

CAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY SERVE INDONESIA? SEMPER REFORMANDA AND THE SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES OF OUR TIMES

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores liberation theology as theology that liberates theology itself from time-conditioned human past limitations. It outlines the principles of Christian liberation theology and points towards parallels in the Islamic tradition. Using examples from Indonesia and Scotland, including the author's connections with the Papua Province of Indonesia, it shows how an applied theology based on love in action can bridge differences across denominations and faiths. It can lead not just to dialogue, but to a deeper mutual appreciation and taking care of one another. In particular, liberation theologies can help us to overcome violence in the world today, healing communities that are broken, overcoming poverty, and leading towards a fuller human development in promised "life abundant."

ABSTRAK: Makalah ini mengeksplorasi teologi pembebasan sebagai teologi yang membebaskan teologi itu sendiri dari batasan manusia

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di masa lalu karena kondisi waktu. Makalah ini memberi dasar prinsip dari teologi pembebasan Kristen dan membandingkannya dengan tradisi Islam yang paralel. Dengan menggunakan contoh dari Indonesia dan Skotlandia, termasuk hubungan penulis dengan provinsi Papua, makalah ini menunjukkan bagaimana sebuah aplikasi dari teologi berbasis kasih dapat menjembatani perbedaan antar denominasi dan iman. Dia dapat menunjuk bukan hanya ke dialog, tetapi juga ke sebuah apresiasi bersama yang lebih dalam untuk saling memperhatikan. secara khusus, teologi-teologi pembebasan membantuk kita mengatasi kekerasan di dunia pada masa ini, menyembuhkan komunitas yang terluka, mengatasi kemiskinan, dan menuntun menuju sebuah pertumbuhan manusia yang sepenuhnya dalam “kehidupan yang berkelimpahan.”

KEYWORDS: liberation theology, Indonesia, Scotland, poverty, violence, nonviolence, community empowerment, interfaith.

KATA-KATA KUNCI: teologi pembebasan, Indonesia, Skotlandia, kemiskinan, kekerasan, nirkekerasan, pemberdayaan komunitas, lintas iman.

Introduction: Experiencing Indonesia

This paper is based on a lecture delivered to staff at the Sekolah Tinggi Teologi in Jakarta in February 2013. I use it to explore my encounter with liberation theology and how it has since influenced my life's work. Let me introduce myself with a memory that goes back over 30 years to my first visit to Indonesia. I passed through the country while travelling back to Scotland after working as a Voluntary Service Overseas volunteer in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Although I was from a very Protestant (Presbyterian) island in Scotland, I had been posted to teach at a Roman Catholic vocational school under the retired archbishop of PNG, Virgil Patrick Copas.

He and I had many discussions about religion. One day he gave me a copy of the Vatican II documents and said, “Read this. You see, we are trying to change, and I do believe that the Second Vatican Council was the work of the Holy Spirit. It was a charism – a holy gift.”

Most of the contents were beyond me at that time. However, I

read the passages about other faiths and what stuck in my mind were sections like this one, from *Lumen Gentium*,

But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God.... Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life (Vatican II 1964, 16).

It was as I left PNG that I saw an example of this spirit in action. I was travelling with my friend and we flew from Vanimo in PNG to Jayapura in what was then called Irian Jaya, now Papua. From there we went to Makassar or Ujung Pandang (as it was called at the time) in Sulawesi. Our plan was to travel as deck passengers on a cargo ship to Surabaya in Java.

We had no idea what to expect. The only place we could find that was not already occupied had suspended over it the cages of brightly coloured birds that were being sent for sale in Java. When the boat got moving and the cages swung about, we got showered with "fertiliser!" We moved to another part of the boat, up in the bows, but when the sea became stormy we got blasted with ocean spray. It was a boat trip from Hell, but then an Indonesian angel appeared. The captain had seen us, and wanted to give us his private cabin and food from the ship's kitchen. He refused any payment. I wish I could remember his name. All that I remember now is his full, round, smiling Javanese face. He was a Roman Catholic and most of his crew were Muslim, but religious differences did not bother any of them. Their faith was kindness, and that grace-filled generosity was my first experience of Indonesia.

