human well-being can be nourished, both at the personal level and at the group level, by love when love is accepted as equal regard in our relationship with others. Equal regard means caring about our neighbour for the neighbour's own sake. On love as equal regard, Outka adds that "there ought to be active concern for what (our neighbour) may want or need, and not for the sake of benefits to the self."[147] Loving one's neighbour in this way is extending positive regard and care to one's neighbour without pre-condition.

Love as mutuality, also a Niebuhrian theme, even though Preston associates this idea of love with Temple more than with Niebuhr,[148] facilitates meaningful relationship that does not pander the risk of "capitulation to the expectations or wishes of any person or group."[149] Mutuality nurtures friendship and deepens it. It is a love that allows for, and is marked by "mutual action and influence between distinctive persons where neither side consumes or abnegates."[150] One approaches mutuality with a sense of positive self-love. This is the love which Christians are commanded to measure in their love for their neighbour, in the sense of loving "thy neighbour as thyself." This self-love must not be confused with selfishness, self-centredness or the promotion of self-interest. To love oneself is to have a positive self-regard, that is, having an assured sense of self-esteem. Preston himself recognizes this. For awhile he had confused self-interest with loving oneself.[151] But by the time he presented the Scott Holland Lectures in 1983, loving "thyself" was seen as "self-affirmation" and no longer as a text that supports self-interest. He went on to declare,

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[147] Outka, *Agape*, p. 9.

[148] Preston, *Future*, p. 108. Says Preston, "Temple stresses more the element of love in the sense of mutuality (than Niebuhr)."

[149] Outka, *Agape*, p. 35.

[150] Ibid., p. 35.

"... without a proper self-affirmation it is not possible to relate adequately to others, or even to have a proper self to lose when it is necessary."[152]

Mutuality as love "refers, in part or altogether, to a quality of relation *between* persons and/or groups. Those actions are loving which *establish* or *enhance* some sort of exchange between parties, developing a sense of community and perhaps friendship."[153] This mutuality is possible when the agent brings to the relationship a positive self-worth, confidence and personal integrity. The quality and well-being of life as persons-in-community which Preston's social theology seeks to encourage, can in fact be strengthened by fostering not necessarily self-sacrificial love which is exceptionally rare, but love as equal regard and mutuality.

While radical love might be exceptionally rare, and while we might have difficulty employing it to regulate group relationship, love considered in its totality as self-sacrificial, equal regard and mutuality, is paradoxical. And so Preston tells us that the "more one knows of it the more one finds there is to know. The reward of love is to know more of what it means, the opening of further dimensions of it."[154] This paradox has been described by Niebuhr as an "impossible possibility." J. Bennett explains this intriguing phrase thus,

"..... while love is never fully embodied in any human motive and action, it remains relevant as a standard for both motive and action. It is relevant because we are judged by it and because, if in humility before God we avoid the pretensions which most seriously distort our life, we are able to approximate such love. The chief

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[151] Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 104, 105. Preston seems to think that "love thy neighbour as thyself" is a proof text, of a sort, for self-interest. He was so confident about it that he concluded that "Self-interest has to be allowed for."

[152] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 48.

[153] Outka, *Agape*, p. 36.

[154] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 102. Cf. Preston, *Future*, pp. 57, and 117.

warning must always be that whenever we do approximate it, at that moment even the best we do is in greatest danger of corruption."[155]

At another place, Preston captures that Niebuhrian sense of the paradox of love well, when he explains, "The result of entering more fully into what Jesus meant by love will be to see further reaches of it, and greater challenges than we had hitherto imagined."[156]

We want to say two more things about love as understood by Preston before we move on to consider the issue of justice in Preston's social theology. Firstly, as an ethicist who is keenly sensitive to the presence and contribution of followers of other faiths and those who have no religious affiliations, Preston asserts that Christians should not presume that *agape* can only be found in Christianity. "We must not talk as if there is no knowledge of *agape* outside the Christian faith,"[157] he advises. Again reflective of his recognition of the grace of God at work in the whole of creation, he reminds us that there are always "some glimmerings of the unconditional graciousness of *agape*"[158] present in the life and community of those who may not be Christians. Preston would probably concur that among the vast number of East Asians, principally the Chinese, Japanese, the Koreans and Vietnamese, who have a long history of Confucian moral influence that predates the Church, the cultivation and presence of *Jen*, the highest form of Confucian virtue may be equated with the presence of *agape* in their life and moral teachings. Just as the English word 'love' cannot capture the fulness of *agape*, it would be foolish to claim that *Jen*, a rich word on its own, is the full embodiment of *agape* in the Chinese language. Nevertheless,

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[155] John C. Bennett, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Social Ethics," in Charles W. Kegley ed., *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, p. 107. Or as Karen Lebacqz says, love as the "impossible possibility" is "relevant as the ultimate standard by which actions may be judged, but not possible of immediate implementation in the social world." Lebacqz, *Six Theories of Justice*, p. 85.

[156] Preston, *Future*, pp. 116f.

[157] Ibid., p. 102.

[158] Ibid., p. 102.

Confucian scholar Chen Jingpan adduces that "the English word Love is nearest to the Chinese word *Jen*. It is the highest virtue of the Christian people, and it is also the highest virtue in the Confucian teaching."[159] Another Confucian scholar Xinzhong Yao in his comparative study of *Jen* and *agape* has this to say:

As far as human love is concerned, there are many terms that are used to express the conception of love in these two traditions (Christianity and Confucianism). However, in their selection of terms, we find that they follow a similar way. Confucians use the term *jen*, and Christians use the term *agape*, to mean a special relationship between one person and another (whether humans or spiritual beings), of respect, care, in which the utilitarian consideration has been reduced to its minimum; ....[160]

The other issue is that *agape* should not be seen as synonymous to self-abnegation, nor should it be used as a tool for social control. Preston is perhaps mindful of the feminist criticism[161] of Niebuhr's emphasis of *agape* as sacrificial love. This emphasis of *agape* as sacrificial love has been seen as an ideological instrument, sanctioned by a male-dominated society, to consign women to their traditional subservient status in society. And that is not what Preston wants to convey. He parts company with the reprehensible ideological interpretation of sacrificial love, by saying that *agape* in his view is not an enslaving ideology, but an empowering love. "Today we do not want to preach a submissive love to those with less power, but to empower them."[162]

1.3.3 Justice

Unlike *agape* which is based very much on what the Bible teaches, and exemplified especially in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, justice in Preston's theological framework

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[159] Chen Jingpan, *Confucius as a Teacher*, p. 248. He has a helpful discussion of the various meaning of Jen in the teaching of Confucius and his disciples. pp. 250ff.

[160] Xinzhong Yao, *Confucianism and Christianity*, p. 97.

[161] Cf., Kenneth Durkin, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, p. 180.

is not, strictly speaking, dependent on what the Bible says. To be sure, for a theologian who is reluctant to draw direct application from biblical text to support ethical decision, he makes a rare excursion to the Bible to highlight what he sees as a biblical paradox about justice as impartiality and justice as being partial to the poor. In his view, "the general tenor of the Old Testament leaves side by side the idea of justice as impartiality, not favouring one person more than another, and that of a special concern for the poor, and this is not contradicted in the New Testament."[163] Biblical references to justice both as impartiality and as being pro-poor can be found in the writings, for example, of the authors of Second Isaiah, and the Minor Prophets, especially Amos and Micah. But it is mainly from social philosophy and moral theology that Preston draws assistance in developing his idea of justice for his social theology. He suggests that justice may be classified under four broad categories.[164]

1) Formal justice which deals with the correct application of the law.

2) Substantive justice which is concerned that the law must be just.

3) Retributive justice which is further sub-divided as commutative and corrective justice.

4) Distributive justice which has two sub-divisions: recognitive and attributive justice.

These are useful distinctions which can serve as the basis for a focused discussion on justice and issues, such as love and equality, which are in some ways related to justice. There is however, another widely accepted conceptual differentiation of justice offered by

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[162] Preston, *Future*, p. 58.

[163] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 128.

[164] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 128.

the Roman Catholic Church which provides an alternative basis for looking at justice. As Preston has reminded us, the Roman Catholic Church had in the past equated justice with the preservation of social order and the *status quo* and in so doing, protected the interest of the dominant groups in society.[165] However, in the post-Vatican II era, the Roman Catholic Church has moved away from such a static view of justice and has, in fact, explicitly differentiated justice under three categories: commutative, distributive and social. This is how Charles Curran explains it.

Commutative justice governs the relationship between one individual and another. Distributive justice governs the relationship between the community as a whole or the state and individuals and smaller groups. Legal, or social, justice directs the relationship of individuals to the good of the community and the state.[166]

For our purpose, it is enough to draw on the Roman Catholic tradition that sees justice as commutative, distributive and social. It is safe to assume that the law regulating the three different dimensions of justice, as justice demands, should be just (substantive) and correctly applied (formal).

a. Justice as Fairness

The conceptual differentiation of justice aside, there is a constant refrain in Preston's social theology that refers to justice as fairness,[167] related perhaps more to the realm of distributive justice than the other categories of justice. It should be said that Preston's idea of justice as fairness must not be confused with the more exacting definition

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[165] Ibid., p. 127.

[166] See also Charles E. Curran, *Tensions in Moral Theology*, p. 113. Daniel C. Maguire identifies the three categories as individual, distributive and social, in *A New American Justice*, p. 57, and recently, Bernard V. Brady has stretched the categories to five. The two new categories are interpersonal and communal, in B. Brady, *The Moral Bond of Community*, p. 94.

[167] Cf. Preston, *Explorations*, p. 26; *Church and Society*, p. 103; and *Future*, pp. 58, 59 and 215.

of justice as fairness defended by John Rawls, which we will examine separately.[168] Preston's idea of justice as fairness might or might not have been influenced by Rawls' discussion of it, yet it is clearly drawn from a common sense empirical observation of human relations, and not so much from any in depth theoretical reflection. He illustrates his case for justice as fairness by pointing to the way normal parents treat their children.[169] The point Preston makes is that justice as fairness touches the life of everyone. That children under normal circumstances should receive love from their parents is granted. But there is always the question of how each child of different age and maturity, with differing physical and intellectual endowment, should be treated by the parents in such a way that we could say that the children have been treated fairly.

Ordinarily the measure of justice as fairness does not necessarily mean giving the same amount of attention to every child, or distributing the same amount of benefit to each one of them. It is obvious that in distributive justice some kind of measurement or standard is required to ensure that each child receives the attention needed. In other words, certain material criteria[170] are required to ascertain that there is fairness in justice. Preston suggests three such criteria drawn from social philosophy[171] and they are: 1) according to rights, 2) according to merits, and 3) according to needs. He favours the third material criterion "as the best reflection of the ethics of the Kingdom of God," though he also accepts that "the other two have their place in the kingdoms of this world, and the third must be the leaven of the other two."[172]

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[168] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Preston at least acknowledges that "(m)ost discussions in recent years on justice as fairness have arisen from" Rawls' book. Preston, *Confusions*, p. 188.

[169] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 103. Cf. Preston, *Future*, pp. 58f, and Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 171.

[170] Preston does not use the technical term "material criteria" in his published works. This is used by other ethicists, for example, by Joseph L. Allen in his book, *Love and Conflict*, pp. 161 ff..

[171] Preston, *Future*, p. 10.

[172] Ibid., p. 60.

Social philosopher Joel Feinberg has also argued for the need to deploy material criteria for the sake of justice. However, he has tightened his approach to material criteria by differentiating what he calls "the formal principle of justice" and the "material principle of justice."[173] According to Feinberg, the formal principle of justice insists that "like cases are to be treated alike and different cases to be treated differently."[174] He stresses that the likeness and the differences to be considered must be "relevant" likeness and differences.[175] Not to do so would lead to a miscarriage of justice. As he explains:

Any two persons or things will differ in *some* respects, and it is always possible to cite some difference between them to support (more precisely, in *justicization*) of differences in the way they are treated. Clearly, then, comparative justice requires more than that difference in treatment be based on differences in characteristics. The underlying differences between individuals that justicize differences in their treatment must be *relevant* differences, and the underlying similarities that justicize similar treatment must be *relevant* similarities.[176]

It is in dealing with the question of what is "relevant," that is the criteria for relevance, that he moves on to the "material principle of justice." That is to say, beyond the formal principle, one has to consider the "relevant" material principle, or in our usage, the relevant material criteria. Sometimes to ensure that justice is done and protected, we may have to expand the three basic criteria suggested by Preston, and break them down to more precise criteria such as:[177]

To each the same external action.

To each according to efforts expanded.

To each according to results achieved.

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[173] Joel Feinberg, *Social Philosophy*, p. 100.

[174] Ibid., p. 99.

[175] Or in the parlance of those familiar with tropical fruits, we could say, it is a question of comparing mango with mango, and not mango with mangosteen.

[176] Feinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

To each according to ability.

To each according to virtues present.

To each according to need.

To each according to rank.

To each according to legal entitlement.

To each according to promises made.

It is worth noting that both the formal principle and the material criteria direct attention to the recipients of distributive justice and provide principles on how they ought to be treated fairly. However even if the principles are adhered to, and accepted as fair criteria, there is still something lacking in our understanding of justice if we were to keep our discussion on justice at the level of principles. The material criteria, and we should also say, the different categories of justice, do not address the need for the cultivation of justice as a virtue which is required to enable a person or the community of persons to respond to claims for justice based on rights, merits and needs. The equation of justice and our theological understanding of it is incomplete, if we are to focus on principles and categories of justice, without also looking at the character of the people who ought to be just. For society to flourish, justice as a virtue should not be neglected. There should be some priority given to encourage justice as a virtue to be cultivated, nurtured and nourished by the narratives of various significant over-lapping communities.[178] Christians, with access to resources from their own faith community, should be in the forefront working with like-minded people in cultivating justice, promoting social justice and in fostering justice as fairness, even if we take MacIntyre's warning that the post-Enlightenment idea of justice is too fragmented,

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[177] Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

[178] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 26.

though we do not have to accept his pessimistic assessment that the West might be going

through a new Dark Age.[179] We shall let Preston have the final say on why Christians should

be involved in cultivating and promoting justice: "True, God sets no limits to the

possibilities of achieving such qualities of justice, but neither are there limits to the

possibilities of injustice. The Christian shares in the task of furthering the one and avoiding

the other."[180]

b. Preston's critique of the Rawlsian Theory of Justice as Fairness

Preston has criticized Rawls' treatment of justice on a number of occasions.[181]

Rawls is of course a leading philosopher whose book on justice has been critically

acclaimed and widely discussed.[182] He has developed his theory of justice from a liberal

contractarian tradition. The basic idea of his theory of justice, which seems deceptively

simple, is well-known. Since his *Theory of Justice* first appeared in 1971, Rawls' basic

formulation of two principles[183] to secure justice as fairness has undergone modification. In

an article on "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus" he presents his modified rules of

justice as fairness this way:

1. Each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties which is

compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for all.

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[179] We will interact more with MacIntyre when we consider the common good in Preston's social theology.

[180] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 96. The style is reminiscent of Niebuhr, e.g. "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." (Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. xiii.)

[181] E.g., Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 49, 128f., 170; *Church and Society*, pp. 66f.

[182] See, for example N. Daniels, ed., *Reading Rawls*, and a recent critique from Duncan Forrester, *Christian Justice and Public Policy*, pp. 113-139.

[183] Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, pp. 60 and 83.

2. Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions. Firstly, they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they must be to the great benefit of the least advantaged members of society.[184]

Rawls had by 1987 dropped his demand for "the most extensive total system" and replaced it with "a fully adequate system" for his first principle. This modification is probably in response to critics who questioned whether Rawls' assumption of a well-developed liberal society for his theory of justice is indeed fair. Preston, for instance, criticized Rawls' first principle before it was modified, for stressing "the priority of liberty (which) presupposes a fair level of wealth," when many countries in the world "still lack food and shelter, to say nothing of education." The point Preston makes is important. Liberty as an abstract idea makes little sense when there is widespread poverty around the world. Even with the modification of his first principle, Rawls' idea of liberty may still have to be contextualized if it is to be applied to countries with little or no knowledge of what a liberal society entails, or countries which are sceptical of the intention of those propagating the liberal ideology. Yet Preston's critique is not a rejection of the idea of liberty as such, nor is it a denunciation of its validity. For Preston, Rawls' original first principle, "illustrates the point that the understanding of what is just is related to particular societies and cannot entirely be resolved by abstract argument."[185] Elsewhere Preston has been critical of Rawls' contractarian liberalism for being "too individualistic."[186] According to Preston, Rawls' contractarian theory builds on "an inadequate myth in its basic individualistic assumptions about human beings."[187] What Preston also finds disconcerting

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[184] Quoted in Sen, *Inequality*, p. 75.

[185] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 129.

[186] Ibid., 129.

[187] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 66.

is that Rawls' liberalism overemphasizes self-interest without granting that human beings can be altruistic as well.[188]

The modified rules also see the second principle affirming that inequalities should not be promoted at the expense of the disadvantaged. Instead, whatever the inequalities, we should protect the "great (originally 'greatest') benefit of the least advantaged members of society." This protection that ensures the "great benefit of the least advantaged" is what Rawls terms as the Difference Principle, which Forrester commends as "admirable."[189] Even if we are critical of the underlying Rawlsian individualistic philosophy, Forrester accepts that not only does the Difference Principle protect and promote "the interests of the weakest", it can also be appropriated as a "justification for 'affirmative action' on behalf of the disadvantaged."[190] The Difference Principle, we might say, is biased to the poor.

1.3.4 Love and Justice

Possibly influenced by Outka's work on *Agape*, Preston highlights three different ways in which theologians have compared love with justice.[191] Firstly, love has been seen as distinct and different from justice. This view is held by Nygren and Brunner. As Preston puts it, it is a view where,

Justice is seen as concerned with rights and obligations, love with needs; justice with what is deserved in rewards or punishments, love with making a gift of what no one has a right to as a matter of justice; justice with force, love with persuasion; justice as impersonal, stressing what we have in common,

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[188] Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 74 and 129. Also, Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 66, and Preston, *Future*, p. 60.

[189] Forrester, *Christian Justice and Public Policy*, p. 129.

[190] Ibid., p. 130. For an excellent discussion in support of 'preferential affirmative action', see Maguire, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-51.

[191] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 128, Preston, *Explorations*, p. 70, and Preston, *Future*, p. 59. Cf. Outka's 1) Agape and Justice opposed, 2) Agape and Justice Distinguished, and 3) Agape and Justice identified. Outka, *Agape*, pp. 76-88.

love with what is personal and peculiar; justice with what is cool and deliberate, love with warmth and spontaneity.[192]

The second view sees love and justice as identical. The main proponent of this view is Joseph Fletcher. Here both justice and love "are the same as soon as more than two people are involved; justice is maximizing *agape*."[193]

Thirdly, love is seen both as distinct from and yet closely related to justice. This view, often associated with Niebuhr and Tillich, sees a dialectic relation between love and justice which affirms their distinctiveness and accepts their relatedness. Preston explains,

There can be no love without justice; love can never require less than justice, it can never make 'acts of charity' a substitute for justice. Justice restrains egoism and provides stabilities in society for the common good; love is a free gift in addition, embodying the righteousness of God who is concerned with the good of *each* as well as the good of *all*. On the other hand there is no justice without an element of love, because justice involves affirming other persons in their otherness and not merely because of their function. So love is the principle of justice, and justice both prepares for love and partially expresses it.[194]

This third view which holds a dynamic reciprocal relationship between love and justice is the view Preston finds "most adequate."[195] It is a view favoured by Preston for three reasons. First, it does not confine love to the personal realm. Secondly it teaches us not to accept any social ethic that builds on self-interest and individualistic philosophy. And

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[192] Preston, *Future*, p. 59.

[193] Ibid., p. 59.

[194] Ibid., p. 59.

[195] Ibid., p. 60.

thirdly, *agape* though essential in Christian social ethics does not identify itself with any particular social system, instead it serves as an ongoing critique of all social orders.[196]

Concluding Summary

We have provided in this chapter the first of our two-part assessment of Preston's theological framework. The second part of this theological framework will examine Preston's reliance on the doctrine of creation for his social theology, in the way he deals with the themes of Natural Law, the Orders of Creation and the Common Good. This is the topic for the next chapter.

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[196] Ibid., p. 60. Preston made known his preference for this view of love and justice earlier in Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 128.

Chapter Four

The Social Ethics of Ronald H. Preston

2. Theological Framework (II)

This chapter continues with our discussion of Preston's theological framework. We will look at Preston's treatment of the theology of creation for his social ethics, specifically with his appeal to the related doctrines of Natural Law, the common good, and the Orders of Creation. We are aware that the idea of Natural Law and the common good have received criticism from theologians and philosophers who question the validity of such teachings. Our discussion will take into account such criticism but we will argue that they should not be abandoned at all. Without underestimating the complex challenges posed by our fragmented world, these theological themes do point to some common grounds on which people of differing faiths and beliefs, living in overlapping communities, can work together for human well-being. The overall effect of Preston's theological framework is that it reinforces his inclusive, grace-infused social ethic which Christians of different traditions can deploy for their social-ethical engagement in our plural world.

2.1 Natural Law

Although the idea of Natural Law is not new,[1] defining Natural Law is not as easy as it might look. Theologians of diverse backgrounds, among them keen supporters of Natural Law, have suggested that the term is ambiguous and confusing.[2] Apart from the

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[1] E.g., A.P. d'Entreves, *Natural Law*, pp. 7-32, and Paul E. Sigmund, *Natural Law in Political Thought*.

[2] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 80. In the same book, Preston suggests that the doctrine of Natural Law is "in disarray." p. 149. Also Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 105. Cf. John Macquarrie, *Three Issues in Ethics*, pp. 91ff.

problem of ambiguity and confusion, Suggate reminds us that "Natural Law has been condemned as (a) profound theological error, and stigmatized as an empty formula."[3] It is not our wish to add to that confusion. Nevertheless, precisely because it is an ambiguous term, we need to be clear about what we mean when we use that term. Despite the obvious risk involved, we shall offer a working definition to serve as a reference point for our discussion of Preston's critique of Natural Law. Bearing in mind that Preston is interested in including both religious and non-religious people in our common search for moral vision and human well-being, the working definition should not be overly religious so that non-religious people might be deterred from associating with it. Nor should the definition be so irreligious that religious people would have a problem identifying with it. An inclusive working definition is required, and here we shall depend on Maritain, who summarizes Natural Law as "an order or disposition which human reason can discover and according to which the human will must act in order to attune itself to the necessary ends of the human being. The unwritten law, or natural law, is nothing more than that."[4] This speaks of an order, a disposition, and a direction that is intelligible to all humankind. And because it is intelligible, humankind with the help of God's grace, reason and discernment, can discover it, even if only partially, and respond to it. Natural Law can be known by any person solely by virtue of the person being human. Our working definition of Natural Law borrowed from Maritain will serve as a reference in our exposition of Preston's view of Natural Law.

2.1.1 Preston and Natural Law.

Careful readers of Preston's works would notice two things about his discussion on Natural Law. Firstly he is critical of a version of Natural Law which might be described as a misuse of it. The target of his criticism has been primarily the hierarchy of the Roman

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[3] A. M. Suggate, *William Temple*, p. 106. Cf. Preston, *Explorations*, p. 80.

Catholic Church and what he considers to be the traditional Roman Catholic use of Natural Law reflected in the social teachings of that Church. By "traditional," Preston has in mind, mainly but not exclusively, pre-Vatican II social teachings and post-Vatican II teachings on human sexuality found, for example, in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. In Preston's assessment, the traditional Roman Catholic moral theology depended too much on a static view of Natural Law to sanction her official teachings.[5] This static perspective has often led to some questionable conclusions derived from a deductive argument which disregards historically contingent factors, advances made in scientific knowledge and findings in the social sciences.

Secondly, while consistently critical of what he sees as a misuse of the Natural Law, he nevertheless recognizes that Natural Law, when properly understood, is still a valid theological framework for social ethics. He does not use the description himself, but it is clear that in his discussion of the potential of Natural Law as a theological framework for social ethics and inter-faith conversation, he is arguing for what the former bishop of Durham, Ian Ramsey had described as a "rehabilitation" of the Natural Law, or in the words of John Macquarrie who is sympathetic to Ramsey's project, a "rethinking" and "re-interpretation" of Natural Law.[6]

We shall look into these two issues in Preston's thought on Natural Law in greater detail by asking in what sense he is critical of the traditional understanding of Natural Law. This will be followed by considering his argument on how Natural Law should be re-

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[4] J. Maritain, *The Rights of Man and the Natural Law*, p. 35.

[5] See also Macquarrie, *op. cit.*, p. 20, "....if we are going to try to rethink the meaning of 'natural law,' we must not think of either human nature or cosmic nature in the static manner that has been customary in traditional moral theology."

[6] Ian T. Ramsey, et al., *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy*, pp. 382ff, and Macquarrie, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

interpreted, and how a re-interpreted version of Natural Law may be a useful framework for social ethics.

2.1.2 Preston's Criticism of the Traditional View of Natural Law

A foretaste of Preston's criticism of Natural Law can be found in his introduction to the 1976 re-issue of William Temple's *Christianity and Social Order*. In that introduction, he inferred that Temple's view of Natural Law was an adoption of the traditional Roman Catholic view. Part of the reason for reaching that conclusion was what he saw as Temple's direct application of Natural Law to economic issues. Preston has always argued that one should not make direct application either from doctrine or from the scriptures to the complex problems besetting the world, without taking into consideration contextual variants and time-sensitive factors. Besides eschewing a direct application of doctrine and scriptures to the problems of our fragmented world, Preston argues that in the process of making moral decisions, we should avail ourselves of knowledge gained from other disciplines and the input from experts. He faulted Temple for an inadequate understanding of the workings of economics and found Temple's view on Natural Law, reflected in that same book to which he had written a generally affirmative introduction, to be unfortunate. Temple, according to him, had adopted a view of the Natural Law similar to the traditional Roman Catholic use which assumes that "there is something 'fixed' in 'nature' which man can perceive and to which he must conform, and which can be deduced from some general principle, or from the 'nature' of an act devoid of any particular human context."[7]

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[7] Preston's remark in Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, p. 13. It should be noted that though Preston judged Temple to have adopted a static or "fixed" view of Natural Law, Suggate whose own studies of Temple covered more than *Christianity and Social Order*, does not share Preston's conclusion. What Preston judged Temple to have adopted, Suggate points out that Temple had in fact spoken against. Suggate, *op. cit.*, pp. 115ff. Our concern for this analysis of Natural Law is not so much to assess Temple's use of Natural Law, but to identify what Preston's view is all about, though it would appear that the weight of Suggate's conclusion based on Temple's wider publications seems fairer.

Preston rejects such a fixed view of nature as erroneous. He often uses an example from the Bible[8] to illustrate his case against those who hold rigidly to a static view of what is "natural," and to explain why it is inappropriate to make direct application of doctrine and biblical text to vexatious social problems of our time. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians sanctioned his own advice to the Christians in Corinth by appealing to what he thought was the natural thing to do with regard to hair length. In a language reminiscent of Natural Law, Paul had counselled, "Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?"[9] Confident though the apostle was, here is an example of one whose understanding of what was "the very nature of things" was informed by a culturally-conditioned static view of nature. The apostle obviously did not anticipate changing hair-styles across time and territories. He did not envisage that in Ch'ing China (not that he knew of the existence of China), the "very nature of things" to do for every Chinese gentleman was to wear a queue.

Certain practices which might have been passed off as "natural" were in fact products of their time. New knowledge brought about by advances in social sciences, for example, has offered us new perspectives in analyzing social issues which theologians in the past were not able to do. In an article, "Towards Transnational Social Ethics", he declares that "the idea that human nature is so fixed that we can specify in detail certain actions as natural and to be followed or unnatural and to be shunned, is no longer tenable."[10]

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[8] The problem with a "fixed" view of Natural Law is that "particular customs of a particular time have been given a permanent status and called 'natural'." Preston, *Explorations*, p. 149. See also Preston, *Future*, p. 8.

[9] 1 Cor. 11: 14, 15a , NIV.

2.1.3 Aquinas and Preston's Critique of Natural Law.

The Roman Catholic Church has often claimed to have depended on St. Thomas' interpretation of Natural Law for articulating their moral teachings. If the Church had indeed depended on St. Thomas, it would appear that the follies of the traditional use of Natural Law could be traced to Aquinas, so that in criticizing the Roman Church,[11] one might also apportion blame on him. That however, is not how Preston perceives the problem. He is convinced that the problem is not with Aquinas but with his neo-scholastic heirs who were perhaps less than being faithful in applying what Aquinas had taught. They failed to allow for creative space and the greater chance of fallibility the nearer one attends to the particular.

Understandably then, while directing his criticism against the hierarchy of the Roman Church, Preston took care to exonerate Aquinas. We see this in 1980 when Preston excluded Aquinas from his criticism of what he saw as the disarray in Natural Law, "traditionally used". He made clear in his assessment that "St.Thomas Aquinas, from whom the tradition chiefly comes, was very cautious in what detailed moral conclusions could be drawn from the concept and well aware of the relative (we might say conditioning) factors involved in doing so. It is his successors who ignored his caution."[12] In other words the "disarray" we find in Natural Law is the failing of Aquinas' neo-scholastic successors. In similar vein, but using different words, Suggate has also argued that there is a degree of dubiousness in the traditional Roman Catholic use of Natural Law. Just as Preston sought to protect Aquinas from blame, Suggate is careful not to attribute this "dubiousness" to Aquinas. He stresses that the problem "lies not so much in the thought of Aquinas himself

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[10] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 133.

[11] Ibid., p. 133.

[12] See Preston, *Explorations*, p. 149.

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as in some of its development by his successors which had become traditional in the Roman Catholic Church."[13]

If the problem does not lie with St. Thomas, in what sense then has the Roman Catholic Church deviated from the teaching of Aquinas? And where has the Church gone awry in her attempt at applying St. Thomas' formulation of Natural Law for her social teachings?

The answers to these questions can be found in an insightful explanation offered by Charles Curran who has brought to our attention a methodological flaw in the interpretation of Natural Law. According to Curran, the social teachings of the Roman Church, especially prior to Vatican II had developed a primarily deontological perspective of the Natural Law, whereas "Thomas Aquinas in his moral theory was not a deontologist but a teleologist."[14] By comparing the two different methodological approaches, Curran is not arguing for the superiority of the one over the other. Nor is he advocating that we should opt for one methodological model by excluding the other. Teleological and deontological models must not be seen as mutually exclusive. What he is pressing for is that if one is to be faithful to a Thomist application of the Natural Law, then social teachings from a Thomistic perspective should be framed primarily but not completely from a teleological method. In support of his argument that Aquinas is basically a teleologist, Curran reminds us that Aquinas' "first ethical consideration is the ultimate end of human beings. The ultimate end of human beings is happiness, which is achieved when the fundamental powers or drives of human nature achieve their end."[15] What neo-scholasticism and their manuals on moral teachings had

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[13] Suggate, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

[14] Curran, *Tensions in Moral Theology*, p. 97.

[15] Ibid., p. 97.

offered the Roman Catholic Church had been, in Curran's appraisal, a "truncated" version of Aquinas' moral thought.

This teleological approach of Aquinas is also recognized by John Macquarrie when he argued that Natural Law should be seen as a direction to be fulfilled and not a static law to be obeyed.[16] For Macquarrie, the "movement that is envisaged, whether we are thinking of human nature or of a cosmic nature, is a movement with direction, an ordered movement." He elaborates further by saying,

Natural Law is, as it were, the pointer within us that orients us to the goal of human existence. Actual rules, laws, and prohibitions are judged by this 'unwritten law' in accordance with whether they promote or impede the movement toward fuller existence. Natural law changes, in the sense that the precepts we may derive from it change as human nature itself changes, and also in the sense that man's self-understanding changes as he sharpens his image of mature manhood. But through the changes there remains the constancy of direction.[17]

Macquarrie's reading of Aquinas's view of Natural Law, and Curran's explanation that the Catholic traditional moral teachings had veered away from the teleological to the deontological, help us to locate where the fixed view of the Natural Law might have come from. The diagnosis provides a way for social ethicist to avoid a static and deductive application of the Natural Law by being more sensitive to teleological demands.

2.1.4 New Directions in the Roman Catholic understanding of Natural Law.

If Preston has been harsh in his criticism of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, we should regard his criticism as one given by an ecumenist with a life-long interest in promoting Christian unity. He cares deeply about broader ecumenical welfare and his criticism should be seen as part of his on-going dialogue with other traditions of the divided Church, in search of an ecumenical social ethics. What we have to do to get a fairer picture

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[16] Macquarrie, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

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of his criticism is to place it against the backdrop of his appreciative awareness that the rigid view of Natural Law is no longer the predominant view of the Roman Catholic Church. He acknowledges that an increasing number of Catholic theologians, especially since Vatican II, have abandoned the traditional "truncated" perspective. There is now a recognizable change taking place within the Roman Catholic Church which has moved away from a "fixed" idea of nature and Natural Law, although occasional attempts have been made by certain section of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to silence progressive voices and re-impose the traditionalist interpretation.[18] Earlier in 1960, John Courtney Murray, an influential American Jesuit Moral Theologian, had published *We Hold These Truths* which included a chapter where he defended the validity of Natural Law and discussed his version of it that rejected a fixed interpretation of nature.[19] And among the post-Vatican II English-speaking Roman Catholic theologians who have argued for a recasting of Natural Law and its implications on ethical issues, the one who stands out for his outspoken view is Charles Curran.[20] Curran is of course no longer recognized by the Vatican as an official theologian of the Roman Catholic Church. That notwithstanding, his view continues to attract widespread following among Protestant and Catholic ethicists.

Interestingly, besides attributing the traditional fixed view of Natural Law to a deontological interpretation of it, Curran's survey of the Natural Law in the Roman Catholic Church detects three major shifts in the way the Roman Catholic Church has done moral theology since 1891, the year Pope Leo XIII issued his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Firstly,

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[17] Ibid., p. 108.

[18] "The Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) is an attempt to do this, with hints of disciplinary action latent." Preston, *Confusions*, p. 144. Cf. Preston, "Veritatis Splendor: A Comment," *Studies in Christian Ethics*, pp. 38ff.

[19] Murray, *We Hold These Truths,* pp. 295ff.

[20] Curran, *Contemporary Problems in Moral Theology.* See also Charles Curran, *Directions in Catholic Social Ethics*, and Charles Curran, *Tensions in Moral Theology.*

there is a shift to historical consciousness. By that he means that theology is now done more contextually, instead of, on the one hand, the more rigid mode of what he refers to as "classicism," and on the other hand, the extreme mode of what he terms as "sheer existentialism." As Curran explains it, "Classicism understands reality in terms of the eternal, the immutable, and the unchanging; whereas historical consciousness gives more importance to the particular, the contingent, the historical, and the individual."[21] It is classicism which encourages the dubious fixed view of nature. As for "sheer existentialism," the problem lies in its preoccupation with "the present moment in isolation from the before and the after of time, with no binding relationships to persons and values in the present"[22] The historical consciousness or the contextual mode of doing theology safeguards the Church from the extreme of being obscurantist on one hand, and rootless, on the other. It is opened to the past, but not fixated on it. It is concerned about the present without disregarding the contribution of the rich inherited tradition.

The second shift is a move from a static view of social order, and a blind obedience to "controlling authorities to a recognition of the vital importance of the human person with the concomitant need for human freedom, equality and participation."[23] This shift takes the Roman Catholic Church away from being protective of the *status quo*, a defective tendency which Preston has criticized, to become more critical of social injustice embedded in the way society has sometimes been organized. Rejecting a static view of social order opens up new avenue for understanding justice and it also strengthens the moral teaching of Catholic personalism which stresses the dignity and freedom of the person.

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[21] Curran, *Tensions*, p. 89.

[22] Ibid., p. 89.

[23] Ibid., p. 93.

The third significant shift is a move from a legalistic model, sometimes understood as a pejorative version of a deontological model, to a "relationality-responsibility model (which) sees the human person in terms of one's multiple relationships with God, neighbor, world, and self and the call to live responsibly in the midst of these relationships."[24] We have already noted that although the deontological approach to ethics has been implicated in the static view of Natural Law, it is not an approach to be discarded. For Curran, in the "relationality-responsibility model there will always be a place for some laws and norms, but the law model will not be primary."[25]

Needless to say, Preston like Curran is not completely satisfied with the Curia that continues to pronounce social teachings, particularly those relating to sex and human sexuality, derived from a physicalist interpretation of Natural Law,[26] as evidenced in *Humanae Vitae*. The physicalist argument has been used by the Vatican in support of their official pronouncements on what constitute a 'natural' or 'unnatural' practice, and in their rejection, for example, of contraception and abortion.[27] Curran faulted the Roman Church for clinging on to a classicist and fixed view of nature in defending the official teachings on sex and sexuality.[28]

On the whole, despite the severe tone of his earlier criticism of the Roman Catholic Church, by 1994 Preston was obviously impressed enough by what he had witnessed for him to describe some of the changes taking place as "radical." After examining the development of the Roman Catholic social teachings from the publication of the *Rerum Novarum* in 1891,

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[24] Ibid., p. 96.

[25] Ibid., p. 96. Preston is sympathetic to Curran's "revisionist" view. See *Confusions*, pp. 144, 145 and 193.

[26] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 106. Cf. Preston, *Explorations*, p. 150, and Curran, *Tensions*, pp. 22ff.

[27] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 106. Cf. Preston, *Future*, p. 47, "Natural Law cannot any longer be used in the non-historical, physicalist way..."

[28] Curran, *Tensions*, pp. 100ff.

he observed that, "there has been a radical revision of (Papal) thinking on Natural Law, (with the notable exception of sexual ethics)."[29] He commended the Roman Catholic Church for retaining "its emphasis that Natural Law is the human mind understanding reality, but with the awareness that human thinking is historically conditioned and our knowledge is constantly open to re-appraisal and growth."[30]

Differences still remain. But Preston would have no difficulty agreeing with Curran's assessment of the development taking place in the Roman Catholic Church.

2.1.5 Basic Morality as Natural Law

That Preston is a harsh critic of the traditional classicist use of Natural Law, there is little doubt. That Natural Law has many other critics[31] is also well-documented, and in that sense Preston is not alone in his criticism of the Roman Catholic Church. With so many critics, little wonder then that in the "ecumenical circles" Preston had observed that Natural Law "had been exploded,"[32] triggered off perhaps by Barth's rejection of it, early last century. Yet amidst criticisms and the general polemic against Natural Law, he warns of the "danger of throwing the baby away with the bathwater...".[33] Clearly he does not want us to jettison Natural Law no matter how scathingly he or others might have criticized the "truncated" version of it. For all his criticism, he still regards Natural Law, properly understood, "hard to do without..."[34] in that it can still be retrieved as a valid theological

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[29] Preston, *Confusions*, p. 43.

[30] Ibid., p. 43.

[31] Cf. Curran, *Directions*, p. 44. Cf. J. P. Wogaman, *A Christian Method of Moral Judgment*, pp. 7f, and Ans van der Bent, *Commitment to God's World: A Concise Critical Survey of Ecumenical Social Thought*, pp. 169ff.

[32] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 23.

[33] Preston, *Future*, p. 49.

[34] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 23. Cf., Ans van der Bent, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

framework for social ethics.[35] So that Natural Law is not consigned to oblivion, Preston presses for an alternative view of Natural Law which can be deployed for doing social ethics in a plural world.

Like Macquarrie,[36] a major reason for searching for an alternative version of the Natural Law is that Preston sees in Natural Law a common ground in which people in our multi-religious and multi-racial society could work together for human well-being without having to retreat into some self-imposed enclaves, demarcated by religious allegiance and divisive particularities.[37] It is Preston's contention that Natural Law, understood as a basic moral order or natural morality, offers a unifying moral order for people living in overlapping communities to communicate with each other for human flourishing, in a way that sectarian theological framework might not be able to facilitate. Preston emphasizes this point when he asserts,

Fortunately the different understandings of man are not so completely contradictory that they do not overlap. In particular many forms of humanist view overlap at many points with Christian views. Nor are the chief different religions totally contradictory. If they were, human groups would be so isolated from one another as to make tolerable life together on this planet impossible. It is this which makes *some* doctrine of Natural Law possible and necessary, as distinct from those versions of it which have broken down.[38]

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[35] See too Macquarrie, *op. cit.*, p. 110, and Ans van der Bent, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

[36] Macquarrie, *op. cit.*, pp. 82ff., and p. 110 where he says, "We have seen that [Natural Law] provides a firm basis for moral cooperation and community between Christians and non-Christians."

[37] See for example, Hauerwas' rejection of the Natural Law, in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 63f. The ecclesiological ethics of Hauerwas sees the world as inherently violent, and the religious/philosophical traditions of the world to be so fatally fragmented that there is no possibility of common ground for people of differing faiths to work together without expecting Christians to compromise their faith, understood in the way Hauerwas contrues Christianity. His is a view which we do not share. We also question his assumption that the world (and by implication this must include all religious faiths apart from Christianity) is inherently violent and that there is only one tradition of Christianity that is faithful, and it is the "non-violent" version he represents. Hauerwas seems to ignore that the "God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus" (p.63) whom he calls our attention to, is not a tribal God, but the Lord of the whole creation.

[38] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 153; Also, Preston *Ambiguities*, pp. 80f. and Preston, *Confusions*, p. 111.

The Natural Law which Preston wants us to have is clearly not the rigid version which he has vigorously rejected, but one which he describes as "basic morality" held by all humankind. Using the book of Amos to illustrate his point, he elaborates, "Indeed the Old Testament does not think that only those who believes in Yahweh are moral beings. Far from it. It assumes the reality of moral insight and moral decisions in the life of human beings, just as it assumes the reality of God, and does not argue the question."[39] The advantage of seeing Natural Law as a basic moral direction, or "basic morality" is that people who may not share the same religious faith can still find a common ground in their quest for human flourishing informed by shared values, for the benefit of the whole of humanity. Basic morality stresses a shared ethical vision without having to be entangled in religious differences, although we grant that some differences are irreconcilable and that it is also impossible for any religious person not to have her morality shaped by religious conviction and nurtured by significant religious community. This formulation of Natural Law as basic morality is explained by Preston in one of his lengthier treatments of the subject:

(Natural Law) does not, properly understood, refer to a law of physical nature, as the laws of natural science are often thought of, nor a law enacted by a state or local authority, but to a moral law which human beings know they are bound by, not because it has been imposed on them by an outside authority, but because they themselves recognize its authority. Natural law is self-imposed, but responds to what is understood as a moral fact of life. One does not have to be 'religious', still less a Christian, to recognize it, though Christians believe that it is a moral order inherent in God's universe, one which has led to the appearance of persons in it.[40]

To construe Natural Law as basic morality is to couch it in a religion-neutral term, without having to disclaim the religious sanction which the various faith communities might provide. Being a hopeful realist that he is and a believer of God's grace at work in all

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[39] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 95.

humanity, Preston sees basic morality as "binding in all, and we need to work out its implications together."[41] It is obvious that having to "work out its implications" suggests that basic morality involves constructive participation from the moral agents, in the dynamic process of fostering relationality-responsibility, which Curran speaks about. One is also reminded of what John Courtney Murray says when defending the efficacy of Natural Law. "It can claim to be only a 'skeleton law,' to which flesh and blood must be added by that heart of the political process, the rational activity of man, aided by experience and by professional competence."[42] Working out the implications of basic morality assisted by practical reason, common experience, overlapping consensus and expert advice is like having to add the "flesh and blood" to the Natural Law which Murray refers to.

2.1.6 Tao as Natural Law

What is of particular interest to us, however, is Preston's hints that the Tao[43] used by C. S. Lewis, offers a clue to how we might define Natural Law as basic morality cross-culturally. Lewis had used Tao as a generic term for Natural Law.[44] He had defined Natural Law from sources both within and beyond European philosophical traditions, to include the sapiential writings from Egypt, India and China.[45] Preston has not developed the idea of Tao beyond treating the subject teasingly in a marginal way[46], and in a footnote reference to C.S.

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[40] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 105.

[41] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 96.

[42] Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

[43] Preston quotes C. S. Lewis' treatment of Tao in Lewis' *The Abolition of Man*. See footnote no. 5 in Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 175.

[44] "This conception in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental alike, I shall henceforth refer to for brevity simply as 'the *Tao*'. Some of the accounts of it which I have quoted will seem, perhaps, to many of you merely quaint or even magical. But what is common to them all is something we cannot neglect. It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of things the universe is and the kind of things we are." C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, p. 11.

[45] Ibid., pp. 41 ff. The main Chinese source quoted by Lewis is that of Confucius' *Analects*. Surprisingly he omitted reference to other major sources of Tao, for example, in Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*.

[46] For example in Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 132.

Lewis' Riddell Memorial Lectures. And because he only makes marginal references to *Tao*,

Preston has not explained how *Tao* might be appropriated to enhance our understanding of

Natural Law other than to give assent to *Tao* as interpreted by Lewis. Had he delved deeper

into the idea of *Tao* in Chinese philosophy, he might be able to tell us that *Tao*, besides

being a generic word used by Lewis for Natural Law, might hold some promise in furthering

mutual understanding and appreciation of Natural Law both among Christians, and between

Christians on one side and Chinese including Sinophiles and Asians with cultures

influenced by Chinese philosophy, on the other side. In the absence of discussion of *Tao*, we

have to look at Lewis' definition to find out what Preston might have in mind when he

suggested that in Lewis' interpretation of *Tao* there is a "concise treatment of common

morality.."[47] Lewis had defined *Tao* as

....the reality beyond all predicates, the abyss that was before the Creator Himself. It is Nature, it is the Way, the

Road. It is the Way in which the universe goes on, the Way in which things everlastingly emerge, stilly and

tranquilly, into space and time. It is also the Way which every man should tread in imitation of that cosmic and

supercosmic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar.[48]

The *Tao* as defined by Lewis has that sense of a "constancy of direction" that

Macquarrie talks about.[49] More than that, it is also the truth or the way which one is

supposed to seek after and cultivate.[50] This is the *Tao* which more than a quarter of the total

population of the world in East Asia are familiar with. That *Tao* is deeply entrenched in the

world view and psyche of the majority of East Asians can be seen for instance in the

pervasive reference to that word, even in ordinary conversations among the Chinese. For

example, we have two words *Tao Li,* regularly used in conversation to refer to that which is

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[47] Ibid., p. 175.

[48] Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 10f.

[49] Macquarrie, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

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reasonable. When one speaks of *Tao Li* one speaks of natural reasonableness, and the basic moral obligation it expects of every upright person.

Outside China, the influence of *Tao* and its impact on the Japanese culture can be found in the two words which have been anglicized as *Shinto*; a name given to the national religion of Japan. The second word in *Shinto,* that is '*to*', is the same word for *Tao.* The '*Shin*" in *Shinto,* written in the shared classical Chinese form, refers to a "god" or "gods." *Shinto* may be literally translated as the *Tao* or the way of the "god(s)."

Like Natural Law, *Tao* is both an ambiguous and ubiquitous concept, and it has attracted more than one way of defining it.[51] Yet even though there is difficulty involved in defining *Tao,* complicated by the fact that it can be used both as a verb and noun, and despite its Chinese origin, as a broad philosophical idea, it points to a reality, a direction, which transcends any particular group or race.

Notwithstanding its ambiguity, there are scholars such as Max Kaltenmark, the French Sinologist who, while granting the difficulties in defining the term, nevertheless concedes that it has been used to refer to what he has interestingly designated as "Natural Law (Tao of Heaven)."[52] Julia Ching, a leading Confucian scholar who is a Christian, takes a somewhat similar view about *Tao.* In her book *Confucianism and Christianity,* she makes this comparison between what she understands as the Confucian conscience and the Roman Catholic teaching of the Natural Law.

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[50] So *Tao* is the term used to translate Logos in the Johannine prologue, and also for "way" in John 14:6 when Jesus asserts that he is the "way, the truth and the life."

[51] "....it is foolish to try to propound a single, sovereign definition of Taoism, since the term denotes not one school but a whole congeries of doctrines. The problem is all the more complex because the word *Tao* (the Way) is used by every school of Chinese thought or religion, and because the English word *Taoism* is used to refer to both Taoist philosophy (*Tao-Chia*) and Taoist religion (*Tao-chiao*)." Julia Ching in Hans Kung and Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions,* p. 131. See also Max Kaltenmark, *Lao Tzu and Taoism,* p. 28.

[52] Kaltenmark *op. cit.,* 1969, p. 28

It is interesting to note here the greater resemblance between Confucian teaching and the traditional Catholic doctrine of a *natural moral law* - that which is based on human nature itself, the law written in men's hearts. Usually specialists of comparative law have a negative opinion. They point to the Confucian *disparagement* of positive law ... as evidence that it has only a penal character. Certainly, the Confucian tradition places much more emphasis upon the moral personality of the ruler than upon the laws governing the country. But this does not mean Confucian philosophy would not agree to the self-evident principle - attributed to natural law - that man knows as though by moral instinct to do good and avoid evil, even if this same instinct does not enlighten him as to *what* is good and *what* evil.[53]

Clearly a way is open for Christians to appropriate *Tao* at a deeper level than we have done in the past, although it is prudent not to hold too romantic a view of it. To be sure, there are problems which need to be addressed. An idea which has been around for more than two thousand years, would have accumulated a multi-layer of meaning. It is to be expected that along the way, and in the many usages deployed by sometimes conflicting philosophical, not to mention religious schools, it has taken on differing interpretations and varied meanings which require careful exegesis and deciphering. In that sense it is right that Hans Kung in his dialogue with Julia Ching should refer to the different layers of usage of the term.[54] If we are not to be entrenched in the trap of multi-layered meanings, it might be necessary to differentiate the philosophical understanding of *Tao* from a religious understanding of it[55] so that when we use that term we should make it clear that it is the philosophical *Tao* that we have in mind. It is this philosophical *Tao* which C. S. Lewis used for Natural Law in his Riddell Lectures. By inference, Preston is also pointing to the philosophical *Tao* when he quoted Lewis.

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[53] Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, p. 90.

[54] Hans Kung and Julia Ching, *op. cit.,* pp. 159 ff.

[55] Ibid., p. 131.

There is in the philosophical *Tao*, and by extension, the ethical *Tao*, a common platform for an ethical naturalism which should equip Chinese Christians living in a predominantly non-Christian Chinese environment to work closely with their neighbours, although they may follow different religious faiths. An added bonus for the Christians in East Asia who work within a *Tao*-informed ethical naturalism, is that when they use a commonly recognizable term and accept that term as a common ethical language for moral discourse, it is less likely that they would be ostracized as aliens in their own culture. In a situation where the value-system of the Church has become too fused with the prevailing culture, as we might say of the Church in the United States, Hauerwas' call for the Church to be faithful to her vocation, that is for the Church to be the Church,[56] is a valid message which requires urgent attention.[57] But in an Asian context where Christians are decisively in the minority[58] living in countries with no long-term history of Christian presence and where Christianity has often been negatively associated with the colonial West, being a "resident alien"[59] in the sense that one ceases to engage constructively in the socio-political life of the wider community, would create unnecessary barriers, and in so doing give further reasons to the public to suspect that Christians are rootless Asians who are proxies of Western interests. That said, it is conceivable that in a country where the dominant group of people and the powers-that-be are hostile to Christians, and where to be a Christian is to be open to abuse and persecution, it might be necessary for Christians to give and receive mutual

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[56] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 99ff.

[57] Not everyone is convinced by Hauerwas' ecclesiological ethics, besides Preston, see for example, Max Stackhouse, "In the Company of Hauerwas," *Journal for Christian Theological Research*, 1997, pp. 1-6, and Stephen Platten, "Culture: Speeches to its Theological Despisers," *Modern Believing*, vol. xxxix, 1998, pp. 10-18.

[58] For some time, the only Asian country where Christians are in the majority is the Philippines, though we can now include East Timor. Yet neither country has a long and unbroken history of Christian presence. Christianity arrived in these countries as in most Asian countries rather late, riding on the back of, and often associated with, European imperialistic adventure.

[59] Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*.

support as a withdrawn community of persecuted believers, in the Hauerwasian sense. Probably in response to Hauerwas' social ethics, Preston makes it known that he is not convinced that the Church should "abandon the large-scale issues of public policy and government and take refuge in local communities, churchly and secular."[60] Nevertheless, he is prepared to grant, as we have done, that perhaps in a hostile country where Christians are in the minority, the Hauerwasian model might be appropriate. Then again "not necessarily even there."[61]

Basic morality as Natural Law is shared morality.[62] It appeals to the shared experience of humankind. "This appeal to the basic experience of human beings," according to Preston, "is what the Natural Law doctrine (properly understood) is concerned with."[63] Since he was not writing for an East Asian audience, understandably *Tao* was not explicated in as great a depth as we might like him to do. Nevertheless it might not be too presumptuous, following his line of argument and his hint of the potential of *Tao*, to suggest that in his understanding of Natural Law there is a place for *Tao*, at least the philosophical if not the ethical *Tao* which Christians can adapt for their theological framework. We must not forget that philosophical *Tao*[64] has a moral dimension which has been shared by most East Asians for a longer period of time than the history of Christianity. And because we cannot presume that God's grace is not at work in the history and culture of East Asian civilizations prior to the arrival of Christianity, it is not unreasonable to say that *Tao* might just hold the elusive missiological key which could open up opportunity for mutual

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[60] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 130, Cf., Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 133f.

[61] Preston, *Ambiguities* p. 131.

[62] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 106.

[63] Preston, *Confusions*, p. 127.

[64] To have a better feel of *Tao* and its impact on Chinese culture, see Theodore de Bary, et. al., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2 vols; Max Kaltenmark, *op. cit.*; Lin Yutang *The Wisdom of Laotse*; Kung and Ching, *op. cit.*, 1989; and Fung Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*.

understanding and the enrichment of our common search for human flourishing among people whose life and culture have been immersed by some adumbration of *Tao*.[65] Natural Law as basic morality might find in ethical *Tao* a common moral ground for social ethics in an East Asian plural society.

2.1.7 Natural Law: "For Want of a Better Name"[66]

If what Preston is really arguing for is basic morality, one might then ask whether what he has reclaimed is indeed Natural Law, or something else altogether? Has Preston, in fact, disregarded his own warning and discarded the baby with the bathwater when he offers us his version of Natural Law? Should we not just call his version 'Basic Morality' without having to rely on the contentious term?

In one sense it is accurate to say that what Preston has offered is no longer "Natural Law" if we define it in the traditional or classicist sense which he criticized. But there is no need to discard the term if we remember that theological terms which have picked up unfortunate baggage, like any term in constant use over a long period of time, need to go through renewed process of clarification and re-interpretation[67] that takes into consideration contextual concerns and the major criticisms of its past follies. There is no need to avoid that term if we also keep in mind that the Roman Catholic Church, without discarding it or introducing new ones, has now adjusted its understanding of Natural Law with enough changes for Preston to describe as "radical." One could of course dissociate oneself from the traditional view of Natural Law by not using that term altogether. That is precisely what N.

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[65] It should be noted that there had been attempts in the past where *Tao* was deployed in dialogue with Chinese with varying degree of success. See Ralph R. Covell's *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese*, especially his chapter on "The Dao and the Logos," pp. 122ff.

[66] A phrase taken from Macquarrie, "What for want of a better name has usually been called 'natural law' is still a very useful concept." *op. cit.*, p. 110.

[67] Ans van der Bent, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

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H. G. Robinson does. He rejects Natural Law, and opts instead for a version of common moral insights which he calls "natural morality."[68] Another person who refuses to use "Natural Law" for his social ethics is Reinhold Niebuhr. However in his astute assessment of Niebuhr's Christian Realism, Robin Lovin has argued that while Niebuhr was highly critical of the Roman Catholic use of Natural Law, his criticism, like those given by Robinson, Macquarrie and Preston, is directed at the Church's rigid view and an over-dependence on human reason.[69] For all his criticism, Niebuhr had in fact held on to a semblance of Natural Law with a strong ethical dimension which Lovin describes as "ethical naturalism." Preston's basic morality may be said to be an "ethical naturalism," to use Lovin's term, or "natural morality" following Robinson's preference. But Preston does not discard the traditional term, possibly because unlike Niebuhr and Robinson but like Ramsey and Macquarrie, Preston's sense of the Anglican Natural Law tradition[70] is still intact, and he sees no convincing reason for him to do away with that term all together. Changing the term might initially avoid misunderstanding with an existing word which had taken on questionable interpretations. But coining new terms would probably add to the confusion and a proliferation of superfluous words which refer to a basically similar idea.

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[68] Robinson would say "....believers and unbelievers do indeed share historical existence, and that means that they have in common many moral insights, many moral doubts, perplexities, ambiguities, and underlying them all an indefeasible and irreducible sense of 'ought', some sense of human dignity and of the true humanity of man. To say this is to enunciate what seems a quite incontrovertible doctrine of natural morality, that there is such a thing; but it is not to set forth a theory of natural law or indeed any other systematic presentation or interpretation of this natural morality. Morality is not a dead, static, unchanging thing, as the theory of natural law tends to represent it; and at the root of the present-day criticism or suspicion of objective norms and ethical absolutism there may well lie a confusion between the traditional representation of a reality and the reality itself." N.H.G. Robinson, *The Groundwork of Christian Ethics*, p. 260.

[69] R. Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism*, pp. 108f. Another criticism against Natural Law traditionally used is that it does not take sin seriously enough, a point conceded by Curran as well. See Curran, *Themes*, p. 32, and his criticism of *Pacem in Terris*, in Curran, *Directions*, p. 49f.

[70] That the Anglican Church has a Natural Law tradition is also discussed by Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 302f. Robinson takes "cognisance of the fact that within the Anglican tradition, in contrast both to the Reformed and to the Lutheran, a place has frequently been found, not just for a doctrine of natural morality, but for a doctrine of natural law, sometimes in obvious reliance upon the traditional doctrine and sometimes in a more exploratory fashion." Robinson also recognizes that beyond relying on the traditional use of Natural Law or

Our assessment is that even though Natural Law has had its fair share of harsh criticism, it has not been irreparably discredited. Critics like Macquarrie, Curran and Preston have succeeded in arguing that, when properly understood, Natural Law is still a crucial framework for Christian social ethics. If Murray thinks that certain efforts at discrediting Natural Law were in fact futile attempts at burying a wrong corpse,[71] we might say that theologians like Preston, taking cue perhaps from Ramsey's call for a rehabilitation of Natural Law, is engaged in resuscitating it, and giving it a new lease of life.

Meantime, we need to keep in view that his Natural Law as "basic morality," which is close to the "natural morality" of Temple as interpreted by Suggate[72] and the "ethical naturalism" of Niebuhr as interpreted by Lovin,[73] affirms the universality of Natural Law for all people. Natural Law as basic morality, also manifested as a version of philosophical *Tao*, fits well into our working definition which suggests, "an order or disposition which human reason can discover and according to which the human will must act in order to attune itself to the necessary ends of human being."[74]

As we have shown in an earlier chapter, Preston's theological framework has always emphasized the social relatedness of person-in-community. He has also stressed that a person's character and well-being is cultivated not in a vacuum but through that person's inter-relationship with other members of a community and other overlapping

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merely doing "exploratory" work, there have been serious attempts at restating "the doctrine of the natural law in modern terms." He cites the works of Ramsey and Macquarrie. (p. 303).

[71] Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 298. The resilience of Natural Law, despite attempts to discard it, is such that Murray was led to say, "But the ancient idea of the natural law is as inherently perennial as the *philosophia perennis* of which it is an integral part. Its reappearance after its widely attended funeral is one of the interesting intellectual phenomena of our generation." Ibid., p. 299.

[72] Suggate, *op. cit.*, pp. 124f.

[73] Lovin, *op. cit.*, pp. 72 ff.

[74] See footnote 4, above.

communities. His understanding of Natural Law continues with this communitarian emphasis:

This appeal to the basic experience of human beings is what the Natural Law doctrine (properly understood) is concerned with. Such experience is personal to each human being, but corporate in that persons are what they are through their communal relationships. So living in communities of faith is of great importance in fostering commitments to love-inspired justice, and they thus have a vital role in contributing to the secular communities in which believers live cheek by jowl with citizens who follow other faiths and philosophies.[75]

Basic Morality is enriched and nurtured by relationality-responsibility within the context of multi-layered significant communities where God's grace is always at work in the lives of the people. Preston's concern for a communitarian social ethics is developed further when he argues his case for the common good.

2.2 The Common Good

The common good like the Natural Law has been traditionally associated with the social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, "though it is not by any means exclusive to it."[76] Preston assumes that the common good is an efficacious social vision which is fundamental to his social theology.[77] He often refers to the common good in his writings to indicate that people of different cultures and beliefs, in spite of their differences, do have shared values which can be harnessed for human flourishing.

The best place to look at Preston's discussion of the common good is to be found in his Hartley Lecture[78] where he puts together in one place what he had discussed in varying details elsewhere. Quoting from a Roman Catholic definition of the common good as "a

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[75] Preston, *Confusions*, p. 127.

[76] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 45. Cf. Robert G. Simons, *Competing Gospel: Public Theology and Economic Theory*, p. 88.

[77] Preston, "The Common Good," *Epworth Review*, p. 19.

[78] Ibid., pp. 12-20.

coherent set of structural connections that promotes the interests of all members of society",

he confirms that "This is what I had taken (the common good) to mean."[79] Beyond the short

definition, the content of the common good, for him,

must include the material conditions of life, for without various obvious basic necessities which each

person has access to, those who do not have such access are excluded from participation in the

commonly accepted community life: they are marginalised. Mention of participation takes us beyond

the material necessities of food, shelter, medical care and education to being part of the decision

making processes in voluntary and statutory groups and structures. If any are excluded from them they

are excluded from the common good.[80]

His understanding of the common good, which he associates with basic socio-

economic needs of the people, as well as a sense of practical reasonableness in morality,[81]

has close affinity to the definition found in a recent document released by the Catholic

Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.[82] In the document aptly entitled *The Common*

Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching, the Church affirms that,

The common good stands in opposition to the good of rulers or of a ruling (or any other) class. It

implies that every individual, no matter how high or low, has a duty to share in promoting the welfare of the

community as well as a right to benefit from that welfare. "Common" implies "all-inclusive": the common good

cannot exclude or exempt any section of the population.[83]

If the common good is the good that benefits all and the good that builds human

solidarity, one would expect it to be widely embraced and readily taught. Yet this idea has

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[79] Ibid., p. 16.

[80] Ibid., p. 16.

[81] Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 131f.

[82] *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching*, pp. 28 ff. Here the references consulted
include *Rerum Novarum*, 1981; *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931; *Pacem in Terris*, 1962; *Gaudium et Spes*,
1965; and other post-Vatican II documents.

[83] Ibid., p. 17.

attracted stinging criticisms in recent years, with some questioning whether the concept of the common good has outlived its usefulness. On the one hand, for different reasons, theologians like Dumas and Atherton think that the common good is a hindrance. Dumas sees the common good as hindering justice and Atherton considers the common good as a hindrance to the efficient functioning of the free market. MacIntyre and others like Hauerwas, on the other hand, are convinced that in our fragmented world there is no such a thing as an all-embracing idea of the common good at all.[84]

2.2.1 Three Critics: Dumas, MacIntyre and Atherton

Preston is, of course, familiar with the serious criticism levelled at the idea of the common good. In his books, he has addressed the criticism of the Political Theologian, Andre Dumas, and the criticism of the eminent philosopher, Alasdair McIntyre. It is in his Hartley Lecture that he takes on the criticism of John Atherton, his former student. We will look at Preston's responses to these three critics beginning with Dumas.

a. Andre Dumas

In *Political Theology and the Life of the Church*, Dumas suggests that on the surface, the idea of the common good seems congenial to Christians who are concerned about social well-being. It is supposed to reject among other things, "egocentric individualism" and advocate the "importance of interpersonal solidarity"[85], something which we could affirm. But that, for Dumas, is a superficial and therefore unrealisable reading of the common good. The common good, for him, "tended to give its blessing to the

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[84] Hollenbach attends to such criticism in an erudite essay which defends the common good from a Augustinian-Thomist-Maritain perspective. See his "The Common Good Revisited," *Theological Studies*, 50 (1989), pp. 70ff.

[85] Andre Dumas, *Political Theology and the Life of the Church*, p. 120.

continuation of hierarchies which are supposed to be for the good of society."[86] What he is critical about is that the common good is in fact an ideological tool which favours the establishment and protects the interest of the privileged class. The pious poor, on the other hand, are expected to accept their fated place in society "with a reverent resignation over natural and social inequalities."[87]

Preston agrees with the "basic position" of Dumas,[88] and that is, one should be suspicious of how a good concept can be exploited as an ideological tool to perpetrate the interests of the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and powerless. But he rejects the idea that adopting the common good necessarily means that we have to endorse the *status quo* and remain silent in the face of widespread injustice. What Dumas fails to see is that the common good, like Natural Law, does not need to be interpreted in a static sense. "The task is to see that it is interpreted in a dynamic fashion."[89] It does not follow, therefore, that the common good should be seen as "a reverent resignation over natural and social inequalities" or any kind of social injustice.[90]

Apart from rejecting the common good as an oppressive ideological tool, Dumas insists that if indeed a new common good is to be blessed, "the common good must be seen as the possible outcome of conflicts but not as the prohibition of these conflicts on the pretext that inequality is natural."[91] And indeed this is allowed for in Preston's dynamic view of the common good. In response to Dumas, and more so because he himself would not

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[86] Ibid., p. 120.

[87] Ibid., p. 121.

[88] Preston, "The Common Good," *Epworth Review*, p. 14.

[89] Ibid., p. 16.

[90] Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 45f. And in Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 131, he says , "Andre Dumas, for instance, argues that it tends to pre-suppose a metaphysics of harmony, a stable society, and is advocated by those with favourable position in society, since it offers a justification for the privileges of conservatives."

[91] Dumas, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

want the common good to be exploited as an ideological tool to prop up unjust social structures, Preston asserts that a "commitment to the common good does not rule out that the best realization of it at a particular moment may be the outcome of conflict."[92] There is, however, a Niebuhrian qualification, and that is,

What it does mean is that conflicts must be carried out within an overarching awareness that while my personal or group interests must be represented, heard and allowed for, there are other interests which I am not likely to be as forcefully aware of as my own (still less is my group likely to be as aware of the interests of other groups).......out of the tussle in the public forum an approximation to the common good must be sought.[93]

b. Alasdair MacIntyre

Another critic of the common good identified by Preston is Alasdair MacIntyre. It was in his Scott Holland lectures that Preston first addressed the criticism of MacIntyre whose seminal book, *After Virtue* had criticized the Enlightenment project and the resultant fragmentation of ideas. According to MacIntyre, it is no longer possible to appeal to any kind of meta-idea like the common good and natural law in this fragmented post-enlightenment world. "What we possess," in MacIntyre's analysis, "are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived."[94] MacIntyre is therefore "dismissive of any appeal to the common good or the common moral traditions of promise keeping, truth telling and benevolence because he thinks that moral pluralism has become too great."[95]

While there might be validity in MacIntyre's observation about the marked fragmentation of traditions in a post-enlightenment world and the liberal culture it has

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[92] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 46.

[93] Ibid., p. 46.

[94] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 2. And on p. 5, he laments that "the language and the appearances of morality persist even though the integral substance of morality has to a large degree been fragmented and then in part destroyed."

engendered in the West, Preston considers his view to be too negative.[96] In response to

MacIntyre, Preston states, "He is right to deny that there is a necessary unity and harmony

of virtues and to affirm the possibility of tragic conflicts between them. But because of his

attacks on liberal democracy, he does not give enough attention to the public virtues of

tolerance and justice, and the moral practices needed for a sustainable plural society."[97]

Preston holds the view that despite conflicts of ideas and the difficulties in resolving such

conflicts, there are still some common ideas and shared vision, even if they are in fragments,

which can be garnered and appealed to, by people of differing religious and philosophical

inclinations. The common good is such an idea; so too the idea of Natural Law.

One does not have to hold a pessimistic view about the common good, and Preston

finds support in John Finnis, Wittgenstein, the ancient sages of China and John Rawls to

show that the common good is still a coherent concept. John Finnis, for instance, writing as

an expert in Law, has argued for an understanding of the universality of basic human nature

and what he calls the "basic forms of human goods" to demonstrate that there are goods

which are held in common by human beings.[98] Another way to resolve the problem posed

by MacIntyre about the fragmentation of ideas, Preston suggests, is to adapt the

Wittgensteinian concept of "family resemblance." It is still possible to cluster virtues under

"family resemblance" because not all differences are so irreconcilably dichotomized as they

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[95] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 132.

[96] Ibid., p. 132. And on p. 133 he refers to MacIntyre's pessimism and his oft quoted line that "modern politics is civil war carried on by other means" (MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 236.)

[97] Ibid., p. 132. Of course, MacIntyre has moved on, and he has in fact developed his critique of the enlightenment project further by focusing on the issue of justice in, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Even if we take into consideration MacIntyre's newer works, the central question posed by Preston is still valid. While the Western world may be fragmented, and the claims to morality contested, the fragmentation is not fatal. More attention needs to be given to the search for common interest and public virtues for humankind to cooperate and co-exist with one another in our plural world.

[98] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 132. Finnis has provided a list of what he calls some "basic forms of human good" which include life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, sociability (friendship), practical reasonableness, and religion. See John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, pp. 81ff.

might initially appear to be. In Preston's view, "although it is true that lists of basic moral virtues vary, they do not do so to a radical extent." Moreover, just as he has done for Natural Law, he has also turned to what he considers as the universal appeal of *Tao* to remind us the commonality of moral interest among people of diverse beliefs. For him, the "similarity of the Tao in different faiths and philosophies remain striking." He avers that "Christian theologians need to affirm and foster it."[99] Finally, in his Hartley lecture, he refers to John Rawls to suggest that although Rawls' contractarian construal of justice might have been developed from an individualistic presumption, it nevertheless assumes that common good can be found in the self-interested arrangement of people who work, under a "veil of ignorance" for the greatest benefit of the least advantaged.[100]

A more comprehensive critique of MacIntyre's thesis, however, is provided by Jeffrey Stout. Here we list some of Stout's pertinent rebuttals against MacIntyre's contention that there is no possibility for us to find common ground among people of differing traditions.

a) While total agreement regarding what is good may be impossible to obtain, we should not discount the possibility that our "society can itself be understood as held together by a relatively limited but nonetheless real and significant agreement on the good."[101]

b) MacIntyre assumes that there was a single theory of moral life that dominated the world prior to the Enlightenment. But that is a questionable assumption.[102]

c) Using a term which owes much to Rawls, he suggests that MacIntyre has ignored the possibility of "overlapping consensus."[103]

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[99] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 132.

[100] Preston, "The Common Good," *Epworth Review*, p. 15.

[101] Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel*, p. 212.

d) The problem of diversity of moral languages is not a post-enlightenment phenomenon. "If premodern language-users have been able to converse across cultural boundaries, change their minds in dialogue with strangers, and invent new moral languages out of apparent incompatible fragments, perhaps we can too."[104]

On the common good, Stout makes his case thus:

Only rarely, if ever, are human societies of any size and complexity united in perfect agreement on the common good. Ours certainly is not. But it is still possible for us to recognize the unfortunate effects of religious warfare, invent ways of talking and living with one another, just as it is still possible for us to carry on with our (moral) reasoning in many other ways, relying throughout on agreements we do have. What might these agreements be? We all agree that nuclear destruction would be bad, that Charles Manson shouldn't be held up as a model to the young, and that torturing innocents for the fun of it would be abhorrent. Most of us agree that extending legal protection to peaceful fellow citizens who disagree with us religiously is better than starting the religious wars up again. These are very important things to agree on, as would quickly become evident if we stop agreeing on them. Then we would indeed find ourselves in the dark ages.[105]

c. John Atherton

The critique of the common good by his friend John Atherton caught Preston by surprise and forced him to rethink his stand on the concept.[106] Atherton has basically concluded that in a liberal democracy (more like Novak's Democratic Capitalism) that promotes the free market economy, the idea of the common good is no longer relevant for the Church. His libertarian stand, favouring a free rein of the market, casts doubt on the

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[102] Ibid., p. 212.

[103] Ibid., p. 213.

[104] Ibid., pp. 218f.

[105] Ibid., p. 214.

[106] Preston, "The Common Good," *Epworth Review*, p. 12.

appropriateness of the common good because of its "undue political interference with economic life and private choices".[107]

Though a supporter of the market economy, Preston parts company with Atherton when Atherton "carries his libertarian thought so far as to give priority to the market over the political authority".[108] Preston has always maintained that the market should only be accepted as an economic device. He does not accept the libertarian idea of unrestrained market movement because, when left unimpeded, the market will be "carried away to inhuman excesses"[109] and in the process undermining virtues, such as trust, that support it. Preston's response to Atherton is that one can still support a form of market economy without having to reject the idea of the common good, although he concedes that the common good can be exploited as an ideological tool to destroy legitimate market movements and compromise the virtues of liberty and efficiency that free market encourages.

2.2.2 Five other Points on the Common Good from his Hartley Lecture

At the end of his Hartley lecture, Preston reaffirms the viability of the common good and emphasizes that it is still a concept fundamental to his social theology. Taking into account the input from the three critics whom we have just referred to, he makes these points:

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[107] John Atherton, *Christianity and the Market*, p. 256.