Some Principles of Liberation Theology

What excited me about the experience of living with Roman Catholics in PNG, and then encountering close working relationships between Christians and Moslems on that ship to Surabaya was that they showed that religious differences do not have to divide us. We do not have to be all the same. Rather, we can value each other's differences – they are part of the rich diversity of being human – and work with one another to overcome such evils as prejudice, poverty and war. I soon discovered that people who were doing this were often working with their religions in a way that has come to be known as liberation

theology (Gutiérrez 1988; Boff & Boff 1987; Esquivel 1992). They were using scripture to legitimise taking challenging action.

The Bible is a treasure chest of many locks, the keys to which lie waiting in the human heart (cf. 2Cor. 3:2). Liberation theology seeks to turn those keys and does so by focussing on divine love for the poor. Often its roots are traced to the constitutional document *Gaudium et Spes* - "Joy and Hope" - which reminded Roman Catholics (and hopefully all people of goodwill) that "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties" of the poor and afflicted are shared by Christ, and "the right of having a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone" (Vatican 1965, paragraphs 1 & 69).

There are many scriptural passages that support a reading of the Bible that puts the needs of the poor first - God's "preferential option for the poor." Before preaching to the multitudes, Jesus would ensure that the people were fed (e.g. Mk. 8). Only then did he begin to preach, and to remind them that we do not live from "bread alone" (Matt. 4:4). In reading from Isaiah 61, Christ announced his mission statement as being "to proclaim good news to the poor ... to preach deliverance to the captives" (Lk. 4:18-19). He came to bring "peace on earth" and "good will toward men" and to realise "good tidings of great joy" (Lk. 2:10-14). He said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40). In Luke 4:19 his proclamation of the Jubilee (the Acceptable Year of the Lord) encodes the Hebrew Bible's ethic of the periodic cancelling of debts, the freeing of slaves and the redistribution of the land.

We should note Jesus' selective use of the Hebrew Bible. In reading Isaiah 61, he stopped before reaching the passages that speak about enjoying the "wealth of the nations" and having the "sons of the alien" placed in service beneath you (Isaiah 61:5-6). That is, he omitted the socially unjust parts of the Old Testament. We see here the Bible as a set of documents that evolves through time. Neither should a term like "the poor" be interpreted only to mean the materially poor. It also covers the poor in spirit, thus the oppressor is "poor" as well as the oppressed, but in different ways. As Paulo Freire of Brazil explained,

Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one. The man who emerges is a new man, viable only as the oppressor-oppressed contradiction is superseded by the humanization of all men ... no longer oppressor or oppressed, but man in the process of obtaining freedom (Freire 1972, 25).

The so-called “father” of liberation theology is Gustavo Gutiérrez of Peru. He defines liberation with the simple formula: To Liberate = To Give Life (Gutiérrez 1988, xxxvii; cf. Jn. 10:28). He suggests that the process takes place at three levels of human life. The headings that I have used to organise these here are my own naming system, but the quotations are his,

1. THE SOCIAL LEVEL: as “liberation from social situations of oppression and marginalization.”
2. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LEVEL: as “a personal transformation by which we live with profound inner freedom in the face of every kind of servitude.”
3. THE SPIRITUAL LEVEL: as “liberation from sin, which attacks the deepest root of all servitude; for sin is the breaking of friendship with God and with other human beings (Gutiérrez 1988, xxxviii).

Gutiérrez expands on this,

Therefore, sin is not only an impediment to salvation in the afterlife. Insofar as it constitutes a break with God, sin is a historical reality, it is a breach of the communion of persons with each other, it is a turning in of individuals on themselves which manifests itself in a multifaceted withdrawal from others (Gutiérrez 1988, 85).

Many Protestant churches – especially those affiliated to the World Council of Churches - have embraced these insights in recent decades. They are an extension of the Reformation maxim - *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* – “The reformed church is the church that is always reforming itself.” We should remember that the very word, protestant, is from the Latin, pro-testari – meaning to “testify for” something – and therefore implies a liberation theology. Sometimes we are called to be God’s mouth and hands; other times to be God’s eyes and ears, for as an old Scottish proverb puts it, when faced with injustice we should never forget, “God is not sleeping.”

Worldwide, liberation theology has broadened since its inception in the 1960s to include a raft of approaches including black, Asian and indigenous theologies, feminist theologies, ecotheologies, non-violent theologies and sexual theologies (Rowland (ed.) 2007). Such theologies represent very grounded and human approaches to doing theology. As an American Presbyterian theologian with strong Scottish connections puts it in the opening lines of his book,

In beginning an exploration of liberation theology, it was important not to begin with concepts or principles or historical excursions, but to begin with

people - people who live in very precarious circumstances, who put their lives on the line every day (and night) for their faith, and who live out the things about which I, for the most part, merely write.... When I hear the words “liberation theology,” it is their faces that I see.... (McAfee Brown 1993, 19).

Similarly, the opening lines of a key volume on Asian women's theology,

Asian women's theology has been created out of the historical context of Asia's struggle for full humanity. The women of Asia awakened from their long silence and began to speak out in their own language about their experience of the divine ... these radical ideas on women's liberation, which originally developed during the period of decolonisation (Chung 1990, 11).

For nearly forty years the debate on liberation theology has been partially stalled under the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. While this did not inhibit advances outside the mainstream of the Roman Catholic Church or at a grassroots level, as with base Christian communities in Latin America, reticence within the Catholic hierarchy did inhibit full ecumenical exploration, celebration and sharing. However, as this article was going to press, fresh vigour and interest was introduced by the revelation that Pope Francis had met privately with Gustavo Gutiérrez. While not explicitly endorsing liberation theology, Francis gives every sign of embracing its tenets (McElwee 2013; Valente 2013). Hopefully this will bring new life to Christianity, not just within the Roman Catholic community but also, with Protestants and Orthodoxy. We are perhaps seeing, in this the third millennium, the dawning of a new era of spiritual hope.

Applied Liberation Theology in Scotland

In Scotland I have widely used liberation theology in my work on land reform and environmental protection (McIntosh 1995 & 2001; Henneman & McIntosh 2009). One example was to help prevent the destruction of a mountain on the Isle of Harris that a multinational company wanted to turn into the biggest road-stone quarry in the world. Another was in starting off the modern Scottish land reform process (with the Isle of Eigg Trust). The role of liberation theology in these instances was to help sanction social action for change. So often, people feel that they lack the legitimacy to act. For those who are open to spiritual teachings, the thought that God might be with them can be very empowering. So too is the thought that the Creation reveals the

majesty of God and should not be destroyed for wanton greed.

These days I live and work in a deprived urban area of Glasgow in Scotland and I sometimes use liberation theology in this work. The process is very simple. I select Bible passages that we explore in the context both of the times when they were written and in our times today. This is about doing contextual theology. For example, working with recovering drug addicts and alcoholics, or just ordinary members of the community, we might study the different accounts of the story of the Gadarene demoniac and especially Mark 5:1-20. I will ask people whether they recognise this self-harming “demoniac” in their own community. Of course, everybody does, and often they see him in themselves. I then point out that we know from Book 7 of Josephus’ *The War of the Jews* that the Jewish Revolt took place in AD 66 around the same time that Mark’s gospel was being written. Vespasian, who later became the 9th Emperor of Rome, slaughtered all the youth and burnt the city of Gadara as part of his brutal reprisals. I pose the question: who was it that ate pigs in that era? Not the Jews! They were probably to feed the occupying forces. The “Legion” of demons that possessed the demoniac – all two-thousand of them - were “exorcised” back into the pigs, and then drowned themselves in the sea – symbolising, perhaps, the sea from which the Romans had arrived in the first place.

As such, the demoniac’s suffering can be understood as a story about colonisation by the spirit of imperialism. It helps people to feel legitimised in making their own connections to their own “psychohistory” or psychological history by which the poor, historically, were driven off their ancestral lands. But it is no use to leave people wallowing in the analysis of their suffering. We then move on to healing stories, like the raising of Jarius’ daughter (Lk. 8:40-56). A group can enquire: what kind of “food” – literal or metaphorical - did Jesus intend the father to give the girl? A clue might be that the woman who had followed Jesus earlier that day had been bleeding for twelve years. Jarius’ daughter was also twelve years old. Could this symmetry imply a coded message about gender oppression? If so, what does it say to gender roles today?