[108] Preston, "The Common Good," *Epworth Review*, p. 13.

[109] Ibid., p. 13.

a) The common good should be considered as a dynamic and not a static idea,[110] to prevent the concept being used as an ideological tool to silence the poor and powerless.

b) Social virtues that nourish human well-being and strengthen the common good should be nurtured by social groups and not left to the working of unrestrained market forces.

c) Accepting the common good does not preclude conflicts within the social order. We should be open to public debate and allow our presumptions to be tested and prejudices debunked. The outcome of such forum and dialogue in the public square "would be a realisation of the common good for the moment, provisional and always open to further adjustment."[111]

d) While Christians have their own perspectives of what may constitute the common good, the consensus need not be based "solely on Christian doctrine." Preston reiterates the point that because the world is God's creation and the grace of God is at work in the life of all humanity, adumbration of theological virtues can be found in the adherents of other faiths and those who hold no religious belief.

e) In our search for public consensus, there should be a generosity of spirit, and Christians can contribute such spirit in our common quest for the common good.

2.2.3 A Commitment to the Common Good and Self-Interest

Before we conclude this section on the common good, we summarize here his wider concerns for the common good which we find in his other writing, besides the Hartley Lecture. We can say that in Preston's social theology, a commitment to the common good is

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[110] Reiterating his case for taking a dynamic view instead of a static view may seem repetitious, yet it is a crucial point for Preston, not just in the way the common good should be viewed, but also in the way we should view Natural Law and the Orders of Creation which we will look at shortly.

a commitment to communitarian values and human flourishing.[112] It rejects possessive individualism[113], as well as totalitarian collectivism. In Preston's social ethics the common good involves the political will in harnessing self-interest for the greater interest of the wider community, both at the local level and at the international level.[114] One may be motivated by pure altruism in one's commitment to the common good. But he tells us that our plural society of conflicting interests "needs to be organized so that the equivalent of the 'unseen hand' makes self-interest and the common good coincide, in order to prevent altruism from being put under greater strain than it can bear."[115] In this sense, he thinks that it is the "free market" system, under legitimate political control, which offers the "least bad way" of ordering and harnessing self-interest for the common good.[116]

We shall end this section on the common good by quoting Preston at length.[117]

I take it for granted that the church is primarily engaged in building up a worshipping community whose members will corporately and permanently bear witness to the gospel faith and ethics. It is alarming that many of the most significant moral developments in this century have begun largely outside the churches; the emancipation of women is an example. Bearing witness to gospel ethics leads to a social theology and to politics. In my view the first political task of the church is to strengthen the sense of a common morality in the community, the moral virtues or the basic human decencies which Adam Smith pre-supposed. To my mind this is fundamental, but it is rare to find it realized. Verbally the church talks about evangelism, and practically it is pre-occupied with maintaining traditional structures in a time of inflation, so it overlooks the fact that the strengthening of the concern for the common good, and structures that promote it, is basic to a plural society."[118]

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[111] Preston, "The Common Good," *Epworth Review*, p. 18.

[112] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 26.

[113] Preston, *Future*, p. 143f.

[114] Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 40f., p. 123 and Preston, *Future*, p. 254.

[115]Preston, *Persistence*, p. 105.

[116] Ibid., p. 26.

[117] Ibid., p. 133.

[118] Ibid., p. 133.

2.3 Orders of Creation

A survey of his books will show three main contexts in which Preston introduces the Reformed doctrine of the Orders of Creation. We see him using the term in 1979 to argue against what he has called the philosophy of possessive individualism.[119] Secondly he uses it to denounce the penchant of some Christian groups to emphasize the conversion of individuals without giving adequate regard to the need for structural changes.[120] The third context has a positive note. The doctrine is offered by Preston as a theological framework for an ecumenical social ethics[121] which Christians of different denominational backgrounds could deploy with sufficient confidence.

2.3.1 Structures of Human Relatedness

That the Church has sometimes forgotten about human sociality, and become engrossed in individualistic interest, has disappointed Preston.[122] Humans are not unrelated atomistic individuals. We are all persons-in-relation, not just in one community, but in overlapping communities. Yet even as he is critical of the Church's lapse into individualistic concerns, he is quick to remind us that one does not have to be a Christian to appreciate the inter-personal social-structural nature of human life. Human social relatedness and communitarian values can be found in the teachings of other faiths and philosophies as well. Since Preston is interested in the universality of *Tao*, we may add that the teaching of human sociality can be found, for example, in the teachings of Confucius. Preston would not

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[119] A phrase borrowed from the Canadian social philosopher C.B. Macpherson.

[120] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 76.

[121] Preston, *Future*, pp. 49ff.

[122] He has on more than one occasion expressed disappointment with the call made in 1975, by the then Archbishops of Canterbury and York who asked "What sort of society do we want?" and "What sort of people do we need to be in order to achieve it?" What Preston finds lacking is a third question which should address structural change. See Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 79.

disagree with Harvard Confucian scholar Tu Wei-Ming, who has this to say about *Tao*, self-worth, human relationality and social structures:

The Confucian notion of *Tao*, the Way, involves personal self-development and self-realization. Because a person is not conceived of as a discrete, isolated individual, but as a centre of relationships, human development necessarily involves the participation of other persons. It is not a lonely struggle. Nor is the realization of one's inner spirituality a lonely struggle requiring severance of all human ties. Rather, it is a process of opening oneself up to other structures of human-relatedness.[123]

We do not have to discuss the nuance of what it means to say that a person is "a centre of relationships," to appreciate that what Tu Wei-Ming has just summarized about human nature and social structures is, broadly-speaking, close to Preston's understanding of the person as a social being. Though Confucianism does not have a direct equivalence of the Christian doctrine of the Orders of Creation, there is a dynamic equivalence of it, in Tu Wei-Ming's "structures of human-relatedness." Both the Orders of Creation and "structures of human-relatedness" speak of human social character and inter-relatedness, enriched by their membership in recognizable social structures. Countering the claims of philosophical individualism, an idea which Confucianism also rejects, Preston has offered four Orders of Creation,[124] and we might say, four "structures of human-relatedness" to emphasize the priority of the community[125] and the communitarian structures of life found in every society.

2.3.2 Four Orders of Creation

The four Orders of Creation identified by Preston are 1) the Familial Order, 2) the Economic Order, 3) the Political Order and 4) the Cultural Order. They are the basic social

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[123] Tu Wei-Ming, *Confucian Ethics Today: The Singapore Challenge*, p. 42.

[124] Preston *Future*, p. 50.

[125] There is a caveat. While Preston often talks about the priority of the community he warns that "community" like the "common good" can be exploited as an oppressive ideological tool. "Community is a weasel word. Some communities are repressive, all have repressive dangers to guard against." It is necessary that we should

structures in which every human person is born into, and shaped by them before that person can make decision to shape them or change them. Preston is confident enough of the universality of these Orders for him to declare that the "four Orders can be empirically established with reasonable certainty."[126] They are found in every society, albeit sometimes in "vastly different empirical forms."[127]

In the Orders of Creation, we see a child born into a family system where that child will be significantly nurtured and influenced in the formative years of that child's life. Outside the familial structure, every child is born into an economic system which will mould his life long before he can "take any responsibility for them."[128] In the political arena, a person living under a given political system will be greatly impacted by that system years before that person is able to participate in making political decision that will affect the well-being of the whole society. And the culture in which one is born into will have a profound influence on the life of that child until the child is old or mature enough to make decisions on the desired quality of cultural life. The four structures have a prior formative claim on the life of every person. According to Preston,

The point about the Orders of Creation is that they are prior to human decision. No one, no group, sat down to decide whether to construct the institution of the family or the state. They arrived with human life itself. We do not decide to become part of the Orders of Creation. We are part of them willy-nilly. We cannot escape from them. They are prior to our decision yet profoundly affect us from birth. They are, according to this way of thinking, divine structures which ensure the minimum of human co-operation to make human life

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be alert to such danger and "exercise our hermeneutics of suspicion in relation to it." Preston, "The Common Good," *Epworth Review*, p. 19.

[126] Preston, *Future*, p. 50.

[127] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 76.

[128] Ibid., p. 75.

possible.......their purpose under God is to create the conditions through which each may grow with his fellows towards their full maturity.[129]

2.3.3 Power Structures

The social structures might be "divine structures" as Preston has just reminded us, in the sense that they are recognizable structures in creation which help to facilitate human well-being and communitarian welfare. Nevertheless even though they may be considered as "divine structures" it is important to know that they are not perfect. Not only do they have flaws which we have to contend with and seek to reform (like the Church "they are *semper reformanda.*"[130]), Preston tells us that "with the exception of the community of culture," the rest of the Orders are "power structures, organizing and containing the vitalities of life."[131]

We are mystified by Preston's exclusion of the "community of culture" as a power structure. We also detect a general sense of ambivalence in Preston's inclusion of culture in his arrangement of the Orders of Creation when culture is omitted as an Order, for example, in his chapters on "Political Theology: an Appraisal"[132] and "Understanding Economics and its Limits."[133]

Despite his ambivalence, and contrary to what Preston says about culture, there is sufficient empirical evidence to indicate that culture is not power-neutral. If anything, we could argue that the power of culture is more insidious than the other Orders, because it is not as noticeable as those powers wielded by others. Feminist theologians have reminded us of the oppressive culture of patriarchy which had for a long time relegated women to a

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[129] Ibid., p. 76.

[130] Ibid., p. 76, and Preston, *Future*, p. 50.

[131] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 76.

[132] Preston, *Future*, p. 166.

[133] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 25

subservient role in society, and consigned them to a lower social status in life. Liberation theologians have been suspicious of theologies that champion capitalist culture and oppressive economic systems. That culture is a power structure is also evident in how the tentacles of American culture have spread around the world through her ubiquitous television programmes and fast-food franchises. Rosemary Radford Ruether probably has the power of culture in mind when she blames Americans and implicates the British aristocracies for exporting cultural imperialism. Says she,

Medieval aristocracies made meat-eating the privilege of the wealthy, who could monopolize domesticated animals and game. This elite 'beefeater' diet of the British aristocracy has become the American ideal. American cultural and business imperialism has been disseminating this diet around the world to peoples such as Asians, who historically ate very little meat and that mostly as garnish for a grain and vegetable diet.[134]

2.3.4 Imperfect Social Orders

Though Preston may not think so, but as we have shown, there is a strong case for considering culture as a power structure. Viewed that way, and bearing in mind that the Orders have flaws, we have to be alert to any tendency or temptation to misinterpret social orders as pre-ordained and therefore God-sanctioned in its received form. To disregard the flaws in the social orders might lead one to accept a fixed and faultless view of the "Orders," a view which Preston rejects just as he has also rejected a fixed view of Natural Law and the common good. He makes this clear when he stresses that while the doctrine of the Orders of Creation brings

"home a sense of structure as necessarily involved if human life together is to be human and not anarchic... it must be emphasized again that they need to be under constant critical scrutiny; they have not a fixed normative content, because human life and structures remain open to the future and we do not know all that they have it in

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[134] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, p. 52.

them to be. It is in this connection that the theologians of hope rightly stress the importance of formulating goals for the humanization of life and not passively accepting things as they are."[135]

A fixed view of social orders presents a distorted picture when flawed orders are posited as faultless, and blindly accepted to be so. That was a major problem which beguiled Nazi Germany in the early part of this century. With the endorsement of the Lutheran Church, many Germans accepted what they thought was an ordained "Order" that promoted the superiority of their race. Tragically the mistaken view of German supremacy led to disastrous consequences.[136] Mainly because he refused to accept that ideology, and not wanting to be mistaken for promoting a static view of the Orders of Creation, Bonhoeffer chose the term "mandate"[137] instead of "order." Preston follows Brunner when he uses "order," though others have opted for terms like "orders of divine patience," "provinces," and "institutions."[138]

However, differing terms are not the only challenge we have to address. Since the number of "Orders" is not exhaustive and not everyone with a list of four items shares the same "Orders," it is inevitable that there will be disagreement among theologians regarding the merit of including certain "Orders," and excluding others. The Church, for example, is included by Bonhoeffer and Brunner,[139] as one of the Orders/mandates or Creation. But Preston argues against her inclusion because the Church *per se*, is not a social structure which everyone is born into, although a person who is born into a Christian family will have her life formed by Church-related values. If the Church is to be a mandate or "Order," it should be considered, in Preston's view, as an Order of Re-Creation for those who have

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[135] Preston, *Future*, p. 51.

[136] See also, Preston *Ambiguities*, p. 167.

[137] D. Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 73ff.

[138] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 76. And Preston, *Future*, p. 50.

[139] Ibid., pp. 50f.

been re-born, as it were, into God's Kingdom. Preston presses his point for the exclusion of Church as an Order of Creation, by insisting that the Church is "surely an Order of Re-creation; (and it is) only by a paradoxical extension of meaning can we say that everyone is born into it *qua* human being."[140]

2.3.5 A Case for an additional Order

There is, however, one Order which we can make a strong case for inclusion as an additional Order of Creation. It is the Order of Nature which the Japanese theologian Masao Takenaka[141] suggests would find affinity in the mind and psyche of Eastern Asians. Takenaka does not like the term "Order," himself. His preference is for "mandate,"[142] though the word of his choice is in fact, "dimension." Furthermore, he avoids the word "Creation," preferring instead to use "atmosphere" in his schema. In that sense, the Orders of Creation in Takenaka's construal would be described as the Dimensions of Atmosphere. There is of course no compelling reason for us to change the terms other than to say that one has to keep in mind the context and the target audience in which one is communicating such an idea. Quite clearly, in a Nazi Germany, it makes sense to use "mandate" instead of "Order," even if for no other reason than to disengage a valid theological idea from a Nazi ideology. Perhaps in a Japanese setting, the "Dimensions of the Atmosphere" might carry greater significance for the Japanese mind than having the doctrine translated literally as the "Orders of Creation."

The "nature" which Takenaka proposes for inclusion in the Orders of Creation refers to the world of nature in which humankind forms an integral part. It is the whole eco-system which we are born into. When we include "nature" as an "Order of Creation" we

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[140] Ibid. p. 50. Cf. Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 159.

[141] Masao Takenaka, *God is Rice*, pp. 13f.

acknowledge our membership in God's creation, and accept the responsibility to relate with care to the wider eco-system in a way which perhaps we might not have given sufficient priority in the past. It should be noted that Takenaka's call for the inclusion of nature as an Order of Creation is not prompted by the ecological problem besetting the world, though that might be of concern to him. Nature, as Takenaka has reminded us, has traditionally been held with reverence by Eastern Asians. It is an Order which East Asians would find congenial and would probably respond to readily. Takenaka's culture-sensitive call, therefore, should not be confused with the recent pressure exerted by powerful ecologist lobbyists in the West[143] whose actions had prompted Preston to question their intention and to warn against embracing monism when humankind becomes too fused with the wider creation.[144]

Preston is right when he commented that the people of the Two-Thirds world are ordinarily suspicious[145] of the ecological zeal of the Western environmental activists. These people do share Preston's misgiving that the zealous lobby for ecological protection could in fact be a "rationalization of privilege."[146] The environmental issue, in that sense, could be exploited as an ideology to keep the poor countries poor, and the developed countries rich. Besides expressing misgivings about the zeal of a certain ecology lobby, Preston has also addressed what he sees as a tendency among certain theologians associated with the WCC to portray the "Integrity of Creation," as "a homeostatic state, so that every element is so linked with the rest in such a way that to 'interfere' with any element threatens disorder, is

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[142] Ibid., p. 68.

[143] For example, he challenges the theses of Prof. Lynn White who had blamed the West and Christianity for exploiting the natural environment, see Preston, *Future*, p. 69, and the report of the Club of Rome entitled "The Limits of Growth." Ibid., pp. 77f.

[144] See his *Facts and Fables in Ecology and the Integrity of Creation*, co-authored with Charles Birch.

[145] A point recognized by Preston in *Future*, p. 70.

[146] A phrase used by Preston in *Future*, p. 70, and in a plural form in Preston, *Persistence*, p. 51.

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mistaken. So is the associated tendency to regard every element as of equal significance, so that the human does not stand out; and to think that it does is to exhibit the hubris of anthropomorphism."[147] He decrys the WCC tendency to project "extreme scenerios" on ecological issues, and advises that the extremist tendency should be handled with a hermeneutic of suspicion.[148] And on the matter of the temptation of monism, he issues this warning.

> A word of caution needs uttering about these tendencies. Valuable as they may be as a warning to man against blundering about in the universe in a brash way, nature is ambiguous. She is sacred not demonic. She is a source of wonder to man, of necessities for him, and at times she is his enemy. Blurring the difference between man and sub-human life can easily lead to a quietism with respect to remediable suffering, to sloth, and to the rationalization of privilege. A monistic religion of this kind is a dominant force for conservatism, as readers of Gunnar Myrdal's *Asian Drama* will remember, enslaving man to nature.[149]

However, in spite of Preston's reservation and valid suspicion; and even if we accept his advice that we should not "be stampeded by the recent agitation"[150] of ecologists who "have been criticizing the Christian faith as one of the sources of an exploitative attitude to nature by Western man,"[151] our human relatedness and the ecological crises confronting the world today are reminders for us, not to be monist, but to tend the eco-system as responsible stewards of God's creation. Preston may not be prepared to include nature as an Order of Creation perhaps because he is over-cautious about the threat of monism and ecological fundamentalism. But he has left sufficient hints that he may not be completely averse to including nature as an Order if we accept his warning against monism,

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[147] R.H. Preston, "On to Harare: Social Theology and Ethics in the World Council of Churches," *Crucible*, p.30. Among those he criticized is Prof. Rasmussen who works closely with the WCC.

[148] Ibid., p. 30.

[149] Preston, *Future*, p. 70. Cf. Preston, *Persistence*, p. 51.

[150] Ibid., p. 51.

[151] Ibid., pp. 50f.

and if we keep in mind "that human beings have a distinctive place in nature. They are distinct but not separate; there is a unity but not an identity between humans and nature."[152] Preston agrees that humankind as God's stewards and vicegerents[153] should tend to God's creation with care.

If a primary criterion for recognizing a structure as an Order of Creation is its universal validity, and its conditioning impact on the life of a person, then nature has a strong case to be included as an Order. Nature meets the criterion because every person is a part of nature solely by virtue of being human. And nature has a formative claim on every person's life because no one is given a prior opportunity to decide whether to be a part of it. As Takenaka has proposed, there is a reasonable case to include nature as an Order of Creation.

Conclusion

Our two-part assessment of Preston's basic theological framework has shown that Preston's social theology is undergirded by a deep belief in the presence and transforming power of God's grace in the life of people and the various overlapping communities which they belong as persons-in-relations. Preston's theological anthropology, his dealings with the problem of sin, the role of hope, and the virtues of equality, love and justice, together with his reliance on the theology of creation, with particular reference to the doctrines of the Natural Law, the common good and the Orders of Creation, provide a cumulative, and in our assessment, a convincing case for a communitarian and inclusive theological framework for doing social ethics in our plural world.

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[152] Preston, *Future*, p. 83.

[153] Ibid., p. 69. He would also say, "The best concept that can be drawn from the biblical tradition is that of responsible stewardship. This would call us to respect nature as a craftsman respects the grain of his material, but not to romanticize it." Ibid., p. 83.

Chapter Five

Pluralism and the Social Ethics of Ronald Preston

"The actual problem of plurality is strangely neglected throughout Preston's work."[1] So claims Ian Markham in his book, *Plurality and Christian Ethics*. His judgment about Preston's neglect has serious implication for our attempt to extract from Preston's social theology an appropriate framework for doing social ethics in a plural society. It is a judgment that requires a thoughtful response because if it were correct, our effort in searching for a suitable theological framework in Preston's social theology for dealing with issues related to plurality might be in vain. Our response to Markham's criticism will depend in part on what he has in mind when he uses the qualifier "actual," which he unfortunately has not explained. Ordinarily "actual" means something that is factual and real. If that is the meaning Markham seeks to convey, then the judgment he makes is inaccurate because, as we shall show, evidence abounds to indicate that Preston does not evade the reality of plurality, or the "actual" problem it may present. Markham, however, does not seem to use his qualifier in the ordinary sense when he criticizes Preston's social ethics. We say this because in the same paragraph which carries his criticism, he gives a clue to what he considers to be Preston's neglect when he adds, "it remains surprising that the tolerance and plurality questions *do not even get a mention*."[2] (our emphasis). Far from failing to address the questions of tolerance and plurality, and contrary to Markham's bold judgment, in this chapter we will show that Preston in fact has a deep interest in the issues of plurality and pluralism, and that his social theology engages the challenge posed by both. On the question of tolerance, we will also

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[1] Ian Markham, *Plurality and Christian Ethics*, p. 62.

[2] Ibid., p. 62.

show that it is in fact an essential virtue which Preston thinks humanity should cultivate to hold people of divergent beliefs and worldviews together in peaceful co-existence.

The approach which we will take to help us understand the sense in which Preston's social theology addresses the problem of pluralism[3] will begin with an examination of how pluralism has been construed by theologians such as Ian Markham, Alan Race and Richard Mouw. We have deliberately chosen these theologians for two reasons. They have focused on the problem of pluralism in their theological works. But what is more important to us is that they have given us schematic tools designed specifically to help us differentiate and grapple with the more subtle meaning of pluralism; something which Preston has not supplied. The schemes introduced by these representative theologians will be critically assessed and appropriate schemes will be adapted to guide us in our discussion of pluralism in the social theology of Preston.

1. Pluralism and Plurality

Pluralism is a term often used interchangeably with plurality to refer to the diverse state of affairs in the world. The two words have been used to depict the rich diversity of creed and culture in our society. Yet pluralism and plurality carry multifarious meanings, and it does not help when theologians do not declare the meaning they have in mind when the terms are used. 'Pluralism,' for instance, carries a descriptive function but it has a normative meaning as well. The descriptive meaning of the term is widely employed to denote the diversity of situation or views. Nevertheless it is in the field of theology of religions that much has been written about pluralism in the normative sense so that when that term is so

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[3] We shall use 'pluralism' in a generic sense for now. A more precise definition will emerge when we discuss the schemes offered by Race, Markham and Mouw.

used, it refers to a theological perspective of the religions of the world advocated by John Hick that questions the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity.[4]

1.1 Race's Typology

Alan Race in his seminal book *Christians and Religious Pluralism*[5] differentiates three theological approaches which a Christian might adopt towards people of other faiths and those with no religious affiliation. His categorization of the 'exclusivist,' the 'inclusivist' and the 'pluralist' views has now been explored further by theologians such as Harold A. Netland, Paul Knitter and Gavin D'Costa[6] in an on-going debate on the claims of Christianity and how Christians ought to relate to adherents of other religions. In the discipline of the theology of religions which Alan Race is mainly concerned with, the defining factor that decides whether one is an 'exclusivist,' an 'inclusivist' or a 'pluralist,' has to do with soteriology and one's view regarding the claim and counter-claim of the uniqueness of Christ and the Christian faith.[7]

Without being embroiled in a detailed discussion about the merit or otherwise of the differing approaches, we might summarize that an 'exclusivist' is one who believes in the uniqueness of Christ and that only Christians will receive salvation. An 'inclusivist' would argue that while Christianity is unique, one does not have to be explicitly a Christian to be "saved," i.e., to be reconciled with God. There are people of other faiths and philosophies who are in fact "anonymous Christians,"[8] and they too will enjoy salvation, though they may

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[4] See John Hick and Paul Knitter, eds., *The Myth of the Uniqueness of Christianity.* The contributors to this volume may be said to hold a pluralist view of the Christian faith.

[5] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism.*

[6] Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices*, Paul Knitter, *No Other Name?* and Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism.*

[7] See John Hick and Paul Knitter, et. al., *op. cit.*, and Gavin D'Costa, et al., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions.*

[8] A phrase coined by the Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner.

not be conscious of it. The 'pluralist,' however, would insist that no one religion is a favoured religion. The claim to uniqueness is mistaken and is based on a myth. Ultimately everyone can be saved regardless of one's religion.

All three views have able proponents,[9] and their arguments in defence of each view are more rigorous than we can to give space for in this chapter. Nevertheless, it would be unwise for anyone to caricature any of the three views, and no one should assume the superiority of one view over the others without giving careful study to the intricate arguments offered by the various proponents. Since the question of soteriology is not of direct concern to our project, pluralism in Preston's social ethics should not be confused with the pluralist view of the Christian faith associated with, for example, the works of John Hick and Paul Knitter. It is not necessary nor is it helpful in our discussion of Preston's social theology to pin him down to one of the three categories suggested by Race, though from the perspective of a theology of religions, Preston may have some inclusivist tendencies.[10]

1.2 Markham's Differentiation

It is to avoid the confusion associated with an indiscriminate use of the words that Markham has deliberately chosen to use 'plurality' as a descriptive term and 'pluralism' as a normative term in his discussion of the problem of diversity in our modern world. He says the "term 'plurality' simply describes a state of affairs that is seen increasingly in our cities; it implies no judgment on its desirability or otherwise. The term 'pluralism', on the other hand,

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[9] Additionally see also John Hick, *God has Many Names*, Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, and John Sanders, *No Other Name*.

[10] "Believers have been too certain of their place in the post-apocalytic order, and too certain that it is an exclusive place. There is hope for the 'nations' in the New Testatment; and the more conscious we become of the plural nature of the world, the greater the insight we attain into other religions and philosophies, the more we are coming to see the relation to Christ in them, even though they are unaware of or would deny it." Preston, *Persistence*, p. 151. Cf., Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 101. It should be noted that one criticism against such an "anonymous Christian" inclusivist approach is that it is too presumptuous. Why should non-Christians be the ones who are "unaware of (Christ) or would deny it" ? Could Christians not have been "anonymous Buddhists" or "anonymous Muslims?"

has come to describe a theological position."[11] Another person who has adopted this differentiation is John Kelsay. In an essay "Plurality, Pluralism and Comparative Ethics"[12] that reviews some recent American writings on ethics in a plural world, Kelsay suggests that "'plurality' indicates the phenomenon of difference, while 'pluralism' designates a normative response to this phenomenon."[13]

Markham's and Kelsay's choice of plurality and pluralism, with each word carrying a distinctive meaning, is one way to differentiate the descriptive from the normative theological meaning of the sometimes confusing terms. However, helpful though their solution might be, the differentiation does not go far enough. Kelsay himself has implied[14] that pluralism is more complex than simply splitting it into two neat categories. The descriptive and the normative often interlock and overlap. Furthermore, pluralism though widely used to represent Hick's theological perspective, has other layers of normative meanings which may not necessarily lead one to take Hick's theological route or conclusion. As we shall show, in our search for the common good and human flourishing, it may be necessary to move beyond the descriptive into the more substantive normative claims and counter-claims offered by the various groups. Preston's social theology does not insist that one should become a pluralist, in the Hickian sense, to promote tolerance or to respond to the challenge of a world that is not unitary and homogeneous.[15] But enough is said for the moment to show that we need a better conceptual

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[11]Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 9. Cf., Andrew Clarke and Bruce Winter, eds., *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism*, p. 189. Alister McGrath provides a minor variation to this differentiation. While 'plurality' conveys the 'descriptive' notion, he prefers 'prescriptive' to 'normative' when he deploys the term 'pluralism.' See A. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth*, p. 204.

[12] John Kelsay, "Plurality, Pluralism, and Comparative Ethics," in D. M. Yeager ed., vol. 24.2, Fall 1996, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, pp. 405 - 428.

[13] Ibid., p. 406.

[14] Ibid., p. 406.

[15] This is also a point made by Markham who says, "It is wrong to insist that the affirmation of plurality depends upon accepting Hick's pluralist hypothesis; a fairly conservative theology can be both tolerant and open." Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

differentiation of plurality and pluralism that will take into account their subtle variants, and help us get into a deeper level of discussion of pluralism in social ethics. To be sure, Preston himself has not used these two words in any nuanced way. This has made our task somewhat more difficult. Nevertheless, to ensure that we do not misrepresent his view, it is necessary that we should be more precise about what we mean by pluralism or plurality beyond the differentiation provided by Markham and Kelsay when we use those terms with reference to Preston's social theology.

1.3 Mouw and Griffioen's Classification

Besides the categories offered by Race, and the differentiation given by Markham, there is another way of handling the complexity of pluralism and that is by deploying a conceptual classification offered by the collaborative work of an American theologian and a Dutch social philosopher. Pluralism in Preston's social theology can be better understood, as we shall show, when we examine it with the help of a set of classifications given by Richard Mouw and Sander Griffioen spelled out in their book *Pluralisms and Horizons*.[16]

By providing a more detailed classification of pluralism, they have given us a useful tool to explore more rigorously those critical questions which have preoccupied the minds of many social theologians, and that is, given the diversity of society, and the often conflicting claims made by contending groups and competing interests in the public arena, in what sense and to what extent is it still possible for us to search for common morality? Should religions that make conflicting normative claims which have a bad record of resorting to violence, be allowed to have a public role in shaping the future of the plural society? Has pluralism so fragmented the world that it has made it impossible for Christians and people of other faiths and philosophies to find a common morality, as philosophers like MacIntyre have contended?

In some ways we have already answered these questions in our chapter on the Natural Law and the common good. However, the Mouw-Griffioen classification of pluralism has given us another framework to strengthen our argument for a social theology that can adequately take on the challenge posed by pluralism. Our intention for this chapter would be to explicate the categories provided mainly by Mouw and Griffioen, and not so much by Race or Markham, to help us peel off the various layers of pluralism in Preston's social theology, and understand how he has dealt with the problem of plurality. However, more needs to be said about the Mouw-Griffioen classification which Kelsay has highly commended: "With respect to concepts, one has to rate the work of Mouw and Griffioen very highly. *Pluralisms and Horizons*, more than most of the other works, attends carefully and consistently to the distinctions between and within plurality and pluralism."[17]

1.3.1 Pluralisms and Horizons

There is an important similarity in the differentiation of pluralism made by Mouw and Griffioen on one side, and Markham and Kelsay on the other side. Both groups share the two basic senses in which plurality and pluralism have been used, and that is the descriptive and the normative senses. In the words of Mouw and Griffioen, the descriptive sense is a way of "*acknowledging*" (at times referred to as "*highlighting*") the existence of diversity in our midst, whereas the normative sense "is sometimes used as a means of *advocating* diversity."[18] But unlike Markham and Kelsay, Mouw and Griffioen have developed their conceptual understanding further. There are two main sets of distinctions on pluralism and six sub-classifications in their conceptual scheme.

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[16] Richard J. Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons*.

[17] Kelsay, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

[18] Mouw and Griffioen, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

As indicated, the first set of distinctions made by Mouw and Griffioen differentiates the descriptive from the normative in pluralism. 'Plurality' is favoured when a descriptive word is needed to highlight the existence of diversity, and 'pluralism' is used to convey the normative notion of advocating certain diversity as a desirable state of affairs.

The second set of distinctions divides pluralism into three categories. It classifies pluralism as "the directional, the associational and the contextual."[19] Directional pluralism alludes to "organized religion or .... some other value orientation such as hedonism or Marxism."[20] We may refer to directional pluralism as the basic philosophical or religious worldviews competing for followers. On the other hand, associational pluralism would include the family and "such associations as highly 'voluntary' groups such as clubs and corporations."[21] Generally speaking, we may say that associational pluralism covers what Preston has referred to as social structure. Included here would be those basic social structures identified in the Orders of Creation.[22] Finally, contextual pluralism "is made up of differing cultural contexts."[23] Here the authors have in mind contextual input from various geographical regions, and from groups like women, the marginalized, and the ethnic minority. Many of these voices have traditionally been suppressed by the more dominant group and gender.

This sub-classification of pluralism as directional, associational and contextual makes it easier for us to sort out, for instance, the exact normative sense in which we might be using that term. When partners in dialogue are clear about what sense each one has in mind when they discuss the problem posed by pluralism, it is likely that they will have a better

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[19] Ibid., p. 17.

[20] Ibid., p. 16.

[21] Ibid., p. 16.

[22] Ibid., p. 125.

chance of making progress in their common quest for human well-being than if they were to

be guided by a fuzzy or an inadequately defined meaning of pluralism.

1.3.2 Six Sub-classifications of Pluralism

However what makes the scheme given by both Mouw and Griffioen a more

appropriate conceptual tool than the three-fold typology popularized by Race, or the

descriptive-normative distinctions given by Markham and Kelsay, is the still wider

differentiation its offers. When we combine the two sets of distinctions on pluralism, i.e., 1) a

distinction between the descriptive and the normative pluralism, and 2) a distinction between

the directional, the associational and the contextual pluralism, we have six sub-classifications.

The resultant six sub-classifications look like this:[24]

Descriptive directional pluralism: highlighting the fact of a plurality of directional perspectives.

Normative directional pluralism: advocating directional plurality as a good state of affairs.

Descriptive associational pluralism: highlighting the fact of a plurality of associational patterns.

Normative associational pluralism: advocating associational plurality as a good state of affairs.

Descriptive contextual pluralism: highlighting the fact of a plurality of cultural contexts.

Normative contextual pluralism: advocating contextual plurality as a good state of affairs.

Looking at the six sub-classifications, it should not be difficult, according to both

Mouw and Griffioen, for Christians of various theological persuasions to engage in

substantive discussion with people of other faiths and ideologies on issues related to all the

three types of descriptive pluralism. Descriptive pluralism whether it is directional,

associational, or contextual, highlights for us the presence of diverse groups and claims,

although we should say that the three types of descriptive pluralism do more than merely

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[23] Ibid., p. 16.

highlighting the presence of diversity. They also challenge us to be both sensitive and responsive to the claims of others in our community. Hopefully that would encourage us to enter the public arena and be active in fostering human well-being that includes input from divergent groups.

However, although Christians need not be apprehensive about dealing with pluralism at the descriptive level, one may still choose to ignore the presence of plurality in the community by taking the 'Christ against Culture' route, and withdrawing from any significant cross-cultural social engagement in the public arena, a route rejected by Mouw and Griffioen. No responsible social theology should avoid engaging with the phenomenon of pluralism in a community which Christians share with people of other faiths and philosophies, despite obvious obstacles which are difficult to overcome when people of different faiths and philosophies meet to discuss socio-political issues and moral vision. Taking on the challenge of descriptive pluralism might not be as problematic as we might imagine it to be, but what Mouw and Griffioen are proposing, we should note, is not just an engagement at the descriptive level even though they recognize that descriptive "pluralisms are usually less controversial than the normative variety."[25] Besides descriptive pluralism, they also want us to take on the challenge posed by normative claims where serious differences are often found and difficult to overcome.

The greater challenge for the Church working within a plural society is not to be found so much at the descriptive level, but at the normative level where deep-rooted differences are located. No one should underestimate the formidable task of dealing with normative differences, yet we need not have to be overwhelmed by such a task and give up dealing with it prematurely. When we keep in mind the subtle differentiation of normative

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[24] Ibid., pp. 17f.

pluralism in the Mouw-Griffioen model, we should appreciate that not all instances of normative pluralism are like cases. That means that different normative pluralisms should be treated differently. It also means that we should examine the issues separately as associational, contextual or directional challenge, without being confused by undifferentiated normative claims.

When we consider normative issues separately under differentiated categories, it is probable that dealing with and accepting both the normative associational pluralism and normative contextual pluralism would be less problematic than dealing with normative directional issues. To accept and advocate normative associational pluralism is to say that it is desirable for a society to support and strengthen the rich variety of social structures and institutions that promotes human well-being. In most cases, these structures contribute to the nurturing of character, the transmission of virtues and the fostering of the common good for the benefit of the whole community.

On the other hand, advocating normative contextual pluralism would mean upholding, for example, the rights of sojourners from a different geographical region, the rights of the minority, and the rights of the marginalized. The contextual concerns of differing groups regardless of their gender, status, or country of origin may enrich the over-all well-being of society and therefore their voices should be heard. The marginalized, like anyone else in the world, share an inalienable right to be treated fairly and with dignity.

Mouw and Griffioen are prepared to endorse the normative associational and normative contextual pluralism, and they argue in support of the contribution both can make to the well-being of the whole of society. Normative directional pluralism, however, presents a serious problem for them. While they accept descriptive directional pluralism, that is to say

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[25] Ibid., p. 14.

they acknowledge that the plural world includes people who hold fundamentally different worldviews, they reject normative directional pluralism because it cannot be consistently defended. In their assessment, normative directional pluralism when advocated as a philosophy would lead to "ultimate relativism."[26] Their concern is that the normative directional pluralism *per se* should not be accepted as a socio-political dogma, as it has sometimes been promoted by the liberal agenda.

There is still a serious dilemma which Mouw and Griffioen had to deal with. How then should Christians and people of other faiths and philosophies holding fundamentally divergent directional views relate with each other in the public square, without getting entangled in serious conflictual disagreement? How are we to manage the different directional moral visions without demanding that groups, particularly the weaker ones, surrender long-held beliefs? How should a plural society ensure that directional differences do not plunge a community into an endless cycle of violence?

To be sure, even allowing for the serious problem posed by directional pluralism which has in the past led certain religious groups into bloody conflicts, they reject attempts by liberal philosophers like Rawls to consign religion as a private matter which should be kept away from the public arena. Taking a cue from Neuhaus and Newbigin, they argue that although the society is pluralistic and although there have been attempts by both Christians and politicians to keep the Gospel out of the public square for different reasons, the Christian faith has a social dimension that should prompt Christians to be interested in the welfare and affairs of the community of which they are an integral part. The Church should engage actively in advancing human well-being and the shaping of societal moral vision, a point which Preston has all along pressed for in his works. Their solution to the dilemma of having

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[26] Ibid., p. 18.

to attend to fundamental differences in directional worldviews and at the same time safeguarding the distinctive claim of the Christian gospel is to view the differences from an eschatological perspective. As understood by Mouw and Griffioen an eschatological view of directional pluralism affirms that in the end it is God who holds the ultimate truth. While the validity of the Christian claim should continue to be rigorously argued and defended, and in as much as we should continue to place our hope in the ultimate eschatological vindication of truth, we have to accept that conflicting and questionable claims are unavoidable. Despite our directional differences, interim provisional agreements can still be negotiated. What Mouw and Griffioen are pointing at is that the different groups of people can still find common ground through dialogue and in the overlapping consensus shared by the people of different faiths and ideologies. Truth-claims, however, can only be verified conclusively in the eschaton.[27]

The two sets of distinctions plus the six sub-classifications give us an idea of the limitation and the scope of how Christians and people of other faiths and ideologies may work together to promote human flourishing. Mainly with the help of the Mouw-Griffioen conceptual classifications of pluralism, we shall now proceed to examine Preston's understanding of pluralism and explore the sense in which his understanding of pluralism might enhance or limit his social theology.

2. Pluralism in the Social Theology of Preston

As we have indicated it is the descriptive sense in which pluralism has been used that is generally considered to be the least controversial.[28] It acknowledges the presence of

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[27] So they say, "it is the eschatological vindication of the truth that makes it possible for us to accept pluralism here and now." Ibid., p. 173. Though they did not say so, this is probably influenced by John Hick's "Theology and Verification," in Basil Mitchell, ed., *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 53-71.

[28] Besides Ibid., p. 14, see also McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

diversity in society and it highlights some of the problems which one might face in a diverse world of conflicting claims and interests. In many ways Preston's understanding of the plural world has been decidedly descriptive rather than normative. That, of course, is not to say that he does not address the problem of normative pluralism at all. There is enough reference to normative pluralism in Preston's social theology, and we will attend to how he deals with it shortly. At the descriptive level, we see him acknowledging quite frequently the diversity of belief and culture in the modern world. More than merely acknowledging the presence of plurality, and as to be expected from someone who holds a strong view about the grace of God at work in the life of the whole of creation, he insists that any responsible Christian social theology should take into account the input and insight provided by people of other faiths and ideologies.

In one of his earlier books where he dealt with the problem of pluralism, Preston offered a short explanation of the development of pluralism in modern Europe. We find this in his Maurice Lectures where he commented on the historical context which contributed to the rise of plurality in the West. He attributes the rise of pluralism in the modern Western world both to the secularization of the West and the concomitant rapid social changes that have taken place in the West since the Enlightenment.[29] It is in his discussion of secularization of the West that he uses the word 'plural'[30] in the descriptive sense to refer to the "fact that there is no one generally accepted moral authority, or code, but a variety." Christianity, in this plural and secularized Western world has lost her influence. The Church now has to compete for adherents not only with other religious faiths, but also with philosophies which have no religious affinity, although not everyone in the United Kingdom,

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[29] He made this point in *Persistence*, pp. 9 and 119.

[30] Ibid., p. 119.

for instance, has come to terms with this state of affairs.[31] Nevertheless he is convinced that by and large, the reality of diversity in society is something which most people in the West are conscious of, and many have accepted plurality as a fact.

It is quite clear that in Preston's assessment the changes in the Western world are irreversible. He has in mind the so-called "Christendom" group when he speaks of the futility of those who yearn for a return to a uniform Christian Europe of the past, as if it is possible to identify a state in the past when there was a truly uniform Christian world. Instead of indulging in a nostalgic "hark back to a much more uniform 'Christendom' situation" Preston suggests that the church should "seek a will of God for those structures which cannot presuppose that those who live in them are either believers or nominal Christians."[32] Preston is not alone in counselling against taking an unrealistic look at the Christian past. He has support, for instance in the American philosopher R.M. Adams who has this to say,

.... there is something questionable about excessive nostalgia for a religiously homogenous society. Christianity as we know it took shape in the religiously, culturally, and ethnically pluralistic society of the Roman Empire. The Christian religion would never have existed if its formation and transmission required a totally Christian social context. And today the Christian Church is growing most rapidly in regions whose historic traditions are quite alien to those that have been most closely associated with Christianity.[33]

Adams is of course speaking from an American context which in many ways is more plural than the context in Britain. But his point is well-taken especially with regard to the growth of Christianity in countries outside the traditional Christian orbit where Christianity has flourished amidst extremely diverse situations. It is in the plural context of Britain that

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[31] Ibid., pp. 70f. Elsewhere in a critical review of E.R. Norman's *Church and Society in England, 1770-1970,* he rebukes him for ignoring "the fact that we live in a plural society" even though Norman's book covers the post-war period which saw a noticeable increase of immigrants from the Indian sub-continent. See, Preston, *Explorations,* p. 126.

[32] Preston, Persistence, p. 70.

[33] Robert Merihew Adams, "Religious Ethics in a Pluralistic Society," in G. Outka and J.P. Reeder, Jr., eds., *Prospect for a Common Morality,* p. 109.

Preston gives his advice against the futility of trying to turn the clock back to a Christendom era. However, while his advice against unrealistic yearning may serve as an important call for those who are still pining for the good old days, it is not as significant as the point he makes regarding the need for us to seek God's will in the structures of life which we find in a plural society. When he suggests that the will of God should be sought in other structures, he acknowledges the presence of God's grace in "those structures"[34], a term he has often used to refer to the Orders of Creation and those basic social institutions shared by all humanity across cultures. If we recall what Mouw and Griffioen have said about associational pluralism, we have here an example of how Preston has responded to an associational challenge. He is prepared to grapple with associational challenge because he is convinced that structures need not be Christian to attract God's favour or to benefit from his will. God's will can be found in such structures which may not be explicitly Christian in character, and it is the responsibility of the Church to engage in seeking for God's will in such structures.

If we accept, as Preston does, that the grace of God who reveals himself through Christ is also present in the life of all humanity, including the various social structures that nurture relationship and foster social well-being, there is no reason for us not to engage in seeking for God's will in those structures. That God's will can be found in other structures of life should restrain Christians from making any presumptuous or premature judgment against structures which might not necessarily be Christian in origin or character. Preston has shown that he is prepared not only to describe the reality of plurality but he is also prepared to deal with the problem of associational pluralism. This is one significant contribution of Preston's social theology for a plural world.

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[34] Cf. Preston, *Persistence*, p. 70.

2.1 National and Global Plurality

From a Singaporean perspective, it is noteworthy that while Preston's main target audience is British, happily for us he is not xenophobic nor is he eurocentric in his interest and theological concern. Theologians from the Two-Thirds world have often criticized theologies emanating from the West for being too eurocentric in concerns and emphasis. It is therefore important for a Singaporean Christian to know that in Preston there is a theologian who not only addresses the challenge of the plurality in the Western society, but is also acutely aware of and concerned with the plural challenge of the wider world; something not many British social theologians in his generation has shown sufficient interest in.[35]

The world, for Preston, is no longer a distant entity. It has been transformed by social and technological changes into a pluralistic global village[36] so that significant events unfolding in a country thousands of miles away, are usually quickly reported by the almost omni-present media. Similarly, economic and political decisions made by the rich nations not only will make to the news headlines, but they will have repercussions for the rest of the world. There is a new awareness of the inter-dependent and inter-related nature of our shrinking world. And he finds it a matter of urgency and prudence to keep a bifocal view of the challenge posed by pluralism for him to deal with it both from a local and global perspective. In his survey of "The Scene in Christian Social Ethics"[37] he seems pleased to note that the social thinking of the Church has in some respects kept pace with social changes taking place all over the world. Elsewhere in another essay, "Towards a Transnational Social Ethics?"[38] he tells us that social theology in response to such changes has evolved over the

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[35]The situation is improving, nonetheless. For example, Bernard T. Adeney, *Strange Virtues*, and A. M. Suggate, *Japanese Christians and Society*.

[36] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 121. Cf. Preston, *Explorations*, pp. 112 and 136.

[37] This is the title of chapter six of *Persistence,* pp. 113 - 134.

[38] Preston, *Explorations*, pp. 132 - 143.

years to become "increasingly aware of the plural nature of modern society (nationally and globally), and that God wills the flourishing of all mankind whether or not in the first place men and women are Christians. So Christians have a responsibility for, and need an ethic at the level of, common humanity." [39]

There are other urgent needs which he expects us to attend to in response to the phenomenon of pluralism. One of which is the "urgency of seeking ways of understanding between men of different faiths and ideologies; in particular it raises for Christians both their attitude to other religions, and the need for Marxist-Christian dialogue."[40] Obviously this urgent need for understanding and dialogue should extend to religions and ideologies other than Marxism which he specified, though understandably he had to focus on Christian-Marxist dialogue when he penned those words in the 1970s, a time when communism was still a formidable force. He has in his later writings engaged in dialogue with feminist thought[41] and environmental critique.[42]

On feminist thought, he sees three broad types of feminism; the liberal, the cultural and the radical. The liberal form of feminism works within the given socio-political order to bring about changes. The cultural form accepts the "complementarity of men and women." The radical form of feminism calls for drastic changes to be made to the socio-political structure to reverse the imbalances of power which presently favour the interest of the male.[43] While he is generally sympathetic to the feminist cause and while he also acknowledges the contribution feminism makes to correct "an imbalance in Christian theology," he warns

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[39] Ibid., p. 136.

[40] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 122.

[41] Preston, *Confusions*, p. 110.

[42] R.H. Preston, "On to Harare: Social Theology and Ethics in the World Council of Churches," in *Crucible*, January-March 1997, pp. 24-23.

[43] Preston, *Confusions*, p. 109.

against idealizing the feminist thoughts. He reminds us that "fancy can also creep in, as when we are referred to a supposed pre-patriarchal society about 10,000 years BC run by women."[44]

If his reference to the social structures of the world is an indication of his willingness to attend to the challenge of associational pluralism both at the local and global levels, and his critical dialogue with the various strands of feminist thought shows his interest in and engagement with issues related to contextual pluralism, what we have seen here in his appeal for dialogue with Marxists and people of other faiths is an indication of Preston's openness to engage himself in dealing with an area of pluralism which Mouw and Griffioen have identified as directional pluralism.

2.2 Problem of Directional Pluralism

We have provided ample evidence to show that Preston is concerned about the problem of plurality and pluralism both at the local and at the global level. As much as he is aware of the presence of ancient religions such as Islam and Hinduism, and philosophies like Marxism and feminist thought, and the challenge these faiths and philosophies posed to the plural society, he is no romanticist who glosses over the differences of worldviews and moral visions. He knows the seriousness of some fundamental directional differences that one finds in the plural world of competing claims and conflicting interests, but he knows too that there are significant common values shared by the various groups on which a responsible Christian social ethics can work.[45] While he is clearly committed to fostering greater understanding and promoting common good among all people in the plural society, there are basic directional claims which cannot be resolved. Not all claims, especially truth-claims, are veridical. Preston seems to accept this as well. We note for instance that though he recognizes the problem of

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[44] Ibid., p. 110.

[45] See our previous chapter on Natural Law, the Orders of Creation and the Common Good.

plurality and pluralism and the challenges posed by both, he does not advocate a relativist social theology that uncritically accepts every conviction, culture and community as "equally valid."[46] He makes this clear when he says "However, the fact of diversity, which is obvious, and the conviction that (subject to basic public order) each should be allowed to follow his convictions, does not imply that all cultures and communities are equally valid, nor that there is no conceivable way of comparing their merits."[47]

From the quotation just cited, it would appear that Preston is not an advocate of normative directional pluralism, which Mouw and Griffioen say would lead to "ultimate relativism." Nevertheless while it is helpful to know where Preston stands when it comes to directional claims, he fails to develop his thought further. It does not enhance his argument to make a generalized statement without giving sufficient support. One wishes Preston had given us examples of what he considered to be a "conceivable way of comparing merits." Furthermore, besides "comparing merits" it would have helped too, had he told us how he would judge whether certain claims are "valid" or otherwise. It would appear that he is more concerned with the practical problem of forming "common convictions amid the pluralism of society"[48] than to set out for us the criterion for comparing merits and judging the validity of claims.

2.3 A Three-fold Response to Pluralism

Keeping in mind that pluralism has a way of pulling people apart with disastrous results, when differences become the main focus of attention, how shall we hold followers of contending faiths and people of differing philosophies together in peaceful co-existence without undermining the quality of community life? What practical steps shall we take that

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[46] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 131.

[47] Ibid., p. 131.

will help to form and foster "common convictions" in our response to the challenge of pluralism?

Preston has proposed a three-fold step for dealing with the plural world. This we will look at in just a while. We shall first consider three other responses to pluralism which Preston has commented on but rejects as inadequate and unsuitable. There is firstly the use of brute force. We do not have to be reminded that in the real world of competing claims, certain groups and governments have found it expedient to resort to the use of force to impose some semblance of order often at the expense of justice. Privileged groups of people, for ideological reasons, have used coercive force to protect and perpetrate their own narrow interest. Preston is keenly aware of the ease with which brute or coercive force has been used either by despotic government or dominant groups to safeguard their own interest in the name of ensuring order and peace. One example used by Preston to illustrate his point is the former regime of South Africa which employed brute force to suppress the Black people when apartheid was given a free rein.[49] It should be said that Preston holds a strong view about protecting "basic public order,"[50] yet despite a high appreciation of public order, he does not favour a social order that is imposed by brute force. Brute force, as shown in the failed experiments of the former Soviet Union and the white supremacist regime of South Africa is repressive and repugnant to those who love justice. Furthermore it cannot be used for too long without arousing revolt from the oppressed.[51]

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[48] Ibid., p. 131.

[49] Ibid., p. 130.

[50] Ibid., p. 131.

[51] Cf. Preston, *Explorations*, p. 155.

A second response which he rejects is the idea of imposing a "monolithic Christian social teaching,"[52] which can be embraced by the whole Church, as if that is at all possible. This is an unrealistic idea and it is not one which has attracted wide support given the plurality of beliefs even within the fellowship of the Church. He gives two reasons for dismissing any possibility of proposing a "monolithic" social theology. In the first place, Christians view social issues differently because of different contextual concerns. The need of a Hutu Christian struggling in the jungle of Zaire, for instance, is different from the concern of an average German Christian or a Christian in Iran. The second reason which Preston gives is one of hermeneutics. Christians do differ about biblical interpretation and what the Scriptures say to the Church in response to the social issues of our plural world.

There is a third response which has gained keen support in recent years. It is a call for the Church to be the Church and for Christians to make a deliberate disengagement from the socio-political arena of the world. Perhaps with this in mind, he poses the following rhetorical questions and offers an answer which reveals where his inclinations lie:

Since people have different faiths and philosophies, does it mean that these will lead them to select and evaluate facts differently, so that we shall never get agreement among humankind? Shall we all be shut up with others of our outlook in separate faiths and philosophies without intellectual and moral contact with those of other outlooks? Fortunately not. This brings us back to the element of basic morality in the world, which is shared by all human beings who are sane enough to be held responsible for their actions. Indeed it can be argued that it is not possible to deny this morality and live consistently.[53]

There is no need for the different groups to retreat into their own religious or philosophical enclave in the mistaken attempt of trying to make a virtue out of a ghetto-like living. He rejects what he calls elsewhere a "privatization of religion" as a response to the

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[52] Ibid., p. 138.

reality of plurality, advocated for instance, by Tawney earlier this century and of late in the writings of Hauerwas. To privatize the Christian faith, or to concentrate on the building of the Church without direct engagement in the political life outside the Church, in his view, would be socially irresponsible. Not surprising then, "privatizing religion" is not an option for his social theology. He is forthright in his criticism of Tawney's view as having "little or no sense of social responsibility."[54] Just as forthright is his rejection of the Hauerwasian project when he asserts that what Hauerwas has argued for "makes it hard for Christians to participate in public dialogue on moral issues with those of other religions and secular persuasions."[55] By criticizing both Tawney and Hauerwas, Preston is not dismissing their concern that building the Church and strengthening the Christian community is an important task of the Church. But agreeing with such a view about the Church and the Christian community need not lead one to disengage from the socio-political arena of the world. Preston takes a more inclusive view of doing social theology in a plural society. Besides supporting the need to build the Christian community and against keeping the Church away from the public arena, Preston suggests that a responsible approach should make a three-fold inclusive response.

In Christian terms it could mean, first, the creation of a strong community among Christians themselves; second, a wider number of persons and groups connected with the church in various kinds of loose and informal ways; and third, a strong commitment to, and search for, the common good with those of other faiths and ideologies.[56]

His three-fold response is very much in line with his belief in our common humanity under the grace of God and informed by his theology of creation.[57] This explains in part his

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[53] Preston, *Church and Society*, 106. Note here that he uses "humankind" whereas in earlier works, he would have used "mankind." (cf. footnote no. 51). This is a fine example of a person who has responded positively to the corrective challenge of feminist concerns, an aspect of contextual pluralism.

[54] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 9.

[55] Preston, *Future*, p. 9.

[56] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 10.

[57] Cf. Preston, Explorations, p. 155.

ready response to the problem of pluralism not by withdrawal from the wider world but as a commitment to the fostering of the common good and the strengthening of basic morality. So without having to withdraw from the public square, and without having to resort to brute force or the imposition of the will of the dominant group upon the vulnerable groups, he thinks that common ground can be found among the various groups of people, and that certain shared virtues or "common convictions" that help a society to flourish can be engendered by "a greater devotion to the common good as compared with sectoral interests."[58] His social theology calls for a "strong commitment to, and search for, the common good with those of other faiths and ideologies."[59] His three-fold response informed by his understanding of grace and a theology of creation allows the Church to maintain her distinct identity without disengaging herself from the political world.

2.4 Dialogue, Consultation and Consensus

Preston's three-fold response to the challenge of pluralism is a dialectical response to the paradoxical challenge of having to strengthen one's own faith-community, and finding over-lapping convictions among different groups of people on the one hand, and accepting the reality of diversity and the sometimes irreconcilable directional world-views, on the other hand. A blanket commitment to the common good without acknowledging the reality of diverse directional beliefs is too utopian for it disregards the integrity of beliefs and philosophies held by others. An undue preoccupation with the reality of directional differences without granting the possibility of finding common ground for the common good would lead to an unhealthy sense of resignation. The three-fold response proposed by Preston overcomes utopian tendency and rejects the temptation of despair. And because a major aim of the three-fold response is the fostering of common good in a plural world, Preston argues

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[58] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 131.

in favour of employing dialogue and consultation[60] to build consensus and to facilitate mutual understanding, which he has said is an urgent task, even if we cannot agree on fundamental directional beliefs.[61] In that sense, the three-fold response is a consensual approach[62] to the problem of pluralism. Little wonder then that Preston is a keen advocate of what has been known as the middle-axiom method, a consensual approach of problem-solving which we will say more when we discuss in greater detail his method of making social-ethical decisions.

There is however a critical implication for taking a consensual approach in dealing with the problem of pluralism. If we understand the nature of consensual approach as an on-going process involving dialogue and consultation, and if we allow for the improbability of solving fundamental directional differences, we have to accept provisional agreements in our search for the common good. Preston knows this to be the case and he advises that in the course of dialogue and consultation, we should be "prepared to take very seriously any provisional and general consensus which may emerge."[63] Consensual approach means that we have to allow for intermediate measures and provisional decisions for the sake of societal well-being.

2.5 Truth, the Virtue of Tolerance and the Need for Allies

As the plurality of the world becomes more obvious, and as more people and groups which used to be marginalized reclaim their right to be heard, the need to cultivate civic virtues[64] to ensure that such diversity and demands from divergent groups do not undermine

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[59] Preston, Persistence, p. 10.

[60] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 135f. He makes a call for both dialogue and consultation not only with Christian experts but also "with adherents of other faiths and ideologies.."

[61] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 131.

[62] Ibid., p. 131. Also, Preston, *Future*, p. 10.

[63]Preston, *Explorations*, p. 138.

[64] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 131.

societal well-being becomes more apparent. In much of the recent literature on ethics that addresses the issue of plurality one virtue has emerged as a critical if not highly desirable civic virtue, essential for holding the plural society together.[65] It is toleration, sometimes synonymously referred to as tolerance.

While tolerance has always been an accepted virtue by the Church, its importance only began to attract greater appreciation after the Enlightenment. Ironically the Enlightenment has been criticized by some leading social philosophers like MacIntyre for fragmenting the Western civilization, and for advocating too individualistic a philosophy of life. Reading MacIntyre's works[66] one might be forgiven for thinking that the Enlightenment has generated only negative impact on the Western culture. But that is not a complete picture, and it is an inadequate assessment of the contribution of the Enlightenment. To be sure, we owe much to MacIntyre for his critique of the weakness and failings of the Enlightenment project. Not all is bad, however. In spite of the critical assessment of the Enlightenment, Preston acknowledges that the world has benefitted from the Enlightenment project as well. There is one benefit which stands out, and that is the inculcation of the need to foster tolerance as a virtue. If we see this virtue in the light of the human inclination to sin and the human tendency to look after one's own interest, the benefit of cultivating toleration that helps to build relationship should become clearer. It is precisely because human propensity to sin, both as a person and as members of a group that led Preston to remark, "God needs to use all means at his command to weld recalcitrant humanity into tolerable co-existence and co-

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[65] For example, Markham, *op. cit.*, Mouw and Griffioen, *op. cit.*, and though not a book on ethics, McGrath, *op. cit.*.

[66] For instance, MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

operation."[67] One of the means would be the nurturing of toleration for the good of the plural society.

So while it is true that the Enlightenment might have received some strong and valid criticism in recent years, in a rebuttal to what he considers as Brian Griffiths' negative assessment of the Enlightenment, Preston reminds us that just as the Church has had her share of producing sound theology and destructive teachings, the Enlightenment is a "many-faceted phenomenon, some of it crude, some of it noble." One noble contribution of the Enlightenment is that it has "taught Christians that toleration is a virtue and not to be dismissed as a lack of concern for truth, in reaction to a Christianity which had torn Europe apart for a hundred years in religious wars."[68]

It is not surprising that Preston should mention toleration together with a legitimate concern for truth. Truth, however conceived, is usually integral to one's directional belief, whatever one's religion or philosophy might be. There is a perception that when toleration is given too much priority, truth might become a casualty of expediency. Theologians like Markham and A.E. McGrath have argued that truth-claims should not be left out of the public arena in our search for a more tolerable world.[69] Their concern is understandable. McGrath for instance does not want toleration, a desirable virtue, to become an ideological tool to suppress the claims of different religious and philosophical groups. He would support the need to cultivate the virtue of toleration. Yet he warns that "Toleration is much more likely to result from showing respect to other religions, than from forcing them into an artificial framework which suppresses their distinctiveness in an attempt to make observation conform

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[67] Preston, Persistence, p. 122.

[68] Preston, *Future*, p. 154.

[69] See McGrath *op. cit.*, and Markham, *op. cit.*, pp. 129 ff.

to theory."[70] Furthermore as Markham has also argued, when claims to truth especially from religious groups are pushed aside and given no voice in the public arena, for example in the Rawlsian liberal agenda, we are assuming that such claims do not have valid contributions to make to common good, and that the liberal agenda on its own can hold the society together. This assumption is dismissed by Markham. He is convinced that there is much which a theocentric social ethics can offer to the debate in the public arena which seeks to promote human well-being. A major contribution, he argues, is that a theocentric social ethics protects the world against nihilism. Expressed more positively, he claims that "a *justified rationality* depends on the existence of God."[71] The teaching of truth especially one located within a theistic tradition is a critical teaching with positive contribution to make to the public arena. It would be remiss to throw it out of the agenda in social ethical discourse.

There is another reason why it does not surprise us that Preston touches on the subject of truth when discussing toleration. The question of truth and toleration was addressed by Reinhold Niebuhr who has been influential in shaping Preston's social theology. Toleration and truth takes up a chapter[72] in the second volume of Niebuhr's *magnum opus*. It is probable that Preston's occasional commentary on the need for toleration is informed by the longer treatment on the subject given by Niebuhr.

In his Gifford Lectures, Niebuhr acknowledges the importance of truth for Christians. Placing his discussion of truth in the context of human sinfulness and God's grace, and the dialectical pull of human finiteness and freedom, he argues that the truth which we claim to have should not be confused with the ultimate truth in Christ. The truth which we have is only fragments of the whole truth. As he describes it in paradoxical terms, "The truth, as it is

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[70] McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

[71] Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[72] Niebuhr, vol. 2., *op. cit.*, pp. 213 ff.

contained in the Christian revelation, includes the recognition that it is neither possible for man to know the truth fully nor to avoid the error of pretending that he does."[73] How well we understand this paradox will therefore depend on how we respond to what Niebuhr offers as the test of toleration which carries a two-fold demand. In the test of toleration, we are expected to keep those "vital convictions which lead to action; and also the capacity to preserve the spirit of forgiveness towards those who offend us by holding to convictions which seem untrue to us."[74] The "vital convictions" presumably include our claims to truth. Yet because of our propensity to make pretentious claims, it is needful for us to be forgiving, and less triumphalistic towards those who hold conflicting convictions.

Niebuhr's dialectical approach to the question of truth should be seen in the context of God's grace and the contingency of history and nature. In his own inimitable style, he elaborates his understanding of truth in the context of grace this way:

However we twist or turn, whatever instruments or pretensions we use, it is not possible to establish the claim that we have the truth. The truth remains subject to the paradox of grace. We may have it; and yet we do not have it. And we will have it more purely in fact if we know that we have it only in principle. Our toleration of truths opposed to those which we confess is an expression of the spirit of forgiveness in the realm of culture. Like all forgiveness, it is possible only if we are not too sure of our own virtue.[75]

In his response to Brian Griffiths, Preston tells us that promoting toleration as an essential civic virtue need not be interpreted as a lack of interest in the question of truth. There is no need to pit truth against toleration, if toleration is understood as a virtue and not an ideology, as McGrath has pointed out. Furthermore in the paradox of truth as explained by Niebuhr and the twofold test of toleration offered by him, we have a way in which we can

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[73] Ibid., p. 217.

[74] Ibid., p. 219.

[75] Ibid., p. 243.

hold a coherent view about the need for the cultivation of toleration without neglecting the question of truth-claims.

We shall end this section by commenting on another recurring theme in Preston's social theology which is related to his call for people of differing faiths and ideologies to nurture tolerance as an appropriate civic virtue that will hold the people of a plural society together for human flourishing. It is understandable for one whose social theology is richly informed by a recognition of God's grace at work in the structures of life and in the life of others, regardless of their faith or ideologies, to advise Christians to seek out active partners in working for human well-being. Christians do not have to work alone in the public arena except perhaps in a country where they are in the minority and under severe persecution. The common interest of a plural society is better served when Christians and the other members of the community co-operate as allies to work for the benefit of all. He holds the view that Christians cannot be effective in "the plural society without allies."[76] And precisely because he holds a high view of God's grace at work in others, it is not inconceivable that in the process of dialogue, consultation and consensus building nourished by the civic virtue of tolerance, in as much as it should lead to more common ground being forged for the benefit for the wider society, he would agree with Mouw and Griffioen that "Christians have good grounds for believing that their own weaknesses can be corrected by encountering the strength of others."[77]

Concluding Remarks

We have shown enough to suggest that Preston is keenly aware the plural mix of society both at the national and at the global level. For the persevering, he has left sufficient

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[76] Preston, Persistence, p. 62.

[77] Mouw and Griffioen, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

evidence scattered throughout his writings for us to piece together how he has responded to pluralism. Yet there are limitations in Preston's treatment of plurality and pluralism. Perhaps if we have to fault Preston, it is not that he has neglected the problem of plurality, as Markham has insinuated, but that there is a lack of a sustained and systematic treatment of the subject. We have already expressed our disappointment that he has not given us a criterion for assessing the validity of conflicting claims, although he tells us that not all claims are equally valid. On the subject of truth and toleration, even though we know that Preston's social theology has been influenced by Niebuhr, and that it is not far-fetched to say that his view on toleration and truth is consonant with Niebuhr's detailed discussion of it, one wished that Preston had said more about toleration and truth other than making an assertion that advocating toleration does not mean having to neglect truth.

Our criticism, however, should be tempered with the knowledge that Preston is a theologian at a crucial time that overlaps the era which ended with the demise of Reinhold Niebuhr, and the emerging voices of a new generation of theologians who are children of the post-colonial world. His treatment of pluralism should be better appreciated if we see him as a pioneer who has in the early stage of the post-colonial world impressed upon Christians the urgency of putting pluralism on the agenda of social ethics and to take on the challenge posed by both plurality and pluralism. Younger theologians have since developed more rigorous and detailed social theology that deals with the problem of plurality and pluralism in greater depth, and we can only benefit from such works.

For a Singaporean Christian coming from a place with a rich history of diversity of religions, ethnicity and cultures, and where Christians are in the minority, it is easy to appreciate Preston's concern for doing social ethics in a plural society. His sense of urgency in dealing with pluralism and plurality, as well as his pioneering efforts in responding to the

problem posed by both, when judiciously combined with the conceptual classifications of pluralism provided by Mouw and Griffioen, have much to offer us as an appropriate and rigorous theological framework for doing social ethics in a plural world.

Since we started this chapter with a note on Markham's criticism of Preston's supposed neglect of "the problem of plurality," we shall conclude by saying that Markham has been incautious in judging that the "tolerance and plurality questions do not even get a mention" in Preston's works.

Chapter Six

Politics in the Social Ethics of Ronald H. Preston

Politics, Preston tells us, "is an inescapable reality."[1] And to "think theologically is willy-nilly a political activity, whether one is conscious of it or not."[2] While that may be true, our problem is that politics defies simple definition. Raymond Plant has reminded us that, "It is impossible to give a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the use of the term 'politics' which would then yield an unambiguous and uncontroversial definition."[3] Since there is no one clear and "uncontroversial definition" available, we will approach Preston's treatment of political issues by looking at the broad political themes Preston addresses and consider their implications for Christian social ethics. We will focus on a selection of recurring themes in the writings of Preston. Taken together, these political themes and Preston's response to them should help to capture and clarify the sense in which his social theology interacts with politics. The themes which we will look at are 1) the state, 2) the phenomenon of power, 3) international relationships, 4) the mode and extent of participation by the people, and 5) the question of accountability.

These themes are selected mainly because they are important enough for Preston to deal at length with them. There is, however, one term which dominates Preston's discussion of political issues, and that is the question of power. We will say more about power and the sense in which Preston has used the term later. For now it is enough to note that because power cannot be ignored in the working of the state, in fostering international relationships,

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[1] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 115.

[2] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 148. Also Preston, *Future*, p. 166.

in the process of decision-making, in the election of governments and the demand for accountability, we will allow power to serve as a thread that weaves through and holds all the themes together, except for our discussion of the state which we will treat as a kind of introduction to Preston's political thought. It should be said that other social ethicists have approached politics in different ways and not everyone follows one set pattern in the way they organise their themes.[4] Our arrangement of the themes for this chapter is clearly not incontestable, but it is serviceable.

1. The State

When considering Preston's response to politics as a whole, it is imperative to remember that his social ethics has been very much shaped by a theology of creation. We recall, for instance, from his theology of creation he has identified four Orders of Creation,[5] one of which is the political order. It is under this political order that he places his understanding of the state, and claims support for a positive response to it. Like the other Orders of Creation, the state is considered by him to be a basic structure of life offering invaluable opportunity for fostering human well-being in an interactive community of giving and receiving. Furthermore, consistent with his theological anthropology, the state seen as an integral part of the political order adds support to his view that human beings are not autonomous or atomistic creatures, but social beings, or to use a phrase for which he has a preference, humans are "persons-in-community" involved in a variety of often over-lapping network of relationships, of which the state, though not perfect, is a significant institution. This is for Preston a positive doctrine of the state that underlines his overall understanding

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[3] R. Plant, "Politics" in Childress, J. and John Macquarrie, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, pp. 483 - 485.

[4] For example, John Bennett, *Christians and the State*, Philip Wogaman, *Christian Perspectives on Politics*, and Paul Marshall, *Thine is the Kingdom*.

[5] Cf. Preston, *Persistence*, p. 15 and Preston, *Future*, p. 166f.

of human relationality and the need for basic social structures to enhance human relationships and relational well-being.

1.1 The State: A Weak and Erroneous View

If Preston's view of the state is said to be positive, we might ask what are those views which he has considered as negative? The answer to this question is not difficult to find. Within the Anglican tradition to which Preston belongs, he has identified V.A. Demant and E.R. Norman as two scholars who hold divergent views of the state and Christian engagement in the politics of the state which he finds untenable. To be sure there are other scholars, both within and outside the Anglican communion, to whom Preston has made references.[6] But it is Demant and Norman who have attracted direct criticism from Preston.

Preston has used the opportunity of his Maurice Lectures to express his dissatisfaction with what he reads as a "twentieth-century Anglican weakness"[7] reflected in a strand of Anglican attitude and response to the state. Citing Demant's Holland Lectures for 1949,[8] Preston laments that high Anglicans represented by scholars like Demant seems to have a 'low' regard for the state.[9] He criticises Demant for being too suspicious of state power, a view which has close affinity to Hayek,[10] without allowing for the possibility that the state can be an instrument for the common good. He suggests that Demant's low regard for the state might have been dictated by two unrelated factors. The first factor Preston attributes to the negative impact of Nazism, Fascism and Stalinism in the first half of last

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[6] For example, the view of John Yoder in *The Politics of Jesus*. (Preston, *Future*, p. 41.) And outside the Church the minimal state which Nozick advocates, in R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. (Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 66f.)

[7] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 15.

[8] Ibid., pp. 13f. See V.A. Demant, *Religion and the Decline of Capitalism*.

[9] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 15.

[10] Ibid., p. 15.

century and the tyrannical totalitarian states they gave rise to. The negative impact and

impression were probably still freshly embedded in the mind of Demant when he delivered

his Holland Lectures. The second factor he attributes to what he judges as a "rudimentary"[11]

idea of the state in the medieval world; a world which, according to Preston, remained

normative for Demant[12] and his "Christendom" world-view. Preston does not deny that there

are enough examples of tyrannical states for the Church to be wary of giving uncritical

support to any state. He is aware of the evil tyrannical regimes have inflicted, yet he is not

convinced that we should therefore denigrate all states or form a low opinion of them.

Rejecting the low regard for the state in Demant's work, Preston favours the reformed

tradition as a more appropriate theological response to the state. According to him, "Calvin

knew better. He had a high doctrine of both the church and state"[13] which he finds wanting

in the Anglican tradition represented by theologians like Demant.

With regard to E.R. Norman, the bulk of his criticism is directed at his controversial

BBC Reith Lectures in 1978,[14] in which the one time Cambridge historian had accused the

Church of meddling in the politics of the state. The basic contention of Norman is that

Christianity has been politicized. He explains, "By politicization of religion is meant the

internal transformation of the faith itself, so that it comes to be defined in terms of political

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[11] Ibid., p. 14. From political philosophy we learn that we may classify the states around a number of theories. Norman P. Barry offers this summary: "The theories have included organic theories that present the state as a political institution embodying collective values which are held to be superior to individual ones, 'social contract' theories that treat the state as a device voluntarily agreed to by individuals to advance purely personal values, 'night-watchmen' theories which severely limit the role of the state to fulfilling the minimum of collective purposes, and the coercive theories of the state which regard its function as solely oppressive." Norman P. Barry, *An Introduction to Modern Political Theory*, p. 46. Though Preston in his comment on Demant seems more concerned about Christian *theological* understanding of the state, it is helpful to know the prevailing theories regarding the state in the field of *political* philosophy.

[12] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 14.

[13] Ibid., p. 15. Also, Preston, *Future*, p. 161.