Finally, we can move beyond the personal to transpersonal visions of reality. We might turn to John’s vision of the vine of life (Jn. 15) and ask what kind of a sense of interconnection is needed not just for our personal healing, but also for “the healing of the nations” in today’s world (Ez. 47:12; Rev. 22:2)?

Interfaith and the Healing of Nations

Notice how, in the above example, there was a liaison from personal suffering to collective healing and with that, the development of an expanded and interconnected sense of what it means to be a human being. Unless we can respect the full humanity of others irrespective of their ethnicity or religion there will never be peace on earth and joy will always be tainted by poverty. This returns us to the passage quoted above from *Lumen Gentium* and to the imperative of not just interfaith “dialogue,” but interfaith appreciation. It also returns me to experiences here in Indonesia where the cultural richness is such that the opportunity to bridge differences is constantly present.

I came to Indonesia this year as part of work that my wife, Vèrène Nicolas, and I have been carrying out with the planning officers of BAPPEDA in Papua Province. We have been helping them to work more effectively as government officers for and with the people and of course, they comprise a mixture of Moslems and Christians of both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds. This has proven to be very rich because the question of community development can be understood as how to cultivate community in its deepest meanings – as what Muslims call the *Ummah* or *Umat*, Buddhists call the *Noble Sangha* and Christians call the *Church*. I know that some Christians would object to viewing these terms in an inclusive manner, but let us not forget that Jesus himself said “I have other sheep, which are not of this sheepfold” (Jn. 10:16; cf. Jn. 14:2, Eph. 1:2), and the Holy Qu’ran teaches that Christians are “nearest amongst the Believers in love” (QS 5:85-88).

When we visited Yogyakarta our guide said, “Look – here is the biggest Buddhist temple in the world at the heart of the biggest Muslim country in the world, and most of the visitors are local Muslims!” It was the same at the Prambanan Hindu temple, and when I got back to the Christian centre where we were staying in Jakarta I woke up in the middle of the night with a sense of being shown how all of these represent layer upon layer of the manifestation of God in Java. I know that in some parts of Indonesia there are violent tensions between different religious groups, but this is what we must all work to overcome. Jesus said that we must try and love even those who we might find hardest to love (Matthew 5:43-48).

Now, here is a story about this that came out of our work with the BAPPEDA team. At one point, Vèrène Nicolas, put a question to

BAPPEDA's then-head, Alex Rumaseb. In front of his staff she asked him what it was that had given him such a passionate commitment to working for integral human development and peaceful relationships in Papua. Alex said that his family were from the Papuan coast, but that when he was a boy the family had lived in the highlands. There his sister was murdered as a consequence of ethnic tensions in the community. However, Alex was determined not to fall prey to hatred. When he qualified for his work as a government officer he made a point of going back to work in the same area. He came to understand what had caused the troubles at that time, and to forgive what had been done to his family.

This led to him being respected by people on all sides and has helped to shape the way in which he has role-modelled leadership in BAPPEDA. To me, that is an example of applied liberation theology. Alex felt a Christian imperative to break the relentless "spiral of violence" (Camera 1971). He became a man capable of speaking truth to power, but speaking that truth to power in love. To speak truth to power in love does not mean running away from injustices. It means facing them, but with God-given courage. My late friend, the American theologian Walter Wink, suggested that transforming the abuse of power is a threefold process (Wink 1992). We must:

- Name the Powers that Be, finding the courage to say what is wrong and why;
- Unmask the Powers, revealing how and why they cause oppression;
- Engage the Powers, seeking not to destroy them violently, but to call them back nonviolently to their higher God-given vocation (Rm. 13).