[14] E.R. Norman, *Christianity and the World Order*. The controversy Norman generated brought about rebuttals from leaders of different theological background in *Christian Faith and Political Hopes: A Reply to E.R. Norman*.

values - it becomes essentially concerned with social morality rather than with the ethereal qualities of immortality."[15] Unlike Norman who does not think that the Church should be involved in grappling with social-political issues of the wider world, Preston is adamant that the "gospel must be concerned with"[16] the politics of the state, in the sense that the Church should not disengage herself from the state. Disagreeing with the view propounded by Norman, Preston argues that engaging in the political affairs of the state does not mean getting the Church "politicized." As is to be expected, Preston debunks E.R. Norman's accusation of the "politicization"[17] of the gospel as erroneous. Probably out of a sense of incredulity, but more likely because he does not want the irony and error of Norman's view to be left unchallenged, he retorts:

Politicization means to subsume the gospel under some political programme which, as will be evident, I should deplore; but the accusation is made only if Christians are critical of established institutions; when Christians support them it is accepted without comment and they are not accused of politicization.[18]

It should be obvious that deliberate disengagement from the politics of the state is in fact a way of supporting the *status quo*, a serious implication which Norman noticed in passing,[19] but did not seem to comprehend. Preston explains that "politics is a sea in which we must all swim. For to be non-political, or apolitical, is itself a political stance; it tacitly supports the *status quo*, and does so irresponsibly by lack of attention rather than conscientious decisions."[20] An uncritical acceptance of the *status quo* (which Norman

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[15] Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[16] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 117.

[17] Ibid., p. 117. Also Preston, *Future*, pp. 163f.

[18] Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 117f.

[19] Norman, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[20] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 80. Cf. Preston, *Future*, p. 166.

seems to advocate) is an irresponsible political act (which Norman does not seem to realize)
of sometimes supporting unjust structures and sustaining the unfair privileges of those who
have benefited from such structures. Clearly troubled by Norman's erroneous and highly
negative view of the Church's involvement in the politics of the state, Preston derides
Norman for combining "the worst features of both the Christendom and the privatized
theological attitudes. His privatized unpoliticized theology hankers after the old
Christendom political theology."[21]

We should mention that in recent years, theologians like Hauerwas have mounted
rigorous argument for disengagement from direct participation in the politics of the state.
Hauerwas sees the Church as the *Polis*, and argues that the Church should not be involved in
the political agenda of the wider society nor should the Church be seen as endorsing or
giving credence to the politics of the liberal society which has domesticated a
Constantinized Church. To be truthful to the claims of the Christian Story, Christians need
to "recover the church as a political community",[22] and reject the universalizing attempts of
the liberal agenda. Hauerwas insists that the Church has to be faithful to her particular
tradition-transmitting practice, and that can only be done when she disentangles herself from
what he considers as an impotent engagement in the Enlightenment project.[23]

1.2 The State: An Imperfect Instrument in need of Critical Support

Compared with the views held by Demant and Norman, and theologians like
Hauerwas, Preston's social theology gives a more positive view of the state. Yet in spite the

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[21] Preston, *Future*, p. 166. This is perhaps an unfair judgement. As Dr. A. M. Suggate has clarified to this
writer, although they do not have a high view of the state, the Christendom people at least started from a social
view of human beings. Norman, on the other hand, holds a much more privatized and individualized view of
the Christian faith and political engagement.

[22] Hauerwas, *After Christendom?*, p. 26.

[23] Ibid., p. 35.

positive theological perspective, we should note that Preston is reluctant to embrace the state as if it is an unblemished structure of life. His doctrine of the state may be positive, but he does not want us to misconstrue the state as perfect. Nor is there a need to reject the state or to avoid the politics of the state even if we recognize the state's limitation and the folly of the Enlightenment. The Church is indeed the *polis* providing the witness to the power of the Gospel of Christ. Granted the Church is the significant community which Christians depend on for nurture and character formation. But Christians do not hold membership in only one community, significant though the Church is. They are also members of overlapping communities, with shared interests and values drawn from different tradition-transmitting sources of accumulated wisdom, and not necessarily from a common desire for survival, as Hauerwas puts it.[24] While Preston's social theology does not ignore the unique contribution of the Church as a tradition-transmitting community, perhaps he has not given sufficient attention to it. Nevertheless, amidst the overlapping communities of relationships, Preston's social theology acknowledges that even an imperfect structure like the state can still be used for fostering human well-being because of the presence of the grace of God at work in His creation.

In order that the Church does not idealize the state or extend uncritical support to it, Preston has offered additional theological criteria to help the Church weigh the options and make her judgment of support. He introduced three additional theological criteria, which, as we have considered in an earlier chapter, are part of his overall theological framework for social ethics.

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[24] Ibid., p. 29.

1.3 Three Theological Criteria

The first criterion is that every person in the state has "equal significance in the sight of God, and that this equality is more significant than any empirical differences between them..."[25] Secondly, following the example of Jesus, the state should be "especially concerned with all those who (are) in some ways marginalized, whom the majority tend to write off."[26] And thirdly, because of the tendency of corruption and prevalence of sins, there should be sufficient mechanisms to provide checks and balances against abuse of power.[27] Applying these three criteria, or 'presumptions'[28] to the state will sharpen our theological discernment and help us assume a more critical reciprocal perspective of the state and its role in enhancing human well-being, without dismissing it or idealizing it. Unlike those who denigrate the state or others who take too optimistic a view of it, Preston's view has a "doctrine of the state (that) emphasizes not only its negative role of restraining disorder but its positive role of creating and encouraging social institutions, structures and conventions which facilitate rather than hinder the living of the good life."[29]

If we have to summarize Preston's theological view of the state, we may say that it is a high but critical view, very much shaped mainly by a theology of creation, which is to some extent tempered by his doctrine of the prevalence of sin and reassured by the doctrine of the ever-present grace of God. One other point is worth noting. While the type of state he favours is informed by his theological framework, it is also shaped by his British and European political context. He rejects the totalitarian state whether fascist or Marxist. Nor

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[25] Preston, *Future*, p. 140.

[26] Ibid., p. 141.

[27] Ibid., p. 142.

[28] Preston, *Future*, p. 142. This is a term favoured by Wogaman. See J.P. Wogaman, *A Christian Method of Moral Judgment*, 1976, pp. 60 ff.

[29] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 49.

does he favour a strict authoritarian state. What he supports is a form of participatory democracy which we shall discuss later in this chapter.

2. Power and Politics

We now move to another recurring political theme: power. Power is, of course, an intractable phenomenon. Yet we cannot make sense of politics without making reference to it.[30] And although power may be enigmatic, Preston does not avoid the problem posed by it, neither does he neglect the potential that power presents for facilitating the common good. For instance, he recognizes that power can be mustered to maximize the "divergent interests as a condition of creativeness in social order."[31] Precisely because he knows that power like self-interest can be harnessed for human well-being, and that power properly understood can contribute to our understanding of politics and inter-group relationships, he presses for the Church to develop a "theology of power."[32] That call for a "theology of power" was first made in the course of his criticism of Tawney when he chided his former teacher for not dealing sufficiently with group conflicts.[33]

Where Tawney has perhaps failed to take adequate cognizance of the ramification of conflicts and the ensuing power struggles, Preston in the tradition of Christian Realism influenced by Temple and Niebuhr, sees conflicts of interest and power struggles as something that will always be present in any society or relationship. In that sense, since we

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[30] In "the kingdoms of this world it is not possible to ignore questions of power, " says Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 103.

[31] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 95.

[32] Ibid., p. 95. Since Preston first remarked that "we need a theology of power," we now have a number of books that address that need. For example, Christine Firer Hinze, *Comprehending Power in Christian Social Ethics*, and James P. Mackey *Power and Christian Ethics*.

[33] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 95.

cannot "run away from power..."[34] it is unlikely that we can do responsible social ethics without grappling with the question of power in the political arena.

Regrettably, after directing our attention to the need for a theology of power, Preston has not offered in any substantial way such a theology. To complicate matter he has sometimes deployed the term 'power' loosely, in his social ethics, without telling us exactly what he means. To complicate the matter, he has occasionally used related words such as "strong", "violence", "force", and "authority", usually not in any nuanced sense at all, to communicate his idea of power in different contexts. It is when he is not precise with his use of terms that we are left to wonder what he has in mind when he writes about 'power' and its related words.

Just as we have done with our study of Preston's idea of pluralism, we need to look elsewhere for suitable models that will clarify the meaning of power in his social theology. We can turn to two theologians for the schematic tools to help us place the sense in which power might be understood in Preston's works. The two academics whose works we shall consult are Christine Hinze, an American social ethicist and James Mackey, a Scottish theologian.

2.1 Descriptive Models of Power for Social Ethics

Hinze has offered two descriptive models of power.[35] The first is what she terms the "power-over" model. This is a prevalent form of power commonly expressed in inter-personal and group relationships. Invariably a certain amount of control and coercion is involved when one exercises this mode of power whether or not one recognizes it. It is power that seeks to dominate. In social theory this model has sometimes been referred to as

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[34] Ibid., p. 95.

[35] Hinze, op.cit., pp. 4 ff. Cf. Keith Dowding, *Power*, pp. 4ff.

"superordination." Hinze describes this first model of power as domination and control. The control, as she puts it, is "essentially *control over* decisions, paths of action, and outcomes, but especially over other people."[36]

The second model refers to power as "power-to." Here power is generally seen as that exercised by the people as free moral agents in collaborative endeavour. This may also be said to be a coactive form of power-sharing. Whereas the "power-over" model seeks control, the "power-to" model points "primarily (to the) people's *ability to* effect their ends."[37] While she prefers the second model, she nevertheless accepts that sometimes "power-over" needs to be exercised within certain limits, to empower, for example, the removal of unjust structures and to facilitate wider practice of "power-to" relationship as well as enabling the fostering of human flourishing.[38]

A different schematic understanding of power is provided by Mackey.[39] Building on material provided by A.P.D'Entrèves,[40] his scheme places power in a spectrum oscillating between force on one end, and authority on the other.[41]

"Force," "authority" and "power" are of course inter-related terms. Sometimes they have been used interchangeably, with the unfortunate outcome of masking their subtle difference in meaning. However, in Mackey's scheme, force carries the distinctive meaning of power that is coercive. Authority, on the other hand, is power that is authorized, as it were, and it is therefore morally more accountable.

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[36] Hinze, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

[37] Ibid., p. 5.

[38] Ibid., p. 257. Feminist theologians "affirm the need for power-over in the form of authority, but 'authorities' are only such if they represent and serve communal flourishing, and remained bonded with the community in doing so."

[39] Mackey, *op. cit.*, pp. 4 ff.

[40] A. P. D'Entrèves, *The Notion of the State.*

Generally speaking then, Hinze's "power-over" if placed in Mackey's spectrum would probably be situated close to the side of force, and her "power-to" would be close to the spectrum's other end, that is, authority. She has already indicated that from the perspective of feminist theologians, "power-over" may be expressed as "a form of authority" and as such "power-over" may be accepted as a type of authorized power.

Both Hinze's and Mackey's classifications of power have their own merits. An evaluation of the two approaches may suggest that Mackey's spectrum seems to be a more helpful tool insofar as it provides for the over-lapping of force-power-authority, and allows for the constant push-pull interplay between the three elements. Power is rarely exercised without a juxtaposition of force and authority. In that sense, since Mackey's schematic presentation gives a more dynamic picture of power, it is a preferable scheme.

On the other hand, Hinze's models though helpful seem too neat and a touch artificial. The impression they portray of power is that of an either/or choice, of either "power-over" or "power-to". However, it must be said in all fairness to Hinze that she does not offer her models in such stark terms. In fact she grants a certain degree of overlapping, and concludes that a comprehensive understanding of power will have a mix of both "power-over" and "power-to."[42] We shall refer mainly to Mackey's schematic presentation of power and occasionally to Hinze's models of power as we examine Preston's treatment of it.

3. Power in the Political Realm

We have already noted that Preston accepts power as a given phenomenon in the political arena. With the help of Hinze and Mackey, a clearer picture of power and politics

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[41] Mackey, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[42] Hinze, *op. cit.*, p. 281 ff.

in the social theology of Preston should emerge when we examine power and other related words used by him. We shall turn next to Preston's discussion of the government and power exercised by government in a democratic society.

3.1 Power of the Government

One of the first things we notice when we look at Preston's discussion of power associated with government is that he seems to use power synonymously with authority. So when he pleads for more power for the government he is in fact asking for more authority, or more power that is authorized, for the government. Keeping Mackey's spectrum in mind, power in a democratic government can be properly understood as authorized power, or authority. This being the case, it will be easier for us to appreciate the rigour of Preston's argument when he tells us that what the government of the western democratic states need is more power and not less; that is more authority and not less. His argument for more authority for the government is sometimes couched in terms of strengthening the government and on many occasions he has used the word "strong"[43] to denote authorized power when he asks for more of such authority to be granted to the democratically elected government.

If the government in the West - and here we shall assume that it is usually the government of the United Kingdom - needs strengthening or more authority to exercise power, why, we might ask, is there a general reluctance and a lack of consensus to grant the freely elected government more authority? Part of the reason for this reluctance, at least in the second half of last century, can be attributed to the rise of the New Right. At the height of the Thatcher rule in Britain and Reagan's presidency in the United States, when the political philosophy of the ruling parties was influenced very much by F.A. Hayek and M.

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[43] E.g., Preston, *Persistence*, p. 105, and Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 117f.

Friedman, the ruling party in Britain favoured less interference from the government, and more stripping away of government's control of services and industries through privatization of often sizable and over-subsidized public assets. The New Right worked for a minimal state with limited power[44] mainly because they feared that granting the government more power might result in the curbing of individual rights and liberty.[45] There is also an economic reason, but this we will deal with separately in another chapter. Be that as it may, the rise of the New Right explained only in part the reasons for a general reluctance to give the government more authorized power. There are other factors, and we should add that one need not be a Thatcherite to want to limit the authority of the government. The tyranny of highly centralized countries where power had concentrated in the hands of a small group of usually self-appointed leaders like the Politburo of the former USSR, and the despotic rule of dictators in many Two-Thirds World countries such as the former Zaire and Burma, provide enough reasons for people in the western democratic countries to be wary of granting too much power even in the form of authority to the government.

The suspicions of government and the unwillingness to grant the democratically elected government more authority, for fear of possible abuse of power and the probable loss of personal freedom, though understandable, in Preston's view, seems disproportionate to the need for a stronger government that will be empowered to govern with greater authority and efficiency. For those who are suspicious of a strong government, Preston counters that it is not authorized power that we should be afraid of. It is the lack of authorized power that weakens a government and makes it difficult for them to make tough decisions or plan long-term policies that will provide greater benefits for the well-being of

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[44] Hayek's and Friedman's influence will be considered when we survey economic issues in our next chapter.

[45] The paradox, as Dr. Suggate has pointed out this writer, is that the Thatcher government actually centralized a great deal by curtailing the power of local authorities and appointing quangos.

the people. In his view the fear of a stronger government, in other words the fear of a government with greater authority, should be assuaged and counter-balanced by the knowledge that a democratic system of government which Preston speaks out of, will have its own built-in safeguards against abuse of power. In any case, in the so-called western democracy, preferred by Preston, the power of the government is derivative power. It is power or authority that is derived from the endorsement of the electorate. To borrow an idea from Michel Foucault,[46] it is circulative power in that as the government is authorized to exercise power, the government in turn enables the governed who are the electorate to exert more power for the good of the community. In a democracy, power for the government, and by extension, power for the state is authorized power. The government is empowered, so to speak, by those they govern, to exercise authority, circulate power, and to foster common good. This is a hegemony/consensus understanding of parliamentary democracy which we mentioned in our chapter on Singapore.

In Preston's judgment, the government of the democratic state needs more authority for the elected leaders to govern in the long-term interest of the people, rather than be distracted by short-term populist policies, lobbyist pressure and the fear of losing the next general election. He seems dismayed by the irony that "electorates often want incompatible things, and are reluctant to give governments which are subject to defeat at the polls enough backing to deal with basic policies issues."[47] To those who fear granting too much power to the government, Preston warns that not strengthening the government might make the country "ungovernable."[48] He wonders whether the "expectations of an advanced industrial

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[46] Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in Colin Gordon, ed., *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings, 1972-1977*, p. 98.

[47] Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 120, also p. 143 and Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 30.

[48] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 30.

society have become such that electorates are in danger of not giving governments enough manoeuvring room to cope with the problems that arise." [49]

Having said that, Preston himself harbours a nagging apprehension that power in wrong hands may be abused, just as power in the hands of some recent totalitarian governments have been abused. His dilemma is how to prevent abuse of power without disabling a properly elected government with inadequate power to govern effectively. As an indication of his desire to press for more authority for the government and the seriousness with which he understands the fear expressed by those who are suspicious of strong government, he leaves us this advice: "Eternal vigilance against the misuse of state authority, from the tyranny of petty officials upwards, is certainly needed. However the root problem of the modern Western democratic state is not that it has too much power but that electorates give it too little."[50]

What makes Preston press so hard for the strengthening of the government, in spite his apprehension? The answer should be seen in the context of his concern for the common good. Without a sufficiently strong government, common good and human flourishing will be undermined in a state of conflicting group interests, where the dominant groups will be free to impose their will on others. A strong government is thus needed for the government to have the required authority to exert "power-over" and harness conflicting interest and manage competing demands for human solidarity. He warns that competing self interests can be "easily corrupted by love of riches and the desire for power and glory. It needs a strong government and a strong institutional framework within which (the competing interests are) allowed to operate."[51] The problem, however, is how much power is enough

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[49] Preston, *Future*, p. 254.

[50] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 116.

[51] Ibid., p. 105.

for the government? The other problem which is difficult to resolve is that no government, no matter how strong it wants to be, would dare to make tough decisions which would lose them votes, even if those decisions might offer long-term benefits to the people.

Perhaps mindful of the widespread influence of the Transnational Companies and the major media industries controlled nowadays by multi-national conglomerates which do not seem to be accountable to anyone other than their main stockholders, he makes a specific mention for their power to be checked.[52] Transnational Companies and modern media conglomerates are "large and powerful"[53] but "no group is good enough to exercise power unchecked; countervailing power is needed." [54] If there is another valid reason to grant the government in a democratic state more authority, it is because a strong government, in the sense of a government being granted greater authorized power, will be able to provide the "countervailing power" against large and powerful companies and interest groups. However, Preston is aware that the resource-rich modern borderless multi-national corporations and the problems they sometimes present would require more than a strong government to handle. The combined effort of strong governments will be required to handle the challenge posed by such multi-national corporations at the international level.

3.2 Power in International Relationships

Besides addressing the question of power for the government of a state, Preston has also commented on power in international relationships and the place of military power in international order. In an article which surveys recent ecumenical social ethics *vis-à-vis*

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[52] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 117.

[53] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 141.

[54] Ibid., p. 142. Also, "A further complication is caused by the powerful and often frenetic international commercial and financial forces which can shake even the largest economy." Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 30.

military power, he rejects what he considers to be WCC's propensity for making simplistic[55] proclamations. It is in the context of his criticism of the WCC that we see Preston making a rare excursus, in an attempt to show that there are different words which can be used to explain different notions of power. Faulting the WCC for failing to distinguish the subtle difference in terms, he chides them for not taking into consideration the distinction between 'violence' and 'force,' and for not reflecting the views of those who are not pacifists, when they prepared and released statements rejecting the use of military power in international relationships. To his dismay the WCC had issued a statement challenging the churches "to give up any theological or other justification of the use of military power, and to become a koinonia dedicated to the pursuit of just peace."[56]

Standing on the so-called Just War tradition and not as a pacifist, he argues his case for differentiating 'force' and 'violence' when he explains that "Violence refers to the use of force which is to be condemned. Force is essential to human flourishing."[57] This explanation is helpful. Unfortunately he confuses the matter when he goes on to clarify his differentiation of terms further, by saying that "force" that is essential for human well-being should be exercised within the context of law and order, whereas "violence" is in fact "either a corruption of law and order by oppressors or an act of the oppressed against injustice."[58] In his second attempt, he fails to differentiate 'violence' committed by oppressors, and the rebellion of the oppressed (i.e. 'violence' exercised by the oppressed)

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[55] So he says of the WCC, "The simplicity in thought with regard to international affairs has continued." Preston, *Confusions*, p. 170.

[56] Quoted by Preston in Ibid., p. 170.

[57] Ibid., p. 170.

[58] Ibid., p. 170.

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against unjust law. This is regrettable especially when he has accepted the possibility of "Just Revolution."[59]

We can only infer that in Preston's reckoning, the Just War tradition would help us see that military power or power in international relationships should be best understood as power authorized, or justified when certain criteria from the Just War tradition are met. If that is the case, Mackey's power as authority might support further his argument for the need to exert military power as a last resort, and for the good of the international well-being. Needless to say, finding proper authorization or legitimization for the use of military power in international conflict is not as easy as it might seem. There are inherent difficulties finding "authorization" for the use of power in international conflicts for which Preston has not offered detailed discussion. If the decision to use military force is made by a duly elected government of a democratic country, the authorization for the use of force may be said to have been provided by the electorate. But who sanctions or authorizes the use of military power, or for that matter economic power in international conflicts involving many countries? Ideally the United Nations should provide the authorization, as it did during the Gulf War. Similarly an international organization like the Commonwealth can make a collective call for economic sanctions as it did against a wayward regime like South Africa under apartheid. There are nevertheless some serious problems awaiting resolution in authorizing the use of power in international conflicts. Decisions at the United Nations can still be vetoed by the five self-appointed "permanent" security council members. Sometimes to gain a semblance of unanimity, a United Nations demand against an erring country might be so watered down by one or more of the "permanent" members, thus rendering the resolutions meaningless. The Muslim world has always been suspicious of what they see as the double standard of the "Christian" West which seem keen to inflict punishment on Iraq,

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[59] Ibid., p. 64.

but reluctant to implement United Nations resolutions against Israel, for example. As for decisions taken by the Commonwealth, they are not usually binding. Notice the reluctance of some members to impose economic sanctions against the old military regime in Nigeria, or the refusal of the John Major government to censure France for testing nuclear bombs in the Pacific.[60]

In cases where oppressors have perpetrated injustice and corrupt the rule of law we may say that they have exercised power that is clearly at the other extreme end of Mackey's spectrum of power, that is, power as force. The oppressed who have acted against the unjust system should not be put at the same end of Mackey's spectrum as Preston in his attempt to clarify terms seems to suggest when he says that both the oppressors and the oppressed were committing violence. When the oppressed are empowered to act against corruption of the law, they can use the Just War tradition to authorize their act against injustice. Injustice strangles human flourishing. Power that is released by the oppressed to dismantle injustice for the sake of human well-being should not be placed alongside the abuse of power by oppressive regimes, even if force or 'violence' is used.

3.3 Participation: Power of the People

We have so far put together Preston's discussion of power for the government and the state, and his argument for a better understanding of power in international relationships and the use of military power. We shall now examine the place of power for the ordinary people in the political arena. One way of looking at this is to ask the question, how much should the people be allowed a voice in the management of a society in which they belong? Preston has already alluded to the power of the people when he talks about the electorate. It

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[60] France, with the support of Britain, had argued that the nuclear tests were "safe," in the sense that better safety features had been introduced to prevent unwanted fall-out. But the people living in the Asian Pacific rim were unconvinced. If the tests were so safe, why didn't France test her nuclear bombs in the North Sea?

is the electorate, and here we have to keep in mind that he is talking about an electorate in a reasonably open democratic society, who will have the right to exercise the power of choosing or disposing of government once every few years. This is, of course, a formidable expression of collective power and will over who should be authorized to rule the state. The agreed maximum number of years for the term of each parliament[61] serves as a constant reminder that those who are deemed to have mismanaged the affairs of the state will be voted out of office in the next election. In terms of power of the people, it is granted therefore, that the electorate in a sufficiently open democratic society has formidable power at their disposal. And this is the power that authorizes, or legitimizes a group of people usually belonging to a single political party but sometimes belonging to a coalition of political parties, to manage the affairs of the state.

Recent debates about the power of the people has centred on the extent of people's participation in decision-making beyond merely offering them their right to vote for their own government. Preston agrees that "participation in decisions which vitally affect one is necessary if a person is to express his full humanity," even as he has also regretted, "that throughout history and today many millions are just being pushed around by others."[62]

In an ideal democratic system of government every eligible person should be allowed to participate in making decisions affecting societal well-being and human flourishing. In such an ideal state, the voice of the people has to be heard and the welfare of the whole society should be taken into account when decisions are made by the elected government. Yet in reality the level of participation by the people varies, and not everyone agrees on how widespread this participation should be.

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[61] We could use other terms like the Diet or Duma, but since Preston is writing from the British context, it makes sense to keep to the British term for a legislative assembly.

[62] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 85.

Partly because of reaction against totalitarian regimes where decision-making is highly centralized, and also because of the influence of the liberation theologies which emphasize the involvement of the common people in making decision through localized or base communities, there had been a constant refrain especially emanating from the ecumenical circle for a "just, participatory and sustainable society."[63] It was after the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC in 1975 that 'participation' or 'participatory'[64] became part of a rallying slogan deployed to emphasize a preference for decentralized decision-making process that sought to grant the wider community of people a hearing, instead of leaving major decisions to dominant and influential groups and lobbies. Preston is sympathetic to the need for a participatory democratic system of government and decision-making process, as we have noted, but he is not convinced that the idea of participatory democracy voiced in ecumenical circles,[65] especially with regard to solving economic problems, is sustainable. He raises questions about what it means, in practice, to have participatory democracy. Should all decision-making affecting the society be decentralized? How would decentralized decision-making handle the often complex economic and political problems that impinge on the wider concerns of our inter-related world? To what extent is it feasible to involve mass participation in making major decisions without delaying decisions which might require prompt response? In a footnote to his criticism to WCC's post-Nairobi Assembly approach to social ethics, he describes their idea of participatory democracy as perhaps a trifle too naive.[66]

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[63] Preston hinted at this as well, in Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 77f. Cf., Ibid., p. 171, Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 84. Also, Ans van der Bent, *op. cit.*, pp. 63ff. and p. 235. We should note too that "A Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society" was an official WCC theme. According to Preston, "Participatory" was a later addition to the theme which he finds "unnecessary, since if people are not allowed to participate in decision-making in their own society it can hardly be called a just one." Preston, *Persistence*, p. 44.

[64] Preston, *Future*, p. 62.

[65] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 78.

[66] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 171.

On the surface, there seems to be something egalitarian about participatory democracy as opposed to what might look like the more elitist practice of making decisions by experts and a powerful few. But one needs to look beneath the surface of the slogan to notice that there are obvious weaknesses with the type of localized participatory democracy, though the call for wider participation in decision-making seems like an attractive proposition in a world where major decisions tend to be left to a small group of people and so-called experts.[67] Preston lists out some of the major problems to explain why he considers the notion of participatory democracy needs clarifications and refinement for it to work in our complex world.

In principle he accepts the wisdom of participatory democracy. But his notion of participatory democracy does not idealize the highly decentralized form of decision-making which WCC seems to advocate. He accepts that it is desirable for certain decisions to be made at the local level. However, for him participatory democracy need not and should not be direct participation. Rejecting the stance which came out of the Zurich Consultation on Political Economy and Ethics in 1978, Preston says that it is "utopian" to think that direct participation at local levels will mean that

decisions will be made in time; and that there will be no disagreements. (And) therefore there is no need to worry about restraints on the power of majorities to ride roughshod over the minorities because there will be no minorities. When one considers the complexity of running a state, above all the complex interlocked advanced industrial economies, such assumptions can only occur to the most utopian mind;[68]

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[67] Preston, *Future*, p. 63, and van der Bent, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

[68] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 78. Besides being 'utopian' Preston thinks that it is a 'delusion' , Ibid., p. 48. See also Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 85f.

He is not convinced that it is practical or efficient to have direct participation in decision-making when complex issues have to be considered and major decisions made. Experts' input will still be required for the management of our highly complex and competitive society. There must be reliable safeguards for the interest of the minority groups to ensure that decisions do not always favour the majority. Decisions have to be made usually with an inundation of information that needs to be carefully sifted by the decision-makers, and at times prompt decisions have to be taken for the common good. As he has said so often,

National politics therefore needs informed participation and support, not denigration in favour of the small and local. The local is important, but it is one thing to argue for decentralization where possible, and more power and participation at the grassroots, and another to imagine that major issues can be settled there.[69]

Against direct participation, Preston argues for representative participation, even though he recognizes that there are people who are sceptical of it.[70] In a poignant conclusion to his "Reflections on Leaving the Chair," he reiterates the point that

Participation in community politics at the local level, though highly desirable, will not solve (complex problems of competing interests and incompatible demands). Only representative democracy can do it, and that on the basis of a more informed public opinion, whether we live in a social democracy or a democratic socialist society rather than a different and altogether less pleasant form of authoritarian one. Also the representation has to extend more fully from the political into industrial structures. It needs a greater effort to see how inevitable conflicts of interest can be held within a more specific

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[69] Ibid., p. 116.

[70] Preston, *Future*, p. 63. David Nicholls was sceptical of representative participation. He questioned whether anyone can represent the will of another. He also asked if representative form of government may not 'encourage a subtle form of irresponsibility' when millions of electorate left the making of important decisions to a small number of representatives. Despite the concerns expressed by Nicholls, he had unfortunately not offered a viable alternative to representative participation. See David Nicholls, *Deity & Domination*, pp. 26f.

spelling out of the common good, and that in global and not merely national terms. The values of our type of democratic society are too important to be assumed or ignored. Christians can surely not be indifferent to these. They need to be cultivated, and it will not do for us to withdraw into merely cultivating our parochial gardens.[71]

It is not direct participation that will work in our complex interrelated world. It is representative participatory democracy that offers a better and more efficient mode of managing our complex society than direct participation. The upshot of a representative participatory democracy is that it will be less inclined to be too inward-looking and self-serving. Be that as it may there will still be problems in our imperfect world even when we opt for representative participatory democracy. It will have a better chance of succeeding if it meets four basic requirements which elsewhere in an earlier work Preston has spelled out. For a participatory democracy to work,

(It) requires an informed political and industrial electorate which can see beyond the end of its political and economic nose. It requires a sense of the common good and a sense of fairness. It requires the qualities of prudence and proportion which are traditionally emphasized in Christian ethics. It requires governments who lead, who are prepared to implement unpopular policies where necessary, and at the same time are sensitive to those who have less power in either industrial or political weighting.[72]

We might ask whether the four requirements are reasonable requirements. Perhaps they are if these are required of the people in a state where there is a high literacy rate, sufficient employment opportunity, and the way the government is managed is transparent and fair. There may be problems if the requirements are put to people with little or no experience of what a democratic country envisaged by Preston is like. In countries where

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[71] Preston, *Future*, p. 254.

[72] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 39.

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there is widespread poverty, a low rate of literacy, high unemployment and a lack of basic educational and health care facilities,[73] the people might be more concerned about having their stomach fed and a roof over their heads than to be bothered about meeting the requirements of participatory democracy. Perhaps even before Preston's four requirements are met, the basic requirement must be for sufficient food and basic health care to be provided for the people. Preston does not deal with it, but in a Two-Thirds world situation, could it be that structural reform and economic development should precede the call for democracy? Ideally all should happen at the same time. But that is unlikely, and it makes no sense to keep the poor in abject poverty by granting them freedom of expression, or some western-styled participatory democracy, without ensuring that they have enough food and opportunity for education and employment.[74] It would appear *perestroika* should be firmly in place before it makes sense to talk about *Glasnost*. Yet in a place like Singapore where the problem of poverty has been eradicated, *Glasnost* should be encouraged to flourish.

3.4 Checks and Balances: a Question of Accountability

Clearly Preston does not dodge the issues of power in the public place. Nevertheless, even as he pleads for a better understanding of power, and for more power to be granted to the government in the context of western participatory democracy, we should not lose sight of the fact that the call for power in his social ethics carries a caveat. Whilst arguing for the church to have a better grasp of power and recognizing the good which power, especially power-authority, can do for the well-being of the people, he constantly warns that power should be exercised within a framework of checks and balances.[75] This caveat is informed by his understanding of human nature and the corrupting power of sin.

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[73] Perhaps certain level of wealth should be achieved before one is too concerned about issues of participation. This is hinted, albeit indirectly, in Preston, *Future*, p. 62.

[74] See Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 71. Cf., Wogaman, *op. cit.*, 1988, pp. 145 ff.

He is acutely aware that power, especially power as force, can be easily misused and abused, as indeed it has often been misused and abused not just in the wider political realm, but also within smaller institutions such as the church and trade unions.[76] It is out of this concern of how easily power in the wrong hands can become oppressive that he insists that power should be closely scrutinized and proper systems for accountability be put in place. The need for checks against the abuse of power is especially important enough for him to keep reminding us at regular intervals that human "sinfulness requires that there should be checks on the abuse of power because no one is good enough to exercise power over others with no possibility of check."[77]

His insistence for checks and balances to lessen the chance of abuse of power is a demand for accountability from those who exercise it. Accountability requires that there should be proper checking mechanisms to safeguard power from being misused or abused. To be sure there are different types of checks and balances which can be built into the way a country is governed or an institution is organized. Nevertheless there is no perfect system that has all the necessary checks and balances. In the British system, the judiciary, the executive branch and the administrative branch of the state are sufficiently independent of each other to provide some checks and balances.[78] In the American situation, the power of the President is counter-checked by the Courts of Law and the Congress. In the context of Singapore, since independence, the power had rested mainly in the hands of the executive branch, though the independence of the judiciary is guaranteed by the Constitution, and

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[75] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 79; Preston, *Future*, p. 142.

[76] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 79.

[77] Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 48f. also, p. 109. Cf. Preston, *Explorations*, pp. 91f; Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 30f; Preston, *Future*, p. 219, Preston, *Ambiguities*, pp. 26f. and p. 103.

[78] Robert Song, *Christianity and Liberal Society*, pp. 176-212, explores ways to improve the British political system. He is concerned, among other things, in ensuring that majoritarian decision procedures do not violate the rights of the minority and about the legitimacy of judicial review of legislative action.

there is a Presidential Council for Minority Rights that vets legislation to ensure that the interests of minority groups are protected. The recent introduction of the Elected President provides another level of checks against corruption and mismanagement of funds. Singapore does not need more power for the state as such. What Singapore needs are more intermediate associations, not so much to engage in confrontational politics which can be counter-productive, but to provide critical/constructive engagement. The law governing detention without trial needs to be reviewed with the view of abolishing it, to prevent incarceration of innocent people and to ensure that it is not exploited by any ruling party to silence its opponent. The thing to stress is that accountability requires sufficient checks and balances, and no government is good enough to be exempt from being held responsible for the way the country is governed, and Singapore is no different.

Conclusion

That politics is a major concern of Preston, there is no doubt. He has told us that politics is "an inescapable reality," and by that he means that as citizens of two kingdoms, we are also inextricably part of the socio-political world. Inasmuch as we should be concerned about matters pertaining to the Kingdom of God, it is expected of us to contribute to the well-being of Caesar's world. Whether it is the state, the government, the intractable phenomenon of power, international relationships, the extent and mode of participation in decision-making by the people, or the question of accountability, Preston's response is one that involves critical engagement in the politics of our society, and he does so always for the sake of human solidarity and common good.

To be sure, he acknowledges that there will always be ambiguities in the political arena. Therefore no political system is beyond reproach. Politics need theological critique as well. But because his social ethics is both informed and prompted by a theology of creation,

sin and grace, always held in creative tension, the appropriate and responsible approach to politics is not to avoid it or to idealize it, but to be critically engaged in it. It seems logical that when Christians engage in the political arena, they are in fact providing an invaluable dimension of checks and balances not only against the abuse of power, but also against any form of social injustice or pretensions of the state. On the positive side, Christians can bring to the political arena the teachings of the Gospel that will enhance the quality of the wider community life besides strengthen human relationship. Philip Wogaman, has classified Preston's approach to socio-political engagement as a "Mainstream Liberal Christian" perspective on politics.[79] And Preston is in good company.

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[79] Wogaman, *op. cit.*, 1988, p. 92.

Chapter Seven

Economics in the Social Ethics of Ronald H. Preston

Ronald Preston is arguably the leading figure in the English-speaking world calling for a better understanding of economics for Christian social theology, and bringing Christian social ethics to bear on socio-economic issues that plague the world. In most of his published works he has sought to interpret the workings of economics, explain how they affect our well-being, and where the Church might have been found wanting when she addresses economic issues.[1]

In this chapter we will mark out the principal features of Preston's treatment of economics by examining his assessment of the main competing schools, his defence of the market, and the options which he presents to Christian social ethicists and the Church in helping them deal with economic issues in an informed manner.

1. A Call for a Sufficient Understanding of Economics in Social Theology

Preston knows the ubiquitous influence of economics and the desirability for a competent handling of economics by the Church and her theologians. This is shown in the rigour and the regularity in which he addresses economic issues in his social theology. The

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[1] The other Christian social ethicist who has also given much thought to economic issues is Philip Wogaman of the United States, and of late, John Atherton and Peter Sedgwick of Britain. To be sure, some Christian economists have also written about economic issues. Among them we may cite Donald A. Hay, Brian Griffiths, John F. Sleeman, and in the earlier part of this century D.L. Munby. However unlike Hay, Griffiths, Sleeman and Munby, Preston and Wogaman are not professional economists venturing into the arena of social theology, but social ethicists with a competent grasp of economics, arguing for better understanding of economics and their effects on human well-being. See for example, J. P. Wogaman, *Christians and the Great Economic Debate*, J. Atherton, *Christianity and the Market*, P.H. Sedgwick, *The Market Economy and Christian Ethics*, D. A. Hay, *Economics Today*, Brian Griffiths, *Morality and the Market Place*, J. F. Sleeman, *Economic Crisis: A Christian Perspective*, D. L. Munby, *Christianity and Economic Problems*, and D.L. Munby, *God and the Rich Society*.

most succinct treatment of economics given by him may be found in *Religion and the Ambiguities of Capitalism* (henceforth, *Ambiguities*) which carries a revealing sub-title, *Have Christians Sufficient Understanding of Modern Economic Realities?* To be sure, much of what is written there has already been discussed elsewhere in his previous publications. However, it is in *Ambiguities* that he has given a more systematic treatment of the subject as a guide for Christians who have little or no training in economics to appreciate the complexity of economic issues without being lost in technical discussion.

Though the immediate occasion for writing *Ambiguities* was the collapse of the former USSR, Preston has long been critical of the way economic issues have generally been handled by the Church and para-church organisations. For example, he is highly critical of the way theologians like Ulrich Duchrow[2] and Douglas Meeks,[3] and some of the pronouncements of the WCC[4] have dealt with economic issues. He wrote *Ambiguities* to point to, and counteract what he sees as the inadequate understanding of economics which has sometimes led to spurious claims by ecumenical agencies.[5]

1.1 Proper Autonomy

Needless to say, Christian social theology should critique economics, as Preston himself has done, and theologians like Meeks and Duchrow, in their own way, have sought to do. What disappoints Preston, however, is when the Church imposes excessive claims on

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[2] Preston, *Ambiguities*, pp. 85f, and footnote no. 10, pp. 166f. Cf., Preston, *Confusions*, pp. 67ff. Among other things Preston accuses Duchrow for employing a neo-Marxist analysis of socio-economic problems facing the world today to suit his own thesis. He is critical of Duchrow's attack on the market economy, which according to Preston, lacks an understanding of its economic function. See Ulrich Duchrow, *Global Economy*, pp. 126ff. Cf. U. Duchrow's "Political an Economic Wellbeing an Justice: A Global View," in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, vol. 3. no.1, pp. 61-92, and Preston's "A Response to Ulrich Duchrow," in the same journal, pp. 93-99.

[3] Preston, *Ambiguities*, pp. 86ff. Cf. M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist*.

[4] Preston, *Ambiguities*, pp. 82f.

[5] He has in mind, for example, the documents published by the Commission on the Church's Participation in Development (CCPD) of the WCC. Preston, *Confusions*, p. 96.

economics and, in so doing, fails to recognize that economics has a certain autonomy which the Church should respect. Among those whom he criticized for failing to recognize the need to grant economics such autonomy are Tawney[6] and Meeks.[7]

He explains what he means by granting economics the autonomy it deserves by drawing lessons from the Lutheran doctrine of the Two Realms to make his point. He takes care to elaborate that while economics should not be subsumed under total control of the Church, which will betray the distinction of the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world, the autonomy granted to economics should be understood as a "proper autonomy." So that he is not seen as advocating a complete separation of the Church from the economic sphere, which after all is an integral part of the Orders of Creation, he tells us that by "proper autonomy" he does not mean total autonomy.[8] To accede to total autonomy is to misinterpret the Lutheran understanding of the Two Realms and opt for the other extreme which suggests that the Church does not have a role at all in addressing economic concerns. This indeed is Duchrow's critique of a corruption of Luther's differentiation of the Two Realms which had been misappropriated as an ideological tool to discourage the Church from being involved in the socio-political arena with tragic consequences.[9] While Duchrow's response to the misuse of the Two Realm is to reject granting autonomy to the political and economic spheres,[10] Preston pushes for a "proper autonomy." The qualifier

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[6] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 7.

[7] Preston says of Meeks, "It is therefore regrettable to have to mention confusions which arise from a basic uncertainty about economics. In the Foreword Meeks says that he does not want to take away the relative autonomy of the science of economics, but then says later that he regrets that God has been removed from the market." Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 88. There is no 'Foreword' in Meeks' book, though in his "Introduction," Meeks indeed says that he is not taking away the relative autonomy of economics. That Meeks later laments the eclipse of God in the Market is accurate. Cf. Meeks, *op. cit.*, p. 4 and pp. 47 ff.

[8] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 7. "Technical autonomy" is the term used by J. C. Bennett in his book, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy*, p. 59.

[9] Duchrow, *Global Economy*, p. 3, and pp. 9-13.

[10] Ibid., pp. 50, 87f., and 149.

'proper' is crucial for Preston because although the Christian faith cannot assert total claim over economics, yet the Church continues to have a significant role in providing theological critique of what is going on in the world. He does not want us to confuse any economic system of the world with a still unavailable economics of the Kingdom of God.

1.2 The Assumptions of Economics.

In Preston's view, there are at least three assumptions which we have to keep in mind when we study economics. One basic assumption for Preston is that "the universe is orderly and not chaotic."[11] To be sure, this is not an assumption which is declared explicitly by all economists; not in the way he has phrased it. Still it is an essential assumption for Preston, not least because of its theological implication. For one whose social theology has been deeply informed by a doctrine of creation, this acknowledgment that the universe is orderly, as he tells us, evokes for those who "think theologically" a sense of worship and doxology. We might add that the doctrine of creation should also challenge both social ethicists and economists to be responsible stewards and to tend the created order with care. As is to be expected of a theologian, he lists this assumption above two other widely accepted assumptions, namely, the assumption that resources are scarce and the assumption of diminishing marginal utility.[12]

It is the second assumption that resources are scarce[13] which Preston continues to return to in his works to stress that contradictory demands which compete for limited resources cannot all be satisfied.[14] Scarcity of resources affects not only the choice which one has to make in deciding what to produce and how to allocate limited resources in the

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[11] Ibid., p. 19.

[12] Ibid., p. 20.

[13] Cf., Atherton, *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 50ff.

face of competing demands. It also poses the problem of deciding between allocation of the scarce resources to meet present needs, and investing a part of the resources for the future.

Interestingly, it is only in Preston's later writings that he has fastidiously made it a point to qualify the assumption of the scarcity of resources with the word "relative;" a qualifier which he did not use consistently in his earlier works[15] although this qualifier is not always used by economists discussing the problem of scarcity and choice.[16]

Yet it would appear that he speaks of "relative" scarcity in part as a counterbalance against the apocalyptic tendencies of those who warn about the impending depletion of earth's limited resources.[17] By deploying the qualifier, he seems to be assuring us that there is still room for responsible use of earth's "relatively" scarce resources and we do not have to panic in our response, or become too pessimistic about the future of our limited natural resources. However even though his advice against reactionary response to the crisis of scarcity of resources has some wisdom, we suspect that the deployment of the qualifier "relative" may not be persuasive enough for those who are deeply involved in ecological issues. In any case, "relative" scarcity, however one construes it, does not obscure the fact that resources have limits and some resources are plainly irreplaceable, as Preston himself has also acknowledged.

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[14] Cf., A.M. Suggate, "Critical Reflection on Michael Novak's The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism," in Paul Heelas and Paul Morris, eds., *The Values of the Enterprise Culture*, p. 240.

[15] Cf. Preston, *Persistence*, p. 24.

[16] Nevertheless, an example of one who uses the qualifier is M. Umer Chapra, *Islam and the Economic Challenge*, p. 3. Chapra says that "Most economists ..... do not consider resources to be scarce in an absolute sense. Resources are only scarce relatively to the claims on them." The difference, however, between the economists whom Chapra talks about and Preston is that when Preston uses the qualifier, he does not discount the fact that certain resources are scarce in the absolute sense. Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 19.

[17] The Club of Rome is a case in point.

Another sense in which he deploys the qualifier "relative" to scarcity of resources can be inferred from his critique of Meeks' book, *God the Economist*.[18] He judges somewhat harshly that Meeks "does not understand what economics is about, for the omission of the word *relative* before scarcity indicates a basic confusion which is fatal to much of the book."[19] While Meeks recognises that most economics textbooks accept the assumption of scarcity of resources,[20] he has nevertheless been sceptical of the claim of scarcity. In Meeks' view the idea of scarcity has often been made worse by human selfishness and irrepressible wants, too easily exploited and rationalized by market activities. He suggests that there are enough resources to go around. What is required of us is to recover and depend on the Christian teaching of God's providence instead of relying on modern economic assumptions that see us being driven by the "human impulses to self-possession, autonomous individualism, and greed."[21] Meeks asserts that the "biblical traditions uncover God as the Economist who constructs the household with radically different assumptions: *If* the righteousness of God is present, there is always enough to go around."[22] The problem with such assertion is that unlike the empirically observable assumption of scarcity of resources, his 'radically different assumption' seems like a pious wish. Indeed Christians should seek after God's righteousness,[23] but what Meeks has proposed is more a condition than an assumption. He even italicised 'if' to add emphasis to his expectation. Where Meeks has erred, in Preston's view, is his failure to appreciate that resources are "relatively scarce," and by this he means that not every need and claim from everyone can be met, bearing in

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[18] Preston, *Ambiguities*, pp. 86ff.

[19] Ibid., p. 88. Contrary to Preston's judgment, Rodney Wilson, Durham University Economist, says that Meeks' "arguments are persuasive throughout and have certainly influenced the thinking of many in the church and beyond." R. Wilson, *Economics, Ethics and Religion*, p. 99.

[20] Meeks, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[21] Ibid., p. 12.

[22] Ibid., p. 12.

mind the limited resources that we have at a given time, no matter how generous we might be. Put it another way, resources are "relatively" scarce because there will always be unfulfilled, even if they are justifiable, claims.

However, for the economist in Preston, the more important point about "relative" scarcity of resources, and the resultant choices which we have to make regarding how scarce resources should be used or deployed, is the cost which we have to pay. He wants us to understand that this cost is not expressed merely in monetary terms. The real cost which we have to pay for choosing what to do with the limited resources, is what economists refer to as the opportunity-cost.[24] In economic terms, the cost for choosing one particular good or service is the cost of all the other things forgone. Responsible economists and thoughtful Christians who are concerned about socio-economic well-being of the people cannot ignore this assumption but will have to grapple with it, in their search for the best way to allocate scarce resources for the common good.

The other assumption highlighted by Preston, but not referred to as often as the "relative" scarcity of resources, is the assumption of diminishing marginal utility. For a long time the value of goods and services had been thought to be pegged to the satisfaction which one derives from the use of those goods and services. But it was Professor W. S. Jevons (1835-1882) who showed that when more of the same goods and services are made available, the satisfaction derived from their utility would fall and correspondingly, the value would diminish. It is the last and least wanted, that is the marginal unit, that influences the value which one places on a given good or service.[25]

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[23] Matthew 3:33.

[24] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 19. Similarly, Preston, *Persistence*, p. 24. Cf. Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 34 and 35.

[25] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 20.

2. Command and Market Economies

Generally speaking, for the major part of last century, the two main contending economic systems in our world have been the command economy and the market economy. These two economic systems were seen as the only ideal options open to any progressive society, although as we shall see later, there is a third option, and that is a range of mixed-economies which, in a sense, are hybrids of the two. Preston has provided lengthy comment on and comparison between the two main types of economic systems in the modern world.

We should note however that in academic discussions, the command economy and the market economy are usually presented as ideal types.[26] In the real world, it is not possible to locate a country that practises the ideal form of either the command economic system or the market economy. So although Communist China may be said to practise a command economic system with a strong central government control, what has happened in the post-Mao Tse Tung era, is that China has in fact introduced market reform into her economic system.[27] China's experiment with market reform took place initially in a number of coastal cities like Shenzhen and Xiamen, though it has now spread to the inner regions such as Chengdu and Suzhou.[28] And while the USA might be considered a capitalist economy, there is a qualification to her capitalistic claim when she maintains a strong social security system and provides state-financed education.

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[26] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 37. Cf., Griffiths, *Morality and the Market Place*, p. 15.

[27] Preston, *Confusions*, p. 93.

[28] When the coastal regions were opened, one of the economists who was invited to serve as a consultant to the Chinese government was Dr. Goh Keng Swee, the former Deputy Prime Minister and at various times Minister for Finance, Education and Defense of Singapore. Dr. Goh is widely acknowledged as the architect of Singapore's economic policies and growth.

2.1 Preston's Critique of Market Capitalism

Despite the fact that Preston has often complimented the contribution of capitalism, it is not his preferred economic system, though there are some staunch and articulate supporters of the capitalist economic system in Michael Novak,[29] and to a lesser extent, Brian Griffiths.[30] Preston's high praise for capitalism can be seen when he gives credit to the "fact that capitalism has removed the threat of starvation, which has been endemic in most of human history, from considerable areas of the globe."[31] Furthermore, he applauds capitalism when he says,

Full allowance must be made for the enormous achievements of capitalism, not least through the mobilization of capital by limited liability and the incentives for the entrepreneur to take risks which this created. It has sustained an unprecedented increase in population and at the same time in the standards of life in those parts of the world where it first developed. A lot of social aims have been achieved which seemed hopeless in the nineteenth century.[32]

Preston does not espouse capitalism the way Novak has unabashedly done. Novak, a Roman Catholic and a former socialist, works as a professor in the American Enterprise Institute in Washington. He promotes "democratic capitalism," a system which stresses free

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[29] See, Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, and also his essay, "Eight arguments about the Morality of the Market Place," in Jon Davies, ed. *God and the Marketplace*, pp. 8ff. Cf., A.M. Suggate's "Critical Reflection on Michael Novak's *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*," in Paul Heelas and Paul Morris, et al. *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 237-252.

[30] Brian Griffiths tells us that what he argues for (i.e. modern Conservatism and its stress on individual choice and the freedom of markets) should not be "understood within the narrow confines of economics, let alone economic libertarianism. Alongside its advocacy of the market it is concerned to defend those values which are at the heart of a responsible society - on the one hand a sense of personal duty and self-reliance and on the other a personal obligation to those in need, to future generations and to our environment." B. Griffiths, "The Conservative Quadrilateral," in M. Alison, and D.L. Edwards ed. *Christianity and Conservatism*, p. 241. And unlike Novak, for instance, Griffiths readily acknowledges that the market has serious defects which should be counterbalanced by Christian moral values.

[31] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 16. Cf. Griffiths, *Morality and the Market Place*, pp. 15f, "The record of capitalism over the past 200 years in transforming the standard of living of the Western world is remarkable..... By 1900 the kind of poverty, famine and illiteracy which is still prevalent in many parts of the globe had been removed."

[32] Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 29f.

market economy, individual rights and a liberal political culture.[33] Even though Novak takes pains to distance himself from "radical individualism,"[34] he nevertheless advocates an individualistic view of free market in his criticism of government intervention in economic planning. He takes the view that state intervention means coercion and therefore is an infringement of individual rights.[35] Such view is closely associated with the libertarian philosophy and economic system articulated by the influential F.A. von Hayek and Milton Friedman,[36] and widely supported by President Reagan of the USA, and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher[37] of Britain in the 1980s. According to Preston, the supporters of the so-called libertarian[38] or New Right interpretation of the market economy tend to ignore these considerations:

One is the moral framework which capitalism presupposes and to which they paid little attention, as Demant pointed out. Also they often overlooked the considerable state framework necessary to prevent the abuses of the free market. Further, they were complacent about the great inequalities of income which the free market developed, aided by the system of inheritance, which made those who were well off able to command the resources in the market for luxuries which those who were poor could not command for necessities. With inequalities of wealth, of course, also went inequalities of power. They did not see that the beauties of the automatic mechanism which they admired so much seemed like blind fate to vast numbers of ordinary people who less and less were willing to put up with it. And although they would have denied the fact, they gave little attention to the many other aspects of man's life than the economic, such as the desire to love, the desire to play, the desire to exercise power over others, all of which need to be given attention in any economic social and political system. Moreover they underemphasized the ingenuity shown by the managerial side in subverting the free market to obtain special advantages for itself. It is also interesting in this connection to contrast the

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[33] Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, p. 14.

[34] Ibid., pp. 61f, though he concedes that there are democratic capitalists who "carry radical individualism to ridiculous extremes." Ibid., p.128.

[35] He talks about being vulnerable to "the disproportionate power of the state." Ibid., p. 209.

[36] For example, see his critique of Hayek and Friedman, in Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 26ff.

[37] Cf. Preston, *Future,* pp. 135 ff.

comparative secrecy in which management and directors can operate in industry with the greater publicity which governs all trade union activities.[39]

These are substantial criticisms, but there are more. At different places he has enumerated other problems associated with the capitalism of the New Right. Among them, Preston is critical of the so-called boom and slump cycles in free market economy which have contributed to structural unemployment.[40] He is wary of the fact that contemporary capitalism has given birth to large multi-national companies which dominate the economic world, and with their domination, we might add, they have wielded more power than some governments. Furthermore, the disparity of income which he blames unbridled capitalism for generating, is unacceptable.[41] The bottom line, however, is a deep concern of Preston that an over-emphasis on capitalism, in the Hayekian sense, will encourage possessive individualism, a philosophy of life which destroys human fellowship and undermines the common good. A free market capitalism that promotes possessive individualism is incompatible with any responsible social theology that seeks to cultivate virtues, build character, nurture community life and nourish human well-being.[42]

2.2 Preston on Hayek and the New Right

It was Hayek who provided the robust intellectual leadership in arguing for a more unimpeded system of free market economy with the liberty of the individual given paramount importance over any attempt by the government to exert social control. During the first half of last century, when the trend was for academics in the West to be attracted to

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[38] E.g., Preston has referred to Friedman as a "thorough libertarian." See footnote no. 20, in Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 167.

[39] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 29.

[40] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 46.

[41] Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 30ff., and Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 28.

[42] See also Raymond Plant's insightful response in "Challenges to Conservative Capitalism," in Anthony Harvey *et. al., Theology in the City*, pp. 78ff.

the socialist agenda, Hayek stood out as a rare intellectual who refused to be drawn into what he would describe in his widely read polemical book as *The Road to Serfdom* and much later, as the fatal conceit of socialism.[43]

Hayekian ideologues and their New Right supporters, including Novak, are highly suspicious of the government's role in economic planning and control. According to them, state involvement in economic planning and control will invariably lead to inefficiency and mismanagement of the economy. The unimpeded working of market forces which are impersonal and therefore theoretically a neutral tool for allocation of resources and distribution of wealth, is preferred to state intervention. They fear that state intervention places too much power in the hands of a coercive state. Worse still, state intervention curtails and compromises individual liberty and violates individual rights. Friedman, another influential Chicago economist and one-time colleague of Hayek, sees the involvement of the state and the curtailment of freedom as a tyranny.

Preston is no New Right sympathiser of course. Nevertheless he shares the view that any emphasis on efficiency and growth is "a positive sum game. Everyone benefits."[44] However, important though efficiency might be as an economic value, unlike the Hayekian economists, Preston is not prepared to treat efficiency as a decisive criterion for decision-making that affects the well-being of the people. He is concerned that economic efficiency should not be obtained at the expense of human solidarity and the exploitation of labour.[45] For the sake of caring for the welfare of the people, major social services, beyond the barest minimum reluctantly conceded by Hayek and Friedman, should still be actively offered by

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[43] F. A. Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism.* Atherton probably had this book in mind, though he mistakenly referred to it as the "fatal deceit" in his discussion of the market, in Atherton, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 62.

[44] Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 63f.

[45] Preston, *Future*, pp. 136f. Also Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 72.

the government even if the management of those schemes and programmes may not be as efficient as if they were placed under open market competition.

It is obvious that no matter how suspicious one might be against the state,[46] it still has a critical role, both in countering the growing power of large businesses and, in providing a basic level of services such as medical care, education and social security to ensure that the poor are not left to the gutters to fend for themselves, despite Hayek's plea that economic activities should not be controlled or planned by the state. Hayek places too much trust in the working of Adam Smith's invisible hand and the unrestrained freedom of the individuals to sort out social relationships and socio-economic order, which he believes will ultimately benefit not only the rich entrepreneurs and investors, but also the poor in society. This free working of the invisible hand is part of a 'spontaneous order,'[47] a term used to Hayek to explain the evolution of certain unplanned rules and institutions governing the free market and what he liked to call the Great or Open Society. Spontaneous order evolves over time, historically in the people's responses to their immediate environment when they lived in tribal community, and later taking on a life and complexity of its own which makes it impossible for any person to have a full knowledge of its workings to comprehend it, control it, or improve on it. A unique feature of the spontaneous order is what Hayek calls the 'catallaxy,'[48] or the market order, which enables people to live freely together without having any group imposing their will or placing their demand on others in an expanding Open Society. For Hayek, catallaxy facilitates exchanges and in the long run brings benefits to the people without the interference of any pre-determined common

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[46] E.g. Novak in "The Person in the Community," in M. Novak and R. Preston, *Christian Capitalism or Christian Socialism?*, p. 8.

[47] Explained in F.A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty, vol. 1, Rules and Order*, pp. 35-52.

[48] Coined from Greek *katallattein* and *katallasein* meaning to exchange, or "to admit into the community" or "to change from enemy to friend." F.A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty, vol. 2, The Mirage of Social Justice*, p. 108.

objective or shared value. In this sense the idea of social justice, which is a demand imposed by others, is a meaningless term for it undermines the spontaneous order in the Open Society.[49] In Hayek's view any legislative measure to impose social or distributive justice will invariably lead to the use of coercive force and therefore infringe on the freedom of others.

Preston rejects Hayek's individualistic ideology because it ignores the "corporate side of human life".[50] In his assessment, "Human beings will never consent to put themselves at the mercy of such an atomistic society, and will vote out of power any government which gets anywhere near to trying to establish one."[51] He also questions why Hayek discounts the possibility that "welfare capitalism may .... itself have developed some hidden wisdom"[52] and if there are flaws in the hidden wisdom of welfare capitalism, should not the flaws be corrected instead of dismantling the whole system? He asks why the impersonality of the market must mean that "we can have no concept of social justice, but must confine justice to the realm of order and the maintenance of contracts? Why cannot we set out corporately to deal with the 'bad luck' effects of the market?" Hayek has allowed for private initiative in offering charity to the down and out, but Preston asks, "Why must this remain a matter of private benevolence?" The price of leaving the well-being of the people to the free working of the market is too risky and too high. "It left most people unprotected against the vicissitudes of life and the inequalities of power."[53]

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[49] Besides Hayek's *Law, Legislation and Liberty, vol. 2* with the non-too-subtle subtitle, *The Mirage of Social Justice*, see his *The Fatal Conceit*, pp. 117ff.

[50] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 27.

[51] Preston, "A Response to Ulrich Duchrow," p. 96.

[52] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 67.

[53] Ibid., p. 68.

Hayekian economists depend too heavily on self-interest as an instrumental value which Preston suggests is too disconcerting and unreliable. He has of course argued that self-interest should not be ignored when discussing economic issues. What he denounces is that an over-emphasis on self-interest without also building on virtues like altruism,[54] is "turning the institute of the free market into an entire philosophy of life."[55] And following Peter Selby, he derides the "spirituality" of the New Right as one that "finds success in terms of personal rather than corporate achievements...."[56] It is a philosophy of life and a spirituality that negate human solidarity and encourage possessive individualism.[57]

2.3 Externalities

As we have noted, no matter how vehement the libertarian arguments might be against government involvement in organizing the economic order, they are unable to resolve certain contradictions. Milton Friedman concedes that there are areas in the community which require state involvement and which cannot be left to the exercise of individual freedom to decide: whether tax, for instance, should be levied to take care of specific community needs.[58] He has all the while allowed for the government to have a minimal role in keeping law and order. But he goes further to suggest that the government might still have a role to play in taking care of projects with "neighbourhood effects."[59] By this he means projects, such as a public park in the city centre, where direct beneficiaries are difficult to pin-point, and the extent of the benefits which they enjoy cannot be individually

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[54] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 44. Cf., Preston, Future, p. 60. Will Hutton laments that in Britain, "Altruism and the civilising values of an inclusive society have been sacrificed on the altar of self-interest, of choice, of opting out and of individualism." Will Hutton, *The State We're In*, p. 15.

[55] Preston, *Church and Society*, , p. 66.

[56] Ibid., p. 73.

[57] "Predatory individualism" is a term used by Wogaman which is descriptive of an anti-social individualism that is driven by devouring greed. Cf. Wogaman, *op. cit.*, 1977, p. 64.

[58] Cf. Preston, *Persistence*, p. 28.

assessed and charged. Therefore instead of charging the elusive direct beneficiaries, tax is

levied on the community for the building and maintenance of such projects. Moreover, apart

from projects with 'neighbourhood effects' and despite Friedman's derision of the welfare

state, he sees a need for the state to assume a certain "paternalistic"[60] responsibility to

protect the interests of children and to provide custodial care for "mad men" in the

community. He even recommends the use of vouchers to pay for the educational needs of

the very poor.[61]

What we have just seen is that there will always be the problem of externalities

which cannot depend on market direction alone.[62] We have mentioned health care, education

and social security as part of the welfare services which have traditionally been provided for

by the state. We should add the police, the armed forces, and other state-owned agencies

that develop industrial land, coordinate the building of basic infrastructures, and control

pollution as further examples of the externalities which ordinarily the government provide

without being dictated solely by market forces[63] in spite of the New Right's trenchant

argument against granting the government too much power to regulate social life and plan

for the economy of a given society. Against the New Right's untenable orthodoxy, Preston

sees the continued desirability for the government to intervene and be involved in providing

certain critical services to ensure that externalities required for social well-being and

community life are accessible and not jeopardized. Exactly how far this should extend

Preston does not tell us, and in a sense this is understandable since he is reluctant to

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[59] Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 1962, pp. 27f. Cf. Preston, *Persistence*, p. 28.

[60] Friedman, *op. cit.*, 1962, pp. 33f.

[61] Milton Friedman, with Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose*, 1980, pp. 158ff.

[62] For a helpful discussion on externalities see Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good*, pp. 37, and 51ff.

[63] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 46, and p. 61. Cf. Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 28ff.

prescribe detailed solutions and policies,[64] although he is open to the idea of a welfare system which will protect the citizens from falling below a certain poverty line.[65]

A decisive criticism against capitalism which appears regularly in Preston's work is the tendency of capitalism to erode the moral assumption and virtues which it depends on to flourish.[66] He is dismayed that the market economy "presupposes some moral sub-structure which it too easily takes for granted, does nothing to foster, and may thus gradually undermine."[67] The ideal market economy as *laissez-faire* is a "pipe dream."[68] It is a "mirage"[69] which cannot be implemented.

2.4 Critique of the Command Economy

If the free market economy shuns government intervention, at the other side of the pendulum the command economy sometimes also known simply as socialism,[70] is an economic system which is centrally controlled. Just as Preston had praised the contribution of the market economy, he was open enough to acknowledge that the Eastern European countries under communism had within a relatively short span of time accumulated some remarkable achievements 1) in the area of industrialization; 2) in their attempt at eradicating

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[64] See our chapter on middle axioms.

[65] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 68.

[66] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 35. Also, Daly and Cobb, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[67] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 27. Also Preston, *Persistence*, p. 35 and p. 47. Cf. Raymond Plant's critique, "The Moral Limits of Markets," in Paul Heelas and Paul Morris, eds., *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 86ff.

[68] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 72.

[69] Preston, *Confusions*, pp. 92 and 101. "Mirage" is of course a word chosen by Hayek when he talks about the "mirage" of social justice. Perhaps here Preston is making a deliberate choice to give an ironic twist to the criticism of Hayek.

[70] Besides quoting Angelo Rappoport who offers 39 definitions of socialism, Preston also refers to R. N. Berki, to remind us that there are in fact many varieties of socialism. Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 13. In the context of this section, socialism used here refers to a version usually associated with that practised and propagated by the former Soviet Union, i.e., the heirs of Marx, and not the strand of socialism traceable to the Christian Socialist movement of England, i.e., the heirs of Maurice, and some would say Methodism. Preston has provided separate discussion on Christian Socialism which is beyond our scope to cover. See Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 13-32. Outside the British tradition, see John C. Cort, *Christian Socialism*.

unemployment; 3) in holding down the rate of inflation; and 4) in abolishing inheritance which had unfairly contributed to inequalities of wealth.[71] For those who value social justice, the Soviet-styled command economy presented an example of a model where there was no unemployment and where there was no visibly obscene disparity of wealth among the people. The state planned the economy and took care of the social needs of the people from cradle to grave. For more than half a century, many were enthralled by the magic of Marxist command economy. However, attractive though those achievements in the command economy might be, and even as Preston commended the rapid progress made in the command economy of USSR, there were serious cracks in the system. He was to indicate in his Maurice Lectures[72] certain grave problems inherent to the command economic system of which others were also beginning to take notice.

Alec Nove, a specialist in USSR affairs and socialist economics had by that time written a critical assessment of the problems in the command economy of the Soviet Union.[73] Preston, very much influenced by Nove's assessment of the Soviet economy, brought to the surface some of the difficulties which a command economy faces.[74] One major difficulty is that efficient planning in a command economy "is a virtual impossibility,"[75] a point which critics like Hayek had been trying to impress for sometime. It is unreliable to depend on a top-heavy centralized bureaucracy that one finds in a command economy to anticipate demands and to decide on the type of goods to produce and services to offer, not to mention the scope of production and the extent of distribution of goods and

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[71] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 36.

[72] Ibid., pp. 36f.

[73] Alec Nove, *The Soviet Economic System*. Preston expresses his debt to Nove (Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 164) for material which he uses in critiquing the command economy, especially from the first edition of Nove's *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*. See also Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 162. Nove has since the demise of the former USSR updated the book. See A. Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited*.

[74] Cf. Footnote 17 in Preston, *Persistence*, p. 165.

services. Highly centralized planning of a command economy has an in-built problem of not having a reliable mechanism for gathering and sieving through information needed for efficient production and distribution of goods and services. Making decisions on what to produce with the limited resources available became an arbitrary exercise. In the words of Giddens, "Socialism .... failed to grasp the significance of markets as informational devices, providing essential data for buyers and sellers."[76] Without any reliable "informational devices," the command economy had been slow in responding to change of demand brought about by change of taste, consumer expectations and technological advances.

Apart from the obvious economic difficulties with inefficiency and wastage, there is also a political cost to consider as well. While the socialist command system may be seen to have eradicated unfair privileges which one might find in a capitalist system, it has introduced a new breed of privileged class and with it a new power structure. There is now a "concentration of political and economic power in the same source, and the development of a bureaucracy run by a new power elite in which white-collared intelligentsia predominate."[77] For Preston, who has assiduously argued for sufficient checks against corruption of power, it is always dangerous to place economic power in the same hands as political power. The political price of allowing economic power and political power to converge in the hands of the same person or a committee of largely unelected persons can be potentially disastrous for the well-being of the whole community.

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[75] Ibid., p. 36.

[76] Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way*, p. 5. Wogaman, reflecting the criticism of libertarians (he prefers 'neoliberals') against the command economy, makes this point. "According to both von Mises and Hayek, the thing that socialism cannot do is allocate resources on a rational basis. It is all too well to talk of centralized planning but, according to these neoliberals, the planners will never have enough information in hand to develop their plans." Wogaman, *op. cit.*, 1977, p. 17.

[77] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 37. Cf. Wogaman, *op. cit.*, 1977, p. 69.

Elsewhere, more weaknesses in the command economic system are listed in his Scott Holland lectures. He tells us,

Because there is always a seller's market shortages (as distinct from relative scarcity) are endemic; quality is hard to achieve, except where there is a naturally homogeneous product like electricity, or where the central government is the direct customer as in armaments. Agriculture is handled badly because of the heterogeneous nature of the resources such as the varying quality of land and uncertain weather. There is a perpetual tendency to over-invest and neglect routine maintenance. Above all there is the problem of pricing. If prices are kept low because price rises are unpopular the result is that the privileged bureaucracy get the product, a black market and bribery develop, and a kind of barter system may spring up which even draconian police activity cannot suppress.[78]

One would have thought that with such wide and weighty criticism against the command economy, Preston might have concluded that the politico-economic ground which the Soviet-styled command economy had built on, was dubious and unsustainable. In spite of the staggering difficulties and weaknesses which Preston had identified, he was still surprisingly optimistic in the 1970s about the durability of the command economy.[79]

In his Maurice Lectures, Preston was still confident enough about the durability of the command economy for him to predict that the socialist planned economy would not collapse. He was emphatic when he commented that "if one asks, Are they collapsing? the answer must be 'No'."[80] We now know that he was wrong in his prediction, and he was also wrong when he said that if it were to collapse, "it will probably be gradual and not a dramatic process".[81] In *Ambiguities*, he would say on hindsight after the disintegration of the USSR and her satellite states that they "paid little or no attention to the problems of wealth-

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[78] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 50.

[79] Another person who held an optimistic view of the durability of the command system and failed to see the approaching fall is Wogaman. See Wogaman, *op. cit.*, 1977, p. 18.

[80] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 38.

[81] Ibid., p. 38.

creation (as distinct from distribution), to the role of profit, to the concept of competition, and to the role of the market as a humanly devised institution."[82]

Just as the pure market economy is a mirage, he tells us now that it is an illusion to assume that "hidden in the Marxist theories is an economically effective and politically just way of running the social order."[83] In saying that, he is also cautioning those theologians, who have adopted a Marxist critique of capitalism, and those who have expected to find in Marxism an economic system to replace the free market variety. In an earlier criticism of the Marxist approach to economics supported by Latin American Liberation Theologians, Preston had warned that the "economic theories are the weakest part of Marxism"[84] despite its claim to 'scientific' analysis.

3. Mixed Economy: Social Democracy and Democratic Socialism

Socialism which at the beginning of last century seemed poised to conquer the world has taken a hard if not an incapacitating knock since the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. Capitalism, which Marx had predicted would collapse, nevertheless persists notwithstanding some drawbacks and continued ambiguities. Despite the changing fortunes of both socialism and capitalism, it would be a mistake for anyone to forecast the decline of capitalism,[85] just as it would be a folly for anyone to write off socialism completely.[86] All things considered, the option before us is not so much a choice between the free market economy or the centralized command economy since neither system in their pure forms are

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[82] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 14.

[83] Preston, *Confusions*, p. 91.

[84] Preston, *Future*, p. 191.

[85] As Demant did in V. A. Demant, *Religion and the Decline of Capitalism*.

[86] E.g., Lester Thurow, *The Future of Capitalism*, p. 64.

obtainable.[87] Instead of having to make a forced choice and a false one between the two, in true Niebuhrian spirit Preston suggests that on balance, "the issue is not between the free market and the central, planned economy, but how far we can get the best of what the social market and the democratic socialist models propose....."[88]

The mixed economy Preston here proposes is not new; a point which he would readily admit. Western Europe, in particular, has experimented with a variety of mixed economies for the most part of last century.[89] In a sense this is obvious since the people of Western Europe "do not live under either a simple free economy or a simple command economy."[90] Apart from the obvious case of Western Europe, in modern Japan and many of the post-colonial countries, especially those once ruled by Britain, such as Singapore, a version of mixed economy prevails. Additionally, we should not forget that even within the Eastern European countries such as Hungary, Poland, and the former Yugoslavia, some forms of mixed economies were introduced even when those countries were under communist rule.

Munby had defined mixed economy as "an economy in which the state in various ways controls and plans the activities of private business men, and itself engages directly in economic activity as an entrepreneur, but where private business men still play an important role."[91] Munby's definition is an adequate summary of what we could find either in a democratic socialist model or a social democratic model of the mixed economy. That said,

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[87] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 41. Cf., Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 65

[88] Ibid., p. 15. Cf., Richard Harries, *Is there a Gospel for the Rich?* p. 7.

[89] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 67. "Mixed economy" is not a term favoured by all theologians, of course. Atherton opines that talks about "third ways and mixed economies produce more confusion than light." Atherton, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 199. Nevertheless, Atherton offers no viable solution to this widely used term.

[90] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 38.