If we can take the example of Indonesia again, we must not pull away from naming the fact that in the past, so-called "Christian" colonisers killed many tens of thousands of people in East Java. They even used Islam to break the nature spirituality of Javanese mysticism that had previously anchored the people in their strong sense of identity with the land. When the native Javanese revolted the Dutch cut off the heads of captives and hung them from the trees to terrify the populace into obedience. When their policies in East Java resulted in population collapse, they brought in prostitutes as brood mares to increase the stock of labour (Beatty 1999, 1-24).

This spiral of violence continued in different ways into the tragic period of American intervention during Indonesia's dictatorship in the 1960s. As everybody knows, it wiped out much of a generation of artists and intellectuals. In some parts of Indonesia it left hardly a family untouched as either a victim or a perpetrator of the (Vltchek 2012; Goodman & Oppenheimer 2013). We can name the "power" that Indonesia was colonised to exploit its people and resources. We can unmask the fact that this left cultural wounds that resulted in the era of dictatorship. It seems to me that good people in Indonesia, including within its elected government, are now working to engage with those issues to bring about a healing of the nation. This is God-given work, the work of Christ, Allah, Brahman, however we understand the God of love within our own tradition.

For me, as a Christian, this kind of work is about understanding the nonviolence of Jesus' life and teaching (Weaver 2001; McIntosh 2010, WCC 2012). It means learning, in this third millennium, to see the Cross as the supreme symbol of nonviolence – as a sign of the love of God that absorbs the violence (or "sin") of the world, and leaves us with a new heart and a new spirit because it takes the stone out of our hearts, and gives us a heart of living flesh (Ez. 36:26). Let us remember that when Jesus cleansed the temple it was the Court of the Gentiles out of which he drove the money-changers (using the whip not on people, but to drive out the animals there to be sacrificed as the original Greek of Jn. 2:15 suggests). This Court of the Gentiles was the area set aside for non-Jews to worship – if you like, the interfaith area of the temple - and the significance of this for inter-ethnic relationships only becomes clear when Jesus' words are traced back to their origins in the Hebrew Bible (Mk. 11:15-19; Jer. 7:11; Isa. 56:7).

My analysis here may be criticised by those who say: "What about the Moslems – they do not follow nonviolence." I would suggest that this is not the case. Islam, properly understood, is a way of peace. There is a strong tradition of Islamic nonviolence that we Christians too often hear too little about it (Abu-Nimer 2003; Easwaran 1999). The Qu'ran prohibits unjust war (QS 2:190). The hadiths of the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) prohibit killing women and children (Bukhari 32), killing by burning (Bukhari 52), it requires the humane treatment of prisoners of war (Bukhari 52), and that the dead should not be mutilated (Sira 388) (Stewart 1995). Most remarkable of

all is the Qu'ranic account of the Cain and Abel story. Here Abel refuses to raise his hand in self-defence against his brother. He nonviolently accepts his own death because, he says, to have killed would not have been pleasing to "Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds" (Surah 5:30-35).

This is very beautiful. These are the kind of scriptural passages around which we can build dialogue and mutual appreciation. I am left with a reflection from the late Fr Raimon Panikkar who was of both an Indian Hindu and Spanish Christian background. In his *Nine Sutras on Peace* he wrote: "Peace is participation in the harmony of the rhythm of Being.... Only forgiveness, reconciliation, ongoing dialogue, leads to Peace, and breaks the law of karma" (Panikkar 1991).

An Example of Interfaith Reconciliation

Liberation theology as a generalised approach to liberating theology from the "time-conditioning" of the past also finds expression within non-Christian faiths including Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. Within Islam, the thought of Ali Shariati of Iran has been particularly identified with a liberationist praxis. So also, in my opinion, can we view the analyses of Musa al-Sadr of Iran and Muhammad Abdah of Egypt (Rahnema 1994), and I am sure that there are many Indonesian examples as well.

Let me give an example from Scotland of what such mutual respect across religions can look like. At the end of the First Gulf War the British Government called upon church leaders to organise national services of thanksgiving. "Do not be shy," said the commander of the British forces on the BBC's Nine O'clock News on the last day of February 1991. "I have a message for the people back home. Ring your church bells." But the same news bulletin carried the news that one hundred thousand Iraqi conscripts were dead.