[91] Munby, *op. cit.*, 1956, pp. 234f. Atherton also refers to this definition in his work but he rejects Munby's idea of mixed economy post-1989 as obsolete; a view which we do not share. Atherton, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 74.

we should note that it is more as a convenient classificatory tool than a precise definition of terms that mixed economies have been placed under the two broad categories of democratic socialism and social democracy. The problem with such classification is that it does not reveal the variations of the two types. For example, what, if any, might be the difference between democratic socialism and market socialism?[92] And among social democrats, there have been acrimonious disagreements on political vision and strategies which have led in the past to severance of relationship.[93]

Despite attendant ambiguity with the two terms, Preston offers us a helpful way of differentiating democratic socialism from social democracy. According to him, the democratic socialist approach theoretically emphasizes the "public control of economic activities."[94] Selected industries and services, notably health care, social security, and education, are planned, managed and owned by the Government or Government-related agencies. A major objective of such control is to promote equality among all the people. In this sense, Singapore under the PAP-government, as we have shown in our first chapter, is a democratic socialist country, although in recent years a growing number of state-owned companies have been privatised, and certain services, such as telecommunications, once monopolised by the state, are now opened to competition.

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[92] It would appear that the preferred term among certain political scientists in recent debate is 'market socialism,' instead of the more traditional 'democratic socialism,' or in Wogaman's classification, the 'social market capitalism' though broadly speaking, the terms refer to the same political philosophy and economic emphasis. See, for example, Bertell Ollman, ed., *Market Socialism: A Debate Among Socialists*; Pranab K. Bardhan and John E. Roemer, *Market Socialism: The Current Debate*; and Wogaman, *op. cit.*, 1977, pp. 98ff. Alec Nove separates his 'feasible socialism' from mixed economy, but since his 'socialism' opens itself to market forces, even if with restriction, it would seem that he tries too hard to extricate (without success) his approach to economics from the broad spectrum of mixed economy.

[93] A case in point was the recommendation of the Dutch Labour Party to expel the People's Action Party (PAP) of Singapore from the Socialist International in 1976. The accusation of the Dutch Labour Party and the PAP's rebuttal are documented in a book, viz., Devan Nair, ed., *Socialism That Works*. The PAP later withdrew membership from the Socialist International, accusing it of being infiltrated and influenced by Radical Left.

[94] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 39.

The social democratic system, on the other hand, has its emphasis on the "political process of participatory democracy".[95] Preston traces the social democratic approach, which he has also described as 'managed capitalism'[96] or the social market economy found mainly in Germany and France, to the influence of the Roman Catholic moral teachings, reflected for example, in *Rerum Novarum*, the works of Maritain, in later encyclicals like the *Quadragesimo Anno*[97] and the American Roman Catholic pastoral letter on *Economic Justice for All*.[98] It is the Roman Catholic moral tradition, articulated especially by Maritain, which seeks to locate a way between the excess of liberal individualism and the tyranny of socialist collectivism. Social democracy encourages democratic participation of the community and stresses the solidarity among the people. The principle of subsidiarity, an important idea in Roman Catholic moral theology articulated in *Quadragesimo Anno*, stresses that political responsibility should work "upwards from the grass roots rather than downwards from a centralized authority."[99] This principle encourages wider participation in decision-making from the local community upwards. It is a form of participatory democracy that allows the local communities, and civic institutions which include what Temple has termed as the 'intermediate associations,' to have more say and to accept greater responsibility for the care of the basic communities, and the nurturing of community life.

While there are identifiable differences in these two types of mixed economies, in practice however, both overlap, and the difference is usually one of emphasis.[100] In our post-modern world of plurality of views, it is a brave person who would prescribe one approach

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[95] Ibid., p. 38.

[96] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 14.

[97] Ibid., pp. 14f, and also pp. 67ff.

[98] Ibid., pp. 92. Cf., National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*.

[99] Preston, *Ambiguities.*, p. 69.

[100] Ibid., p. 71. Also Preston, *Persistence*, pp. 63f.

for all countries. Even from any casual observation, at a given time in the development of a society, certain needs may have a prior claim on a community than others. Hence in a society where the majority of the people are living in abject poverty or "absolute poverty,"[101] and where undernourished children do not have shoes to wear, not to mention schools to attend, it will not be surprising at all if the priority for that society is for greater government intervention in securing jobs for the unemployed and basic health and educational care for the children. In such a society, it is not irresponsible to ask what value is liberty for the individual if there is no food on the plate and when people die prematurely for want of basic medical care. It is understandable that Singapore, like many post-colonial countries, in the immediate decades after independence seems to be more interested in economic development that would ensure improved social welfare and long-termed community well-being, than to be too pre-occupied with the issue of individual rights and unimpeded liberty. That is not to say that liberty is unimportant or completely absent. But with improved economic health and growing maturity of the population, there is a strong case for the Singapore government to entrust greater liberty to Singaporeans for responsible exchange of views that will contribute to the strengthening of the common good, without fearing that liberty will inevitably lead to unfettered individualism or an uncritical assimilation of American values.

3.1 Mixed Market Economy with Provisos

The prudent thing to consider then is not so much choosing between the democratic socialist model or the social democratic model of mixed economy. "The question is where the stress is to be laid at a given time: toward liberty or toward equality in the interest of

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[101] Coined by Robert McNamara to convey the desperate level of poverty experienced by a vast number of people living in the world poorest countries. See Mark R. Amstutz, "The Bishops and Third World Poverty," in Charles R. Strain, ed. *Prophetic Visions and Economic Realities*, p. 61.

fraternity."[102] It should be said that Preston is not here offering an either/or choice between liberty or equality for the sake of fraternity. Moving toward liberty does not mean abandoning equality, and moving toward equality does not mean forsaking liberty. It is a question of Niebuhrian more or less, "at a given time." If we recall that Preston's social theology places great importance on human relatedness and the need to foster human flourishing, it is only natural that he should speak of "in the interest of fraternity," which is an irreducible and common requirement for both democratic socialism and social democracy. It is also significant that Preston should use the phrase "at a given time." This shows a studied flexibility which allows for the moderating movement of emphasis to meet contextual needs. And because he is open to varying his emphasis between the spectrum of liberty and equality to meet the needs of the 'given time' for the sake of fraternity, it would be unwise if not unfair to label him either as a democratic socialist or a social democrat, although Atherton has suggested that he tends towards democratic socialism.[103] Either way, whether it is social democracy or democratic socialism, Preston stresses that there should be sufficient openness to a mix of market forces, competitions and government control. But there are other things to look for in a mixed economy to ensure that it works for the benefit of the wider community. Besides allowing for market forces, competition, and control, Preston insists that four further requirements should be in place to "avoid abuses and remedy deficiencies" and they are,[104]

1. *Harnessing self-interest to the common good.* An example is the control of pollution. Almost all human activity involves pollution, but pollution must not get out of bounds. ....

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[102] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 65.

[103] Atherton, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 177.

[104] Preston, *Ambiguities.*, p. 65.

2. *Providing a strong welfare state*. This will involve citizen rights and responsibilities: helping them to adjust to market changes without undue hardship, as well as providing mutual support in the incidental hazards of life, including those endemic at particular stages, like infancy, childhood and old age.

3. *Ensuring that private centres of economic power do not become more powerful than the government*. Here a careful watch on transnational corporations is specially needed, together with the decentralization of all that it is not imperative to deal with centrally into intermediate bodies, in order to prevent too much power resting in one place.

4. *Taking participation in decision-making seriously in matters where the interests of citizens are at stake*. At a low level everyone may be able to participate directly; but mostly forms of indirect representation have to be devised.

These specific controlling measures, allowed for by Preston, in the kind of mixed economy he envisages, puts him at odd with Hayekian sympathisers and the democratic capitalism of Novak, although Novak might not disagree with the need to harness self-interest. Preston's readiness to place the market within certain constraint for the common good is disputed by Atherton who now advocates less intervention in the movement of market forces. On the other hand, Preston continues to distance himself from the radical views of Meeks and Duchrow because, unlike Meeks and Duchrow, he is prepared to grant market forces a critical role, within an acceptable political framework, in allocating resources and ensuring efficiency.

From the experience of the mixed economy of Singapore, the measures introduced by Preston seem reasonable, except for the third and fourth measures which remain problematic. As a small country, Singapore depends on multi-national companies to provide employment and transfer of technologies. Some of the multi-national companies generate more profits than the total revenue a small country like Singapore can hope to collect annually. No small country, by herself, can ever take on the challenge of any rapacious multi-national corporation, although it is necessary to be aware of the power that multi-

national corporations wield. Small countries will have to be selective in choosing responsible multi-national investors and to cooperate with other countries and international organisations to demand greater accountability from multi-national corporations. On the fourth measure, it is not easy to know when to involve the people in direct decision-making regarding economic matters and who decides whether the "interests of citizens are at stake".

Clearly, no one has the final answer to all the economic woes,[105] and it would be presumptuous to think that in either democratic socialism or social democracy, we have the panacea to all the economic problems of the world. Nevertheless, there are certain advantages which a mixed economy can provide for those who value community life and human fraternity. The upshot in any mixed economy with the safeguards provided by Preston in place is that wastage of scarce resources can be minimized when the market is given sufficient leeway in helping to decide what to produce, and in rewarding those who are productive and innovative. In other words, for the market to work, state intervention should be minimized in the sense that the government should concentrate on projects which will ensure that there is a safety net to take care of the needs of the poor and powerless, through which no one is allowed to fall. Yet unlike the free market economists, state intervention in the sense just described is not begrudged or held with suspicion, but is accepted as an essential component of a balanced mixed economy. Preston's willingness to grant the state a role in economic management has a caveat. As we have discussed in our previous chapter on politics, the government in such a state should be freely elected at regular intervals.

It is obvious that because of the issues of externalities which the market economy in its *laissez-faire* form cannot address adequately, and because unabated free market economy

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[105] Wogaman reminds us that "Economics is not a simple thing, and we may very well be sceptical of those who claim to have all the answers." Wogaman, *op. cit.*, 1977, pp. 6f.

tends to widen income disparity, the state with its freely elected government should continue to have a role in regulating economic development to promote social justice and foster human well-being. Preston sees "no inherent reason why elements of a command economy in the shape of planning cannot be mixed with elements of a market economy to make the market a better instrument for maximizing public benefit."[106] This is well said except that Preston has left out the difficult part, and that is, how does this actually work out in a world of competing needs and conflicting interests?

4. The Ambiguity of the Market

From what we have discussed so far, it is clear that Preston accepts and indeed defends the function of the market in wealth creation and in regulating the use of relatively scarce resources, in spite of the fact that the market has come under severe criticism from theologians and organisations like David Jenkins, the former Bishop of Durham,[107] Jose Miguez Bonino,[108] and the WCC.[109] The problem with those who criticize the market, in Preston's view, is that they have not quite grasped the working of modern economics and that they have failed to differentiate between seeing the market as a device and as an ideology. He grants that the market can be abused when it is developed into an "overall philosophy;" or in other words, when it is used as an ideology that promotes, for example, possessive individualism.[110] But even with the possibility that the market can be abused, as many worthwhile systems in the hands of sinners can be abused, that should not detract us

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[106] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 40.

[107] See his chapter on "The Necessities and the Limits of the Market" in David Jenkins, *God, Politics and the Future*. Jenkins has judged the market system as a "fatal mistake." Quoted by Atherton, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 47.

[108] "The basic ethos of capitalism is definitely anti-Christian." Jose Miguez Bonino, *Christians and Marxists*, p. 114.

[109] The WCC at Vancouver referred to the market as the "product of 'satanic forces'." Cf. Preston, *Confusion*, p. 93.

[110] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 114.

from seeing the market "in a properly controlled political and social environment as one of mankind's most useful devices for deciding a basic problem in any society, the allocation of relatively scarce resources between alternative uses."[111] More will be said in the next section about what it means to place the market "in a properly controlled political and social environment". For now, what we have just quoted underlines Preston's endorsement of the market as a useful economic tool which can be utilized for the benefit of the society.

Not every theologian is of course as convinced about the usefulness of the market as Preston is. Duchrow, for instance, is sceptical of the market system of the capitalist world and institutions like the World Bank, the IMF and the United States Federal Reserve,[112] which he accuses of perpetrating widespread social injustice and of consigning the poor of the world to greater depth of poverty.[113] For Duchrow, amidst growing poverty in a world of plenty, the debate is not whether the market may be exploited as an "overall philosophy" but how to counter the influence of the global market system which has already been exploited as an "overall philosophy"[114] and blamed for poverty-related death around the world. His radical response is to to declare the *status confessionis* against capitalism, the way, for instance, apartheid had been declared a *status confessionis* in recent time.[115]

Perhaps sensing stubborn opposition from well-intentioned theologians, Preston makes extra efforts, to the point of repeating himself, to stress that the market need not be

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[111] Ibid., pp. 31f.

[112] Duchrow, "Political and Economic Wellbeing and Justice," in *Studies of Christian Ethics*, vo. 3, no. 1. p. 79.

[113] Ibid., p. 79, and Duchrow, *Global Economy*, pp. 141ff.

[114] Quoting Heilbronner, Duchrow agrees that "behind capitalism there are still people and interest groups using the complexity of economics as ideological 'veil'." Duchrow, "Political and Economic Wellbeing and Justice: A Global View," in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 62.

[115] Duchrow, *Global Economy*, pp. 126ff.

despised, but should instead be treated as an ingenious human device;[116] "a creative human invention, superior to any alternative economic system in terms of life-expectancy and positive economic freedom for humans"[117] which can be deployed to serve human well-being. In Preston's estimation, there is no other viable alternative to the market system when it comes to finding a device that minimizes wastage and tackles economic problems in an efficient way. He seems confident enough about the non-availability of a viable alternative to the market that in his epilogue to *Ambiguities*, he uses two emphatic words; "urge" and "only," to make his point when he says, "I have written in the context of the collapse of the Soviet-styled economies to urge the necessity of taking the market seriously as the only alternative on offer to deal with fundamental economic problems which any society has to solve."[118]

Preston leaves us with no doubt that he is a keen defender of the market as a useful economic device. He is more prepared than theologians like Duchrow, Jenkins and Miguez Bonino to let market forces assume a critical role in solving economic problems, provided they are placed under political control. What we should keep in mind, however, is that the critical role of the market does not include a free licence to act as the sole criterion for all economic decisions which every society has to make.[119] There are "serious defects," he warns us, when the market is used as the "sole economic tool"[120] in managing economic life.

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[116] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 34, p. 38, p. 49; Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 23. See also, Wogaman, *op. cit.*, 1977, p. 17 and p. 78.

[117] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 46.

[118] Ibid., p. 127. Prior to the collapse of the former Soviet Union he had already said that "the market is the *best* device for solving (economic) problems over a fairly wide area of economic life, and there is a good case for the socialist command economies to adopt it." (Our emphasis). Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 114.

[119] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 74. "There is a major role for competition and the entrepreneur. But there is no case for saying that markets work best if they are left alone.... For we cannot do without markets, nor can we make do with them alone....They have to be rigorously monitored to prevent the creation of cartels, quotas, monopolies and other restrictions, and to question those whose vested interest actively campaigns for them."

[120] Preston, *Confusions*, p. 93.

To ensure that the market is not allowed to assume an uninhibited role as the sole criterion for economic policies and to safeguard the market from becoming an ideological tool, or a modern-day idol, Preston like Wogaman counsels that the market should be treated as a 'servant' and never a 'master.'[121] However, there is still a nagging apprehension that if Duchrow has been too dismissive of the global market forces because, for him, such forces tend to take on an oppressive ideological life that undermines social well-being, Preston's rigorous defence of the market, in spite of his warnings that it should be treated as a 'servant,' seems to underestimate the ease with which market as a device can quickly be exploited as a tool to serve the interest of the rich and powerful. Our apprehension aside, it should be said that Preston is clearly mindful of the disproportionate sufferings which a market manipulated by unscrupulous persons, businesses and/or countries can inflict upon the ordinary people of the world. By way of protecting these vulnerable people from the sometimes "unmerciful forces of the market",[122] Preston has always advocated that the market in particular, and economics in general, must be subject to more stringent social frameworks, and it is on this matter that we now turn to address.

5. Economics within a wider framework.

On the surface it may seem odd that one who has argued so rigorously for economics to be granted proper autonomy, should also insist that economics must be placed under a broader socio-political framework informed by ethics and theology. A theologian like Meeks whose book *God the Economist* has been severely criticized by Preston for a lack of understanding of economics might justifiably protest by saying that what he (Meeks) is doing is in fact what Preston is proposing, and that is placing economics under the

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[121] Ibid., p. 54, and p. 115. Cf., "In sum, the miraculous market mechanism may be a good servant, but is almost certainly a bad master." Wogaman, *op. cit.*, 1977, p. 97.

[122] Preston, *Confusions*, pp. 93f.

scrutiny of a theological framework, which in his case is treating God as the Economist and expecting the Church and the world to order their economic activities as an *Oikos*; the universal household under God. One might then ask, is not Meeks, and for that matter, others like Duchrow and Miguez Bonino, in a sense, doing precisely what Preston is now advocating?

The answer is yes and no. Yes, because economics is not the be all and end all that is required for organising society such that the needs of the people are provided for, in the sense that economic problems tormenting the world will somehow find their own solution with the providential assistance of a Smithian invisible hand. Economics holds an important key, but it does not hold the exclusive key to solving all the socio-economic problems of the world.

Yet it is no, because there is a marked difference between what Preston is advocating and the presupposition which others like Meeks has employed in their critique of economic matters. When grappling with economic problems, Preston allows economics to run its full gamut, as it were, weighing the options that are open to us in the face of competing claims and limited resources. Economics as a discipline with "proper autonomy" is entitled its legitimate input and to ask hard questions about how societal economic ills can realistically be alleviated and overcome. Furthermore, as we have already intimated, Preston takes a positive view of the market as a creative human device which should be given sufficient room to regulate the economic order. It would be pretentious for one to impose one's theological presupposition on economic matters and start to prescribe economic solutions based on theological reflections without letting economics have its legitimate say. Preston clearly puts a strong case against premature and pretentious prescriptions for the

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economic ills of the world, but there is still the stubborn problem of when theology should be brought to bear on economic issues.

There is no doubt that economists can help to clarify issues that beset society and place before us the probable options and their implications for societal economic well-being, and they must be heard. Having said that, in Preston's judgment, the ultimate decision on economic directions and policies, and the concomitant values which they generate or erode will have to be political decisions. This point comes out very clearly in *Church and Society*, although the immediate context in which he presses the point is his review of the market and free market economy when he says that "(i)ssues of economic life inevitably lead to political ones."[123] In *Ambiguities* he would restate the same point, but this time he moves beyond the confine of just the free market into economics broadly construed. Using what by now are some familiar words, he impresses upon us that, "economic issues always lead back to political ones. That is why, when economics has given what assistance it can, political issues must be considered."[124]

But where does the Church come in? If society as a whole needs political wisdom and with it, moral wisdom to help the elected and the electorate "secure consistent policies instead of patchy ones",[125] surely the Church has critical contributions to make in helping to shape the social and moral framework of the community to which we all belong. It is from the tradition of Temple and Niebuhr that Preston draws on resources as he encourages Church involvement in the economic realm which, for him, is an integral part of the Orders of Creation. Being involved in the economic realm should alert the Church to any

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[123] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 115. Also Preston, *Future*, p. 155., and Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 22.

[124] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 25, and p. 128. The same point was hinted in Preston, *Persistence*, p. 63. There he asserts, "Whatever politicians say, there will be no escape from the political control of essentials of economic policy." Cf. Atherton, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 70.

[125] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 40.

pretentious claims made by theologians or politicians on economic matters. Of equal importance, the Church that is engaged in the economic realm accepts the responsibility to critique those claims of economics that impinge on human well-being and the common good.[126] And precisely because he sees the need for the Church to offer responsible theological critique on the economic realm he has laboured hard and long to develop a social theology that takes economic issues seriously.[127] The Church in a country like Singapore which places high priority on economic well-being can tap into the social theology of Preston to help them have a better grasp of economic issues and offer responsible contextual theological critique of economic development and its effect on the common good.

6. Bias to the Poor

Before we conclude this chapter, it might be appropriate to remind ourselves of Preston's explicit commitment to the plight of the poor. Not to mention this commitment might leave Preston's view on economics open to unfair accusation that he has no particular interest in the economic welfare of those who are most vulnerable to economic upheavals in any society. He tells us openly that his theological framework has a "concern for the poor and underprivileged."[128] That this should appear as the first of four theological "considerations" in the third of his Maurice Lectures indicates, in a deep sense, the special place he has in his social theology for the disadvantaged. Borrowing a phrase from a book

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[126] He rejects the Christendom approach of Tawney and Gore which according to him, presented strict demands and discipline which "the church itself is not able to establish". But he concurs that it "does not mean that she [sic] should abandon responsibility for the economic realm, or be complacent about avarice and acquisitiveness. She [sic] has every reason to be alert to what is happening in the economic realm, to subject it to a theological critique and to be alert to the economic aspects of the church's own structures and operations." Ibid., p. 13. One might argue that the "kind of discipline which Tawney and Gore looked for" (Ibid., p. 13) is a precursor of the Ecclesiological Ethics now very much associated with the works of Yoder and Hauerwas.

[127] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 1.

[128] Preston, *Persistence*, p. 48.

written by David Sheppard the former bishop of Liverpool, he concurs that the Gospel "enjoins a 'bias to the poor'."[129] Later in *Ambiguities*, he would use another term, this time from the Liberation theologians and Roman Catholic tradition, that speaks of the 'preferential option for the poor"[130] and for which he unreservedly declares, "I strongly support it."[131]

It is because of his concern for the plight of the poor, and his desire to ensure that the poor are not misled by utopian promises of charlatans that he cautions against simplistic solution to economic problems which can be counter-productive. He has witnessed the failure of the command economy in the former Soviet-bloc to deliver the economic goods, not only to the poor, but also to the whole of the affected countries, save for those who had privileged access to power and property. And against the New Right, he continues to voice his concern that unbridled free market capitalism leaves the most vulnerable people unprotected and exposed to the uncertainties and vulgarities of life. In place of the Marxist command economic system or the capitalist demand economic system, it is in a mixed economy that he finds the serviceable safeguards to protect the interest of the economically deprived. According to Preston, a mixed economy that promotes social justice and provides for the basic socio-economic needs of the poor with appropriate state intervention and subsidies "is more important than maximum economic output from scarce resources."[132] If granting preferential option for the poor is not to degenerate into a meaningless slogan, it is a matter of urgency for the Church to work at acquiring an informed grasp of economics for her and her theologians to "have a competent analysis (of socio-economic issues) before

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[129] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 125. Cf. Preston, *Future*, p. 58.

[130] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 2, and also Preston, *Future*, p. 141.

[131] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 2.

[132] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 68.

arriving at the best policies in the particular circumstances to alleviate, or remove, the oppressions from which the most under-privileged suffer."[133]

7. Ambiguous Market and Some Persistent Problems

1) Preston has argued for economics to have a proper autonomy, yet he rejects a common classification of economists that labour is a factor of production.[134] Using an aphorism reminiscent of Jesus' comment that the "sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for sabbath,"[135] he tells us that humans "do not exist to serve the economic system; the system exists to serve humans."[136] Not surprising for one whose understanding of the human life is informed by the doctrine of the *imago dei*, finite humans are infinitely more important than things. Yet this theological emphasis on the irreplaceable dignity of human life and his refusal to include labour as a factor of production shows the difficulty and tension which any social theologian would have to encounter when dealing with economics. What does it mean, for example, to respect the proper autonomy of economics which assumes that labour is part of the factors of production, when we have to hold fast to a non-economic but fundamentally theological understanding of human life?

2) In a theological sense, there is no question that Preston is right about the dignity and priceless value of human life. And from another theological perspective, we might add that he has also made a strong case in support for a "preferential option for the poor." When there is a clash of values, what we have seen in Preston's theological argument for rejecting dehumanizing treatment of labour as a factor of production, and in support of the claims of

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[133] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 2. In the same paragraph he advises that "It is possible that inadequately analysed policies designed to relieve (the plight of the poor) may not be the best possible, or may even make things worse. That is why I stress the importance of competence." Ibid., pp. 2f

[134] Example, Michael Parkin, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Also, Atherton, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 60.

[135] Mark 2:27. New Revised Standard Version.

[136] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 44. Cf., Preston, *Confusions*, p. 94.

the poor and powerless for special care, affirms the wisdom of not allowing economics to have the final say. Life is definitely more important than material things. And the plight of the poor and powerless deserves preferential treatment to ensure that their basic needs are cared for and that they are not left to struggle on their own. But the problem remains of not just when, but also what, theological consideration should be brought to the fore in discussing economic issues without being accused of disregarding the proper autonomy which Preston has advised us to grant to economics.

3) A critical problem which Preston might have underestimated is his support for the use of the market as a device for creativity and efficient allocation of relatively scarce resources. To be sure, he places his support of the market within strict qualifications. But the market, even if we treat it as a device, cannot be divorced from the people who use it. People are sinners and markets can be manipulated. A device in the hand of a sinner is not neutral. Warning against making the market an overall ideology is not enough to deter sinful people and powerful groups from misusing and distorting the market to promote their own self-interest and enrich themselves. The free market has been blamed for encouraging short-termism, and putting pressure to cut labour cost to increase profit for the corporate shareholders.[137] Furthermore, even if we acknowledge that the market can be an efficient instrument to help allot scarce resources, Herman Daly and John Cobb remind us that its efficiency does not guarantee "just distribution." And "efficient allocation does not imply an optimal scale of the economy relative to the ecosystem. It does not even imply a scale that is ecologically sustainable."[138] It is prudent, therefore, for Christians who care about human well-being and social justice, to work with like-minded people in strengthening the role of the church and other 'intermediate associations' such as labour union and

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[137] Will Hutton, *The State We're In*, is a case in point.

[138] Daly and Cobb, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

environmental groups, to critique and counteract the pretensions and excesses of the market and the people who promote it. In that sense, there is a place for Christians to take a more sceptical view of the market than Preston might have allowed for.

4) Crucial for any country outside the Euro-North American world is to hold a hermeneutics of suspicion when we talk about the market. It is necessary to ask, "Who is it for? Whose interest does it serve?" Besides asking the questions, we must not assume that there is only one variety of market economy and that is the one driven by America, pushing for American interests. It is true that no country in the world, except for those that choose to be isolated, can escape the tentacles of American influence and power. Nevertheless, although countries in East and Southeast Asia might have opted for some form of market economy that is plugged into the worldwide economic system and therefore exposed to its vagaries, it would be presumptuous to conclude that they have openly embraced the American or European system of free market economy and the rights-dominated individualistic values they advance.[139] If anything, the debate about Asian values which we mentioned in our chapter on Singapore and the commitment to building a stakeholding economy are indications of the suspicion and rejection of American cultural-economic hegemony.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have sought to show through Preston's coverage of economic issues, that any social theology that is faithful to its theological task has to engage in the issues of the public square, and that includes matters pertaining to the economic realm, not least because economics has a direct effect on human welfare and well-being. The economic realm, in Preston's theological framework, is a part of the Orders of Creation, and in that

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[139] See John Gray, *False Dawn*, pp. 4, 166-193, and Hutton, *op. cit.*, pp. 257ff.

sense no responsible social theology that is informed by a doctrine of creation should overlook the challenges posed by economics.

Chapter Eight

Middle Axioms in the Social Ethics of Ronald Preston

It is our intention to spell out in this chapter the main method adopted by Preston for decision-making. This is the middle-axiom method which, until the 1960s, was widely employed by ecumenical agencies such as the WCC, and according to Preston, is still used by most mainline churches and various church boards on social responsibility in England.[1] Preston is a leading proponent of this method in Britain, and he remains a staunch defender of the middle-axiom process, in spite of some criticisms levelled against it. In just a while, we will explain what the middle-axiom method is all about. This will be followed by our assessment of the criticisms of the middle-axiom process and Preston's defence of it. We will conclude by affirming that, despite the criticisms, the middle-axiom method is still a viable method, appropriate for both Christians working with Christians, and Christians working with others, in formulating directions from which policies for the common good may be developed and implemented.

1. Middle Axioms

The term 'middle axioms,' usually attributed to J. H. Oldham,[2] was never quite spelled out, or defended in any detail other than by Preston in Britain, and John Bennett and Dennis McCann in the USA.[3] Preston has made frequent references to middle axioms in his

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[1] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 39.

[2] J.H. Oldham and W.A. Visser't Hooft (eds.), *The Church and Its Function in Society*, p. 210. Cf. Preston, *Explorations*, pp. 38, 154; Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 144; and Duncan B. Forrester, *Beliefs, Values and Policies*, p. 16.

[3] Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 141-156. John Bennett, *Christian and Social Policy*, pp. 77f., and Dennis McCann, "A Second Look at the Middle Axioms," in *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 1981, pp. 73-96.

writings.[4] It was, however, in an article on middle axioms which he wrote for *Crucible*[5] and

reprinted in *Explorations in Theology 9*,[6] that he first articulated his views on the subject in

a substantial way. Not long after that, and clearly in response to a severe criticism of middle

axioms by Duncan Forrester,[7] he wrote a lengthier essay on middle axioms which was added

as an appendix to his Scott Holland Lectures.[8] By then more explicit modifications began to

appear. Preston had taken into consideration the concerns expressed by his critics and

incorporated some of their ideas into explaining how the middle-axiom method works. In his

later writings, Preston avoids using the term 'middle axioms,' calling the description

'unfortunate,'[9] and preferring, instead, to use 'middle level' for the same approach to

decision-making, even though he could not do away with the term completely.[10]

1.1 The Process

The middle-axiom process generally begins with reflection on the shared Christian

perspective of life and faith, informed by the gospel and the teachings of the Church.[11]

From these common "central doctrines of the Christian faith",[12] the process draws out

'derivative principles' which people of other faiths and philosophies may also affirm

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[4] Preston, *Explorations*, pp. viii, 32, 51f, 61, 76, 154; and , also Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 107, Preston, *Future*, pp. 108f, and Preston, *Confusions*, p. 157.

[5] See article, "Middle Axioms in Christian Social Ethics," *Crucible*, January-February, 1971, pp. 9-15.

[6] Preston, *Explorations*, pp. 37-44.

[7] Duncan B. Forrester, "What is Distinctive in Social Theology?", in Michael H Taylor, ed. *Christians and the Future of Social Democracy*, pp. 33-45. Forrester was to develop this critique of middle axioms further in chapter 2 of *op. cit.*, 1989, pp. 16-35.

[8] Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 141-156. For the discussion on middle axioms by John Bennett see his *Christian Ethics and Social Policy*, pp. 77f. A more recent discussion on middle axioms by the Roman Catholic social ethicist Dennis McCann can be found in, Dennis McCann, "A Second Look at the Middle Axioms" in *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 1981, pp. 73 - 96.

[9] Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 107, 141 and Preston, *Confusions*, p. 157.

[10] For example, Preston, *Future*, p. 2; Preston, *Ambiguities*, pp. 108, 128, and Preston, *Confusions*, pp. 67, 157.

[11] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 148.

[12] Suggate, *William Temple*, p. 148.

without having to accept the Christian warrant for them. Preston suggests that "liberty, equality and fraternity'[13] are examples of such derivative principles. William Temple who coined 'derivative principles' offers 'freedom, social fellowship and service.'[14] It is between the central doctrines of the Christian faith and the derivative principles which the Christian faith supplies, on the one hand, and the working out of detailed policies, on the other hand, that middle axioms are located. According to Preston,[15]

A middle axiom is formed to indicate the general direction in which action should be taken.... With middle axioms we are at a halfway stage between what is clear Christian judgment and what is an opinion subject to empirical hazards and checks. To get to a detailed policy recommendation would be to go much further towards the latter.

1.2 What is Going On?

Perhaps because Preston has said that the "formation of middle axioms begins"[16] with theological reflection, he has unfortunately contributed to the criticism that the middle-axiom method is deductive. He gives the impression that middle axioms develop through a process *from* principles *towards* policies, although in an earlier essay he has said that middle axioms have usually developed by way of bringing the principles *alongside* the problems under discussion, in a critical reciprocal mode.[17] In practice, the process of framing middle axioms is not deductive.[18] It often begins with, and entails asking, a searching question which is important enough for Preston to raise it regularly, and that is, "What is going

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[13] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 148.

[14] W. Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, pp. 67-77.

[15] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 40.

[16] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 148.

[17] Preston, *Explorations*, pp. 39f.

[18] Suggate, *William Temple*, p. 149.

on?"[19] Probably influenced by H. R. Niebuhr, but surely in agreement with him, this question is essentially a prior and responsible question to raise before we even consider "What shall I (we) do?"[20] Besides establishing the facts and trends, the question looks for factors which might complicate the issues, and it searches for hidden ideological agenda and undeclared vested interests which could undermine judgment.[21] Asking "what is going on?" helps to probe, clarify and interpret relevant empirical data, and this is done with the assistance and advice from experts plus feedback of people whose lives are directly affected by the decisions to be taken.

Advocates of the middle-axiom approach do not ordinarily expect to work for detailed policy recommendation mainly because they know that societal problems are often too complex for even well-intentioned Christians to find agreement on what those comprehensive solutions and policies should be. Preston knows that detailed policies that command unanimous acceptance, not only among Christians, but also among members of the wider overlapping communities, are usually unobtainable because of conflicting interests and a competing range of probable solutions. Proponents of the middle-axiom method are therefore disinclined to seek for detailed policies. They also eschew the temptation of making general platitudinous statements knowing that generalized pronouncements are vacuous and provide no solutions to deep-rooted societal problems.

It is in middle axioms, concluded after careful and rigorous deliberations, that provisional directional solutions are usually available, common ground is likely to be found and support from a wide spectrum of Christians, people of other faiths and those with no formal religious belief can be obtained. Yet a note of caution is called for. While it is at the

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[19] Preston, *Persistence*, pp 135, 137; Preston, *Explorations*, p. 151; Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 110, 147, 149, 153; Preston, *Future*, p. 45; Preston, *Ambiguities*, pp. 16, 96, 128; Preston, *Confusions*, p. 24.

[20] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, pp. 60 and 63. Also, Joseph L. Allen, *Love and Conflict*, p. 15.

middle axiom level that consensus is likely to be found among people representing different interests and perspectives, negotiating for consensus is not an easy task. Sometimes despite long hours of deliberation, argument and counter-argument, consensus might still elude us. At such a time, Preston probably with misplaced self-confidence, originally suggested that the "onus is on those who disagree to make out a good case for their disagreement rather then the other way round."[22] He would later modify his view when he moved the burden of defending one's case away from those who disagree, to all the participants. His revised view says,[23]

If Christians cannot agree at a middle level, the remaining possibility is to identify the different positions and then ask advocates of each to formulate the questions they want to ask advocates of the others, and to ask each to listen to and address the questions put to them. In this way different decisions of integrity can still be made by Christians who acknowledge their common allegiance, beyond their differences, to their one Lord.

2. Criticisms of Middle Axioms

Criticisms of the middle-axiom method can be found in Paul Ramsey's *Basic Christian Ethics*, Paul Lehmann's *Ethics in a Christian Context*, Ralph Potter's "The Logic of Moral Argument,"[24] and principally, in Duncan Forrester's Hensley Henson Lectures.[25] We will first address the criticisms of Forrester, taking on the important points raised by him in the order he presents them in chapter two of *Beliefs, Values and Policies*, where he places his criticisms of the middle-axiom method under two headings: procedure and logic.

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[21] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 149.

[22] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 41. Cf. Ibid., p. 33.

[23] Preston, *Ambiguities*, p. 108. Cf., Preston, *Confusions*, p. 159.

[24] R. Potter, Jr., "The Logic of Moral Argument," in P. Deats, Jr., ed., *Towards a Discipline of Social Ethics*, pp. 93-114.

[25] Forrester, *op. cit.*, 1989, pp. 16-35.

2.1 The Problems of Procedure

While Forrester provisionally supports the middle-axiom method in ecumenical social ethics,[26] and while he recognises the need to co-opt different groups of people with varied skills, experience and expertise to discuss, analyse and wrestle with the issues at hand, he criticises the "Oldham groups" on two counts. Firstly, he asks what is the role of the theologians in the inter-disciplinary groups. Secondly, he denounces such groups, traditionally constituted, for being elitist.

On the first point, Forrester reminds us that theologians should give theological input to the group, and not merely act as a facilitator and the mouthpiece of the group that issues conclusions bereft of distinctive theological content. On the second point, he is disappointed with the traditional practice of selecting theologians and experts who "come from the ranks of the powerful and the privileged."[27] The implication of this assertion is obvious. Decisions made by the representatives of the power elite would invariably serve their own interest first. These are fair comments. There is some truth in Forrester's criticisms of the way middle axioms might have been formulated in the past, though the danger of middle axioms lacking theological input and being elitist remains a perennial problem.

Although Preston acknowledges Forrester's call for distinctive theological input, he does not seem to be overly concerned about defending Christian distinctiveness in the middle-axiom method. He celebrates the fact that "Christian insights fortunately often overlap with those of other faiths or philosophies", and in that sense, there is no need to

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[26] Ibid., p. 17.

[27] Ibid., p. 20.

emphasise Christian distinctiveness.[28] That said, Preston points out that the middle-axiom method does not preclude distinctive Christian contributions. "Indeed they are the basis from which the process of working towards middle axioms starts."[29]

Regarding the criticism that the middle axiom method is elitist, this can be better appreciated if it is seen against the background of pre-1966 WCC-sponsored gatherings which were usually dominated by Church leaders (mainly men) from the Euro-North American world (mainly white, well-educated and economically secure). In that respect, the early ecumenical gatherings and their middle-axiom decision-making process might have favoured the privileged and powerful. If the "Oldham group" erred, they were perhaps constrained by historical factors and by the prejudice of their time when they listened more to the voice of the established churches from the rich West instead of listening to the younger and poorer churches in the Two-Thirds world.[30] Understandably the middle-axiom process had been elitist, just as churches that continue to disregard the interest of the poor and powerless, in spite of changing time and social sensitivity, are elitist. But the force of the criticism loses ground when we consider that middle axioms are not constructed to serve the interest of the elite alone. There is no hard and fast rule to suggest that the middle-axiom method should be confined only to input from white, well-educated, well-to-do men from the West. The middle-axiom method can, and it should involve the input of those whose voice might have been silenced in the past because they were poor and powerless, and this Preston has allowed for. Clearly in response to criticism from theologians like Forrester, Preston has made explicit what he did not spell out in his earlier essay on middle axioms

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[28] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 153.

[29] Ibid., p. 153.

[30] However, it should be said that the pioneers were nevertheless not entirely ignorant of (nor did they lack interest in) the welfare of the growing churches outside Europe and the USA, or the unique predicaments they faced. See for instance, W.A. Visser 'T Hooft's survey of "The Younger Churches," in W.A. Visser 'T Hooft and J.H. Oldham, *op. cit.*, pp. 83ff.

published in *Crucible*. Preston now advises that it "is important to draw on the relevant experience of all, especially the poor and those who experience the rough side of life; and not merely to do things for them but to hear them."[31]

2.2 The Problems of Logic

We now turn to other substantive criticisms posed by Forrester. These criticisms have to do with the logic of arriving at middle axioms, and whether we can draw too sharp a distinction between middle axioms and policies. Forrester criticizes the procedure as deductive and accuses it of resting on a Platonic presupposition regarding the nature of theology.[32] Aligning with liberationist criticism of certain strands of theology from Euro-North America,[33] he is suspicious of a middle-axiom approach which, he implies, is too concerned with formulating theology that is abstract and devoid of interaction with the real problems of the world. It is this abstract theology that proponents of the middle-axiom method seem to depend on to frame principles and middle axioms. He imputes that the advocates of the middle-axiom method start with

"formulating what one might call pure theological truth; from this one elicits general principles of a universal nature; from these one derives middle axioms, or statements of the bearing of general principles in a particular context, providing a sense of direction; and finally (by the least clearly defined stage in the process) one chooses among the various policy options which might implement the middle axiom."[34]

This criticism would have been devastating if what he says of the nature of theology and the starting process in the middle-axiom method were true. However, on closer examination, what Forrester has put forward as the nature of theology that feeds middle

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[31] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 152, also p. 149.

[32] Forrester, *op. cit.*, 1989, p. 26.

[33] Ibid., pp. 26f.

[34] Ibid., p. 26.

axioms, and the initial steps we have to take in the middle-axiom method, verge on caricature. There is no evidence that the middle-axiom method calls for a formulation of "pure theological truth" as a starting point for developing principles and middle axioms. It would appear that he has unfairly set up this claim of "pure theological truth" as an illegitimate move to introduce the liberationist critique of "abstract" theology, which in Forrester's view implicates the advocates of the middle-axiom method.[35]

It is true, as liberation theologians and Forrester have reminded us, that praxis and critical-interactive theological reflection arising out of both personal and shared community experiences should continue to inform and form our contextual theology, a point acknowledged by Preston[36] and allowed for by employing the tool of reciprocal relationship.[37] Generally speaking, liberation theologians' suspicion of the abstruse theology formulated by scholars secured in the safe haven of academia with no direct regard for the welfare and struggle of the ordinary people, is well-taken, although we should not push the issue too far. The multi-volume theological works written by Karl Barth, for example, may be difficult for ordinary Christians to read, not to mention to comprehend, but no one can accuse Barth of not interacting with the problems of his world. His theological works reflect

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[35] This point comes out more forcefully in his article "What is Distinctive in Social Theology?" There he berates, "For myself, I am more concerned at the ivory-tower misunderstanding of the nature of theology which may be engendered or encouraged by the middle axiom approach. It sometimes suggests that the theologian is rather like Moses coming down from the mountain and veiling his face with middle axioms because the glory of his countenance is too great for the people to behold! It is as if theology were done in olympian detachment and without dynamic interaction with praxis. The resultant pure truths are then transformed into ethics and finally applied, with necessary modifications, in practice and policy." Forrester, *op. cit.*, 1982, p. 41.

[36] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 153.

[37] "There needs to be a reciprocal relationship between criteria drawn from the Christian faith and evidence drawn from human experience at whatever level up to the most expert. The criteria evaluate the evidence and the evidence refines the criteria." Preston, *Explorations*, p. 154. This is akin to Temple's "dialectical method" identified by Suggate. It involves a "constant oscillation between overall understanding and concrete experience. At any one point in time we have an understanding of reality (both of fact and of value) which has been steadily built up by a reciprocal process: we use our understanding of reality to interpret our concrete experience of living, and we allow our reading of experience to modify that understanding." Suggate, *William Temple*, pp. 149 and 207. Cf. Preston, *Explorations*, p. 46; Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 153; Preston, *Future*, pp. 10, 18f, 194; Preston, *Ambiguities*, pp. 1, 103; Preston, *Confusions*, pp. 24, 27, 153.

the crisis of his time, the inadequacy of liberal theology to meet the challenge of Nazism, and the impotence of the institutionalized Lutheran Church in the early decades of last century which led many Lutheran theologians to endorse the ideology of Nazism.

Forrester's insinuation of "pure theological truth" as a necessary concomitant of middle-axiom method is unhelpful. Whatever Preston and proponents of the middle-axiom method assume, it is not a prior formulation of "pure theological truth." That would be too presumptuous a claim, and Preston would be sceptical of anyone claiming to have access to "pure" theological truth. What he would assume, nevertheless, is a carefully thought-out theological framework;[38] something which Stackhouse calls the "enduring theological foundations"[39] and Wogaman refers to as our theological "presumptions"[40] undergirding our approach to social ethics and interacting with contextual issues in a mutually implicating manner. We should not confuse the need for faithful, vigorous and accountable theological task with "pure theological truth" (whatever that is) which Forrester criticizes. His criticism would have carried more weight had he been specific about what he had in mind when he attributed to the middle-axiom method a requirement to formulate "pure theological truth" which is unavailable, and without which presumably, the whole process of finding a middle axiom would be derailed.

2.3 Indicative and Imperative Mood, and Christian Distinctiveness.

Besides accusing the middle-axiom method of beginning its task with formulating "pure theological truth", Forrester also criticizes the middle-axiom method for its "highly

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[38] The "articulated theology" in Preston, *Explorations*, p. 40.

[39] Max L. Stackhouse, "In the Company of Hauerwas," *Journal of Christian Theological Research*, (http://apu.edu/~CTRF/articles/1997-articles/stackhouse.html) 2.1 (1997).

[40] Wogaman, *A Christian Method of Moral Judgment*, pp. 60ff.

controverted movement from the indicative to the imperative mood."[41] There are two parts to this criticism. In the first instance, he suggests that the reluctance of theologians to move beyond middle axioms to policies could be attributed to a questionable assumption, which he blames on Ritschlian liberals, that theologians are experts on issues related to values, and therefore they are more interested in the imperatives, while the quite separate indicatives are left to social scientists who are the experts on facts.[42] This accusation can be easily dispatched by denying that proponents of the middle-axiom method follow such a "controverted" view of facts and values.

The second part of his criticism presses a quite different point about the indicative. If we agree with John Habgood that the "prime Christian contribution to social ethics is in the indicative rather than the imperative mood ...."[43] it is not enough to base the indicative on distilled theological principles, as Habgood seems to suggest when he says[44]

It is Christian belief about the kind of place the world is, about the depth of human sinfulness and the possibilities of divine grace, about judgement and hope, incarnation and salvation, God's concern for all and his care for each, about human freedom and divine purpose - it is belief such as these which make the difference, and provide the context within which the intractable realities of social and political life can be tackled with wisdom and integrity.

For Forrester, the "indicatives can best be seen coming together in a story, rather than a theoretical system."[45] It is the Christian Narrative that should assume the primary role in shaping our life and ethics, rather than for Christians to be guided by what he considers to be restrictive theological principles that may render the Christian Story

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[41] Forrester, op. cit., 1989, p. 27.

[42] Ibid., p. 27.

[43] John Habgood, Church and Nation in a Secular Age, p. 168. Cf. Forrester, op. cit., 1989, p. 28. Cf. John Habgood, A Working Faith, p. 114.

[44] Habgood, Church and Nation, p. 168.

[45] Forrester, op. cit., 1989, p. 28.

redundant. According to him, it is through the telling of the Christian Story by those whose lives have been shaped by the same Story that we could make what he judges to be the "truest Christian contribution to the public realm."[46]

In Forrester's estimation, contribution based on principles and middle axioms are suspect because they lack Christian distinctiveness and avoid the imperative which an undemythologized Christian Story would have provided.[47] He faults Habgood for conceding too much ground when Habgood wrote that in "terms of principles by which people should live and societies order themselves, Christians have little to say that could not be said by any reasonable person of goodwill."[48] But when Habgood said what he said, was he not making an obvious point about the availability of common values among people of divergent faiths and those with no religious faith, despite the fractious problem posed by plurality? In the paragraph following the sentence which Forrester finds problematic, Habgood shows that he is very much concerned about the need for making distinctive Christian contribution to public debate as well. What Habgood emphasizes, however, is "the importance of the distinctive *quality* of the debate on public issues which the churches might be able to offer, rather than a distinctive set of 'Christian policies'."[49]

Drawing support from Lesslie Newbigin, Forrester questions the adequacy of doing social ethics and making ethical decisions based on some general principles shared by people of goodwill whose support for the shared principles cannot be presumed to come from the same sources. Forrester fears that principles which we might have in common with

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[46] Forrester, *op. cit.*, 1989, p. 28.

[47] Ibid., p. 28, where he warns that it would be "fatal to demythologize the story, to reduce it to doctrine or directives, and then cast the story aside as redundant and unhelpful..."

[48] Habgood, *op. cit.*, 1983, p. 168. Cf. Forrester, *op. cit.*, 1989, p. 30.

[49] Habgood, *op. cit.*, 1983, p. 168.

other people "can easily become demonic".[50] Policies constructed around middle axioms and built on derivative principles lack Christian peculiarity and lose the impact of Christian distinctiveness which the Christian Story provides. Apart from Newbigin, it is in Alasdair MacIntyre, Karen Lebacqz, and the ecclesiological ethics of James McClendon and Hauerwas that Forrester finds support for policies to be shaped by the Christian Story and not by some generalized principles and middle axioms. He tells us that "It is the story rather than the principle which helps us to interpret the signs of the times and find their meaning."[51]

Let us grant that there is always a danger that policies guided by derivative or general principles and middle axioms might compromise, or more likely, understate Christian peculiarity and blunt the prescriptive voice sometimes required of Christians who have to respond to societal problems in obedience to the demand of the Gospel. As MacIntyre[52] has shown, and others like Hauerwas[53] and Milbank[54] have argued, the Enlightenment project has infiltrated the way theology has been done, so that instead of doing theology that is shaped by the Christian Narrative, the Enlightenment has corrupted our theology with its own destructive agenda and hegemonic liberal metanarrative. What these scholars have written is a needful warning and a corrective for those particularly in the West who might have been complacent in their theological task. That said, we should insist that articulating derivative principles and engaging in the theological task of social ethics is surely inseparable from the total picture of the Christian Story, and the retelling of that Story. Theological framework, and derivative principles that inform middle axioms are

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[50] Forrester, *op. cit.*, 1989, p. 29.

[51] Ibid., p. 29.

[52] A. MacIntyre, *After Virtues*.

[53] Example, S. Hauerwas, *After Christendom?*

[54] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*.

primarily the product of various communities of believers, and not something manufactured outside the Church, although the point is taken that even with the most stringent of discipline, the Church as part of God's creation is susceptible to distorting influence.

On the question of Christian distinctiveness and the offence of the Christian Story which middle axioms and derivative principles might have sometimes unwittingly neglected, clearly the Church has benefitted from, and should be indebted to, the critique of liberation ethics, ecclesiological ethics and theologians like Forrester. They have provided the critical voices to alert us to moral complacency, and readjust what previously might have been an imbalance in the way we have handled moral judgment, direction and emphases. In response to such criticism, proponents of the middle-axiom method need to push harder when searching for middle axioms to ensure that the imperative when required is not withheld, and our Christian input is not diluted too easily in our desire to find consensus. However, it should be noted that both Habgood and Preston have assured us that taking the middle axiom route does not exclude us from making decisions on issues that demand prompt action. Decisive actions are sometimes needed, but the occasions that call for decisive actions are rare.[55] Using a phrase borrowed from Paul Ramsey, Preston accepts that when we are faced with a "before the gates of Auschwitz" challenge, the church will have to act decisively to attend to the given challenge.[56] Nevertheless, the point made by theologians like Preston and Habgood, that ordinarily it is difficult if not impossible to find agreement on detailed policies among Christians, adherents of other faiths and those with no religious affinity, is wise advice to keep in mind. We should not overstate the need or our ability to provide distinctively Christian solution, given the diversity of views and conflicting

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[55] Cf. Habgood, op. cit., 1989, p. 168, "There will be times and circumstances when, ... Christian consciences will be able to unite around some great moral issue with a unanimity which gives the judgement unique authority."

[56] Preston, Explorations, p. 31, pp. 31f., and Preston, Church and Society, p. 155.

interpretations. The middle-axiom method still has much to offer, even if it is, in Habgood's language, a less than glamorous[57] indicative mood.

2.4 A Note of Caution on Christian Narrative

Since we are seeking for an appropriate Christian social ethic for a plural post-colonial Singapore, we should express a note of caution with regard to Forrester's claim for an undemythologized Christian Story to shape and inform distinctive Christian indicatives and imperatives. We accept the advice that we should be faithful to the Gospel and the demand of the Kingdom of God. However, has not the Story (as required of contextual theology) been told and retold differently, with different emphases, to meet different needs for the dispersed and diverse world-wide communities of believers, spanning close to two thousand years, so that no one and no regional church can claim with confidence, without being pretentious, that they have the complete unadulterated and undemythologized deposit of the truth? The Christian Story that Forrester points to is not as undemythologized or pristine as he might have imagined it to be. It has been filtered through many traditions of the Church and no one tradition is able to know and to hold the complete picture of the Story which God has revealed to us for any interpretation of the Story to offer, in an uncontentious way, the required imperatives that speak to the complex problems confronting the world.

2.5 Criticisms from America

Besides the criticisms proffered by Forrester, there are other criticisms which may be attributed to a misreading of what middle axioms really are. Preston following McCann cites the criticisms of Paul Ramsey and Paul Lehmann as examples of those who had

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[57] Habgood, *op. cit.*, 1983, p. 168.

misunderstood the middle-axiom method.[58] Ramsey had asked "What stands between a 'universal ethical principle' and a 'middle axiom' or between one of these and specific plans of action? Surely not another 'middle axiom'!"[59] Both Ramsey and Lehmann[60] seem to assume that there is a certain logical progression from general principles to prescription, in the middle-axiom approach. Their concern about the problematic logical step from principles to specific situation in the middle-axiom approach, together with the criticism of Ralph Potter[61] which probably elicited McCann's response in "A Second Look on Middle Axioms" seem like a variation of what Forrester had described as the "controverted movement from the indicative to the imperative mood." Taking the line of McCann, Preston's response to their criticism is to explain that middle axioms are not "a middle term in a process of deduction between principle and situation."[62] They are directional guides arrived at not by strict logical movements but by moral reasoning. He explains further that

Middle axioms cannot be forced into the structure of ethical prescriptivism. Moral theologians must indeed take account of the work of moral philosophers, and cannot remain remote from the arguments that range around prescriptivism, but they have no cause to rush to its defence. Moral reasoning and logic are not identical; the

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[58] Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 145f.

[59] Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, p. 350.

[60] Lehmann is critical of the middle-axiom approach because it is a "logical enterprise and there is no way in logic of closing the gap between the abstract and the concrete." Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context*, p. 152. He is, of course, making his case for *Koinonia* ethics. Instead of the middle-axiom method he adds that "ethics is a matter not of logic but of life, a certain kind of reality possessed by the concrete, ... ethical significance (derives) not from the attempt to formulate, to clarify, and to apply ethical principles but from what God is doing in the world to make and keep human life human". Ibid., p. 152.

[61] Ralph B. Potter, Jr., "The Logic of Moral Argument," in Paul Deats, ed., *Towards a Discipline of Social Ethics: Essay in Honor of Walter George Muelder*, pp. 93-114. Potter says that "What is left undone by purveyors of middle axioms constitutes a sin of omission.." (p. 101) and "Middle axioms would seem to be so unhelpful and so inadequate to most situations that Christians would encounter in the immediacy of practical involvements today.." (p. 102).

[62] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 145. See also a more detailed response to Ramsey's, Lehmann's and Potter Jr.'s concern in McCann, *op. cit.*, 1981, pp. 79ff.

former is much more piecemeal and open-ended. Ethics is not a precise discipline. Absolute certainty in it is rare.[63]

Like McCann, Preston advises that the middle-axiom method should not be confused with strict logic in a moral philosophical sense. What McCann has called for, drawing from the works of Stephen Toulmin[64] and Gilbert Harman,[65] is a "more 'holistic' view of the role of reasoning in ethics." Harman gives an idea of the kind of holistic reasoning which McCann has in mind when he says,

Reasoning can lead you not only to accept new beliefs, goals, desires, plans and so forth, but to reject some of your antecedent beliefs, goals, plans and desire. Therefore, reasoning is not best thought of as argument or proof, with premises, steps of reasoning, and a conclusion. Rather you start with a set of beliefs, plans, goals, desires, and intentions, which you modify as the result of reasoning, adding to and subtracting from this set as appropriate.[66]

Perhaps the confusion which might have explained the misunderstanding over the 'logic' of middle axioms came about because of the misleading term. We have already noted that "middle axioms" has been described by Preston as an unfortunate term. Both "middle" and "axioms" can be problematic. "Middle," for instance, does not refer to a location placed exactly at the midpoint between two extremes. "Axioms," carries too many meanings, one of which has got to do with logic, which perhaps misled theologians like Ramsey to pose question about its logical progression. As we have said, Preston has occasionally chosen to replace "axioms" with "level." But if the "middle axioms" are often referred to as some kind of directions or directional guides, why not settle for "directions?"[67] The truth of the matter

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[63] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 146. Cf. McCann, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

[64] Stephen Toulmin, *Reason in Ethics*, and *The Uses of Argument*.

[65] Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*.

[66] Ibid., p. 127.

[67] For example, "Direction" is used by Oldham *op. cit.*, 1937, p. 210. In Preston, *Explorations*, p. 40, we are told that a middle axiom "is formed to indicate the general directions in which action should be taken..."

is that, confusing though the term is, this "unfortunate term" is too widely recognizable for anyone to replace it with another term without adding to the confusion, although we still wonder whether a term like "directions for action"[68] might not be a more accurate description for what middle axioms seek to denote.

3. Three Senses of Middle Axioms

In his study of John Bennett's social ethics, Carl-Henric Grenholm has located three senses in which Bennett has deployed middle axioms.[69] The first sense sees Bennett relying on love as his teleological and universalistic principle. However because of human sinfulness, the Christian ideal of love cannot be realizable in its entirety, in the sphere of politics.[70] Middle axioms are therefore approximate norms which are expressions of the demand of love. This understanding of the ideal of love and the need for approximate norms avoid two temptations. It avoids the temptation of monism which identifies Christian ideal of Love with a political system. It also avoids the temptation of dualism either as a pietistic withdrawal from the political sphere or as a corrupted form of the Lutheran doctrine of Two Kingdoms. The second sense finds middle axioms in the 'common morality' shared by people of different faiths and beliefs. This is derived from a humane ethic which accepts the "revelation of Christ as the ultimate criteria for and primary source of our knowledge of God."[71] But it also recognises the grace of God at work outside the Church. Christians do share values in common with others, as well as contributing values which are distinctive to the Christian faith. The third sense refers to middle axioms drawn from intrinsic values in Bennett's teleological ethics, such as welfare, freedom, and justice. And although

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[68] This phrase is used as a section heading for chapter 9 in Preston, *Confusions*, p. 155, though it is not a section that discusses middle axioms.

[69] Carl-Henric Grenholm, *Christian Social Ethics in a Revolutionary Age*, pp. 79-105.

[70] Ibid., p. 83.

[71] Ibid., p. 89.

"Christians do not monopolize these intrinsic values, they can nevertheless be given a special motivation on the basis of Christian belief."[72] Grenholm describes this third sense as avoiding a pure rule ethic and a pure act ethic. Instead of the pure rule ethic which is deductive, and the pure act ethic which is situation ethic, the third sense opts for a modified rule ethic which enables Christians to locate middle axioms between values and policies. All three senses which Grenholm has identified in the middle-axiom approach in Bennett's social ethics can be said to be reflected in the way Preston uses the method.

4. Advantages of the Middle-Axiom Method

There are advantages in taking the middle-axiom route as Preston is wont to tell us. He lists eight of them:[73]

1. They are a help to the individual Christian in making his own decisions, as citizen and perhaps in his job.

2. They are a link between different confessions. For the most part there does not seem much point in the different churches 'going it alone' in this enterprise.

3. They are a link between Christians and non-Christians in facing a common problem. The expertise of non-Christians can often and usefully be brought into the discussions out of which they arise.

4. They give the Christian community something to say relevant to the concerns of the general public.

5. They are useful in breaking down the clerical-lay division in the church. They cannot be arrived at by clergy or by theologians alone. Relevant lay experience is absolutely essential.

6. They can help to create a bad conscience where people are complacent, whether in the church or the community at large. It is no accident that they arise out of a negative judgment on the *status quo*. For instance in so far as equality is a concept having relevance (among others like justice, freedom, order) to a Christian understanding of a humane society - and it certainly has some place though it is extraordinarily difficult to define

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[72] Ibid., p. 99.

[73] Preston, *Explorations*, p. 42. In an earlier article, he listed six advantages, all of which are included in this expanded list. Ibid., pp. 33f. Cf. Preston, *Church and Society*, pp. 154-155, and Preston, *Confusions*, p. 158.

exactly what we mean by it - we understand it and its implications better by seeing where it is being markedly infringed than by approaching it directly.

7. They help the church to take some purchase over events, and not lag far behind with an irrelevant message. We cannot be too grateful for the work of the ecumenical movement in social ethics which has enabled the churches to be up to date, in the sense of knowing what is happening, for the first time since the Industrial Revolution accelerated the speed of social change.

8. They help the church to avoid either the pietism which takes no interest in this world, or the perfectionism which can only deal in absolutes and therefore never has a relevant word to those who have to do the best possible in tangled situations, and in structures of life in which God has placed us alongside others of all faiths with whom we have to work, and which cannot pre-suppose a shared Christian faith as a basis for their working.

What Preston has offered are eight impressive reasons for a continued use of the middle-axiom method. In a multi-religious context like Singapore, his third point serves as a reminder to Christians, who have to work with experts, people of other faiths and those with no religious belief, not to claim too much in fields where they lack experience and expertise.

Although it is *via negativa*, the sixth advantage given by Preston seems particularly pertinent for a relatively comfortable Church in a materially rich Singapore. In a country where students regularly pledge to uphold "justice and equality," two derivative principles which Christians share with others, the process of middle axioms gives Christians an opportunity to exercise their prophetic voice in calling attention to where the Church or the community might have been negligent in fulfilling these principles. But beyond "justice and equality" more is expected of Christians, who are generally better educated and having higher purchasing power, to seek ways of expressing their love for God and for their neighbours, both within the community of believers and in the wider community, as required by the Great Commandment of Christ.

Unfortunately, in spite of the advantages itemized by Preston, apart from some local Church agencies in Britain which still use the middle-axiom process, the wider ecumenical scene seem to have lost interest in middle axioms.[74] Preston is disappointed that the middle-axiom method which he feels had served the international ecumenical agencies like the WCC well, has now been superseded by other methods in decision-making. In the case of the WCC, what has happened since the Geneva Conference of 1966 is that many of the documents disseminated by the WCC have tended to be written by a small number of writers without due process of consultation among her diverse constituency. Pronouncements have been made in the name of the WCC without giving fair consideration to ambiguity of issues and the diversity of views held by others who might not concur with the views purported to represent the WCC. This has given rise to spurious declarations which have attracted criticisms even from among some of WCC's keen supporters.[75]

5. Some Contextual Concerns

1) In our search for consensus which middle axioms usually hope to achieve, and in our openness to provisional directional guides, might we not compromise too readily and sacrifice the hard-headed deliberation which may lead to a more excellent result? In other words, the tendency to negotiate for consensus and the willingness to accept provisional solutions expose the middle-axiom method to the folly of finding solutions based on the

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[74] This is also noted by Forrester who observes, "More recently the middle-axiom approach has fallen out of favour, ... but strenuous efforts are being made to reconstruct and commend this approach in social ethics by R. H. Preston, G.R Dunstan, Dennis McCann, Alan Suggate, and others...." Forrester, *op. cit.*, 1989, p. 16f. See also , McCann, *op. cit.*, p. 73, "A generation ago talk of "middle axioms" was commonplace among Christian social ethicists......But what was commonplace a generation ago more recently has become rare."

[75] John Habgood, the former Archbishop of York, and for many years an active leader/participant in the WCC has observed that the "WCC has suffered such a disastrous loss of credibility among opinion formers in the Western World." He attributes this loss of credibility to "the temptation to go for grandiose but inadequately researched prophetic denunciation" in the face of the overwhelming problems carried by the Third World. According to him, there "is a lot more thinking to be done." John Habgood, *Making Sense*, p. 224. Habgood chaired an informal group of church leaders and theologians (including Preston) who had been closely associated with the WCC in the past but had been critical of the quality of recent WCC's handling of issues and resolutions. See Preston, *Confusions*, pp. 70ff.

lowest common denominator. Proponents of the middle-axiom approach will protest that that is not what the middle-axiom method is designed for. But we cannot underestimate the temptation to settle for the easiest solution and in so doing miss out on opportunity to press for the better solution which might not engender ready or popular acceptance.

2) Related to such a temptation, is the temptation to shy away from, or to be slow in recognizing the opportunity to make known the positive difference which the Christian faith can contribute to our search for policies that will enhance the common good, perhaps for fear of being ridiculed or being castigated as insensitive to people of other faiths and those with no religious allegiance. In a plural society such as Singapore, it may not be desirable or wise to wave the Christian flag all the time. But surely there are occasions when distinctive and overtly Christian contributions can be made without our being unduly apologetic about it. We think, for example, of the need for measures to be taken where families of different racial and religious groups can be housed in an open and mixed neighbourhood, where they can have free and equal access to playgrounds, schools and other social facilities designed to foster trust and promote reconciliation between people who have been scarred and divided by inter-generational conflicts. This may have to be done against the forces that seek to divide and segregate the communities by coercion and threat of violence. We have to be alert to the great possibility that a mind that is attuned to the middle-axiom method may tend to err on the side over-caution and is therefore less likely to be prescriptive, even though Preston has said that this need not be so.

3) On the practical side, there is one major but not insurmountable logistical disadvantage in the middle-axiom method which we should not overlook. It has to do with how widely the method should be used, and whether it makes sense to push for the use of the middle-axiom method by all Christian groups at different levels. Our contention is that

the middle-axiom method is better suited for use when it is guided by the principle of subsidiarity and deployed mainly at the local, national and perhaps the regional levels.[76] It is at such levels that participants can meet without having to worry too much about travelling too far or incurring high expenses besides taking up too much time from their primary occupational responsibility. From the perspective of the principle of subsidiarity, the lower the level, the more likely it is for the participants to identify with the problems at hand and to accept responsibility in working for solutions which they can own. At the lower level, the issues discussed would probably be those that have direct bearing on the well-being of the participants. Issues that are closer to the hearts of the participants would probably command a greater intensity of involvement and a deeper sense of commitment to the task. In this sense, there is much to commend the middle-axiom method, supplemented by the principle of subsidiarity, for a small, easily accessible, multi-faith country like Singapore.

4) No matter how advantageous the middle-axiom approach might be, the method becomes cumbersome, time-consuming and costly when it is employed at the international level by international institutions. We need only to look at the present-day WCC, with declining financial support and increasing membership, to see how unwieldy the task of convening a reasonably representative group of people to deliberate and to recommend middle axioms can be. Bringing experts and representatives of different regions, gender, and the poor from around the world together, to deliberate on middle axioms at the international level, is a formidable and expensive exercise. A way has to be found to keep the middle-axiom group small and manageable and at the same time sufficiently representative of the different interests and groups that made up the membership of the sponsoring organization. At the bottom line, there is always the practical question that demands a reasonable answer,

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[76] The order is correct for a small place like Singapore where 'local' is the immediate neighbourhood, 'national' refers to the country and 'regional' refers to Southeast or East Asia. Cf., Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 147.

and that is who foot the bills for such a gathering of representative decision-makers when financial support for an organization like the WCC that sponsors the gathering is dropping? More importantly there is a question of legitimacy, and that is, who selects the representatives?

Conclusion

The decision-making process in Preston's social ethics, as we have shown, is not an idea developed in detachment from the hustle and bustle of the world. This is not a system derived from an abstract and inaccessible theology. The theological framework that informs the process of finding appropriate middle axioms is concerned for the common good and the welfare of the poor and marginalized, though it refuses to be reactionary in its response and it is suspicious of any quick prescriptive answer for the social ills of the world. In many ways, because Preston's decision-making method demands thoughtful inter-disciplinary consideration, a careful analysis of empirical data and evidence assisted by counsel from experts and contribution from the poor and powerless, this approach might seem soporific and the conclusion drawn might seem tentative for those who are pressing for prompt action and a quick overhaul of policies. Even if at times the decision-making process might take longer than one would expect and the decisions taken might be provisional in nature, it would be unwise to conclude that the approach lacks decisiveness. Lest we forget, the middle-axiom process allows for occasions when decisive action might be required and new policies have to be introduced with urgency, in response to clear and present injustice.

In the absence of a perfect method for decision-making, considering the perplexing problems confronting the world with its insatiable variety of competing claims jostling for our attention, and in spite of some valid warnings and criticisms against it, on balance, there is a still a justifiable case for adopting the inter-disciplinary analytical approach favoured by

Preston for those who are engaged in doing social ethics in a complex, sometimes confusing, and a definitely plural society where seldom is one presented with a clear-cut 'gates of Auschwitz' situation which demands prompt and decisive action.

Part Three

Conclusion

A Christian Social Ethic for Singapore

The Church, born in West Asia, took almost two thousand years to reach Southeast Asia, riding on the crest of Western colonial forces. It arrived in Singapore soon after the British had colonized the island. Like most churches in East and Southeast Asia, the Church in Singapore is young, and there is no recognizable theology which can be said to be indigenous to the country. While there are theologians in Asia who have been engaged in serious theological writing that reflects the contextual concerns of those theologians,[1] there is no one theology which can claim to represent the interests and concerns of the whole of Asia. But then, since Asia is a vast continent with a rich variety of traditions and conflicting claims, it is unlikely that there will ever be a single representative Asian theology which addresses the aspirations and needs of all Asians.

What is likely, however, is that the young churches in Asia, as members of the Church Universal, will continue to do their theological reflections, in many ways still dependent on the discipline and scholarly resources provided by the older churches from Euro-North America. By way of a critical-reciprocal relationship that cross-fertilises, they will have to continue to learn from, build on, critique and hopefully contribute to the rich deposit of theological works and traditions crafted over two thousand years of Church history. The task for the Asian theologians is to adapt critically what is appropriate for their own context, and frame a social theology that will speak to the peculiar concerns of their own society. It is in that spirit that we have approached this thesis by first providing the

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[1] E.g, A. Pieris, Kim Yong Bock, K. Koyama, M. Takenaka, M.M. Thomas, and C.S.Song.

contextual concerns of Singapore, followed by a critical study of R.H. Preston's social

theology, interacting with other theologians and scholarly works, and in the process,

offering a cumulative case for a Christian social ethic that draws from, and moves beyond,

the theological works of Preston. Taking into consideration the peculiar contextual concerns

of Singapore, we are convinced that an appropriate and credible social ethic for the Church

in Singapore can be adapted from the social theology of Preston, enriched by additional

theological resources from Ecclesiological Ethics with its emphasis on Christian witness,

church life, character formation and cultivation of virtues. And from Liberation Theologies,

we have learned to be sensitive to the needs of the poor, to critique structural evil and to

take on a hermeneutics of suspicion.

The contextualized social ethic which we are offering, mainly influenced by the

works of Preston and the tradition he represents, is nourished by a doctrine of creation, a

Christian anthropology that affirms the God-endowed dignity of human beings, the freedom

and sinfulness of human nature, human sociality, the eschatological hope paved by the

redemptive work of Christ, and a recognition of the grace of God at work in the life of all

people and social structures. This means that while Christians do have a rich reservoir of

theological resources and traditions which we can draw on for our moral development,

theological task and social engagements, we cannot presume that God works only within the

confine of the Church. Neither can we presume that there are no resources outside the

Church, nor are we persuaded that all resources and worldviews outside the Church are

necessarily violent or nihilistic. As we have argued, within the traditional Asian

philosophical resources we can, for instance, use philosophical *Tao* and the Confucian *Jen*

as conceptual tools for Christians to work with others and to develop a contextual

understanding of what it is to foster the common good in the East and Southeast Asian

context. If Christians in Europe can use Greek philosophical categories to explain the

mystery of the Gospel and interpret the teaching of the Church, it would be foolish and Eurocentric to exclude philosophical tools from Asian philosophical traditions to help explain the Christian faith and moral vision to a wider Asian audience.

Moreover, when engaging in the political arena, it would be a folly for Christians to be presumptuous in assuming that only Christians have the best answers to all the vexatious problems of the world or that Christians are the only people who are concerned about the welfare of the poor and powerless. It is precisely because we reject such pretensions and also because we reject the temptation to retreat into our own enclave as "Resident Aliens" that we are open to working with people of other faiths and those with no religious belief, if necessary using appropriate philosophical tools available from the rich Asian traditions. There is a strong case for consensus building and for adopting a humble spirit in the way we go about making our contribution to the common good, and Preston's approach allows for that.

Does that mean therefore that there is no place for a radical approach to social engagement in the context of Singapore? The answer is yes if by being radical we mean that we have always to take on a militant, abrasive or confrontative crusade against the government or other powerful special interest groups, as if we alone are on the side of justice and righteousness. Yet Christians can be radical in the sense of being radically critical without being abrasive or confrontative. This is the critical solidarity approach which Preston speaks about. In an Asian culture, especially one which has imbibed the Confucian ethos that is older than the Christian faith, the wise who are culture-sensitive will usually seek solutions to social problems through negotiation and consensus building without trying to score points in public, or be seen as unreasonably disrespectful to a legitimate authority, especially one which, though not perfect, has a track record of

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governing well and winning successive elections. It is only when the ruler has lost the "mandate of heaven," the mythic legitimization of the right to rule, that the people have the right to rebel against the emperor, and that will be the time for Christians to take a firm stand and adopt a radical confrontative approach against blatant injustice and tyranny. Preston describes that as a "boundary situation," akin, he says, to Paul Ramsey's "gateway of Auschwitz situation".[2] At such a time, love may demand that we have to be prepared to "lay down our lives for our brothers." By and large, however, through a reciprocal relationship and constructive-critical engagement, our Christian social ethic can endorse and help to enhance the values and aspiration encapsulated in the Singapore Pledge and Shared Values as we go about "building a democratic society based on justice and equality" in co-operation with people of other faiths and philosophies.

This thesis, which depends critically on, and yet develops beyond the social theology of Ronald Preston and the theological tradition to which he belongs, is a small but hopefully not an insignificant contribution to formulating a Christian Social Ethic that is both contextual and ecumenical, appropriate for a plural post-colonial Singapore.

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[2] Preston, *Church and Society*, p. 155.

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