The mainstream church leaders of Scotland – both Protestant and Catholic – had loudly opposed the war. They ordered their bells to stay silent and the British government in London was told that this was no occasion for "thanksgiving" (Hulbert & McIntosh 1992, 69). An interfaith conference of spiritual leaders was held on the holy Isle of Iona. From this a joint Moslem-Christian communiqué resulted in the decision that national interfaith services of reconciliation would take place – not services to celebrate a victory. One would be in Edinburgh's St Giles Cathedral and the other in the community hall of the Glasgow

Mosque. But a problem arose with the Edinburgh event. The timing was going to clash with the Moslems' evening call to prayer. This meant that our most honoured guests would be unable to attend.

It was then that Dr Bashir Maan of Glasgow Mosque remembered something from the Hadith, the oral tradition of Islam. The Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) had allowed visiting Christians to use his mosque in Medina for their worship (cf. Acar 2005). Might it be conceivable, he wondered, for us likewise to do something in this spirit today? Scotland's Christian leaders responded positively. They would allow Moslem worship to be conducted in front of the altar at St Giles Cathedral as part of the service. It thereby came to pass that Christians watched on in silence as the community of Moslems prayed in their church. Our silence felt respectful to the point of full prayerful participation.

The following week, on 25 October 1991, Imam Tufail Hussain Shah addressed Christians at prayer in the community hall of the Glasgow Mosque. Referring to the previous week's event, he said,

We joined that night, and again now in this Mosque, to worship the same God, God as was known to the early Jews as Yahweh. God as revealed in the Christian tradition through Jesus Christ. God who we Muslims know by the Arabic word, Allah... We share a common commitment to love, justice, charity, mercy, piety and peace. Building these qualities in our hearts perhaps matters more to God than cleverness in arguing about religion. I believe it is God, Allah, who has brought us together. Let us try to stay together and work for peace not only in the Gulf and Middle East, but throughout this planet, this Universe of God (from my personal records).

Some years later I was telling this story whilst lecturing to forestry students at Edinburgh University. The son of a Nigerian imam came up to me afterwards. "You know," he told me, "we read all about that in our newspaper in Nigeria." He explained that at the time Moslems and Christians were killing each other in his country. His father and his colleagues were so astonished to hear that Scottish Christians had been able to work with Muslims in this way. As he understood it, this is a country "where 98% of them are Christian!" They decided to try and develop a similarly conciliatory approach with the Christian leaders in their area. The killings did not entirely stop as a result, but they greatly reduced.

Let me, at the risk of impropriety, give a further and personal practical example of what I mean. While working with BAPPEDA in

February we were taken to Pulau Numfor near Biak. I gave a number of talks in villages, mostly held in churches or village halls. Because I was being paid international consultancy rates I was relatively wealthy and so I shared with these churches, leaving each one with enough money to buy a sack of rice. It was fitting reciprocation for their hospitality.

Opposite the government guest house where we stayed was the island's mosque. I had watched the island's Muslims going to pray there, including some of the BAPPEDA staff. One night I went over and said, *As-Salāmu 'Alaykum* (Peace be upon you). A young woman doctor who had perfect English and who was there to pray translated, and we began a conversation. The Imam was so pleased and surprised that he went off on his motorbike and came back with a large bundle of coconuts for us all to drink. We had a very warm sharing and when I left, I left the same donation for the mosque as I had left for the churches. The Imam was very surprised, but I said - "Why should I treat the mosque any differently to the churches? Are you not all doing the work of Allah" – and I was mindful that in the Indonesian Bible, the word "God" is translated using the Arabic word, "Allah".

It is with slight embarrassment that I tell that story. Normally our giving should be kept private (Matt. 6:3). However, I share the story simply to show that interfaith appreciation is not rocket science. You can do it with a bundle of coconuts and a bag of rice!

One last point on that. If we all cared for the integrity and wellbeing of one another's faiths, religious violence would soon become a thing of the past. I believe that it is particularly important for Christian groups to understand this wherever they comprise an elite minority. Minority groups are often disadvantaged, but they can also enjoy privileges. This happens because they sometimes develop high levels of socio-economic cohesion amongst themselves. They may also have privileged access to wealth or education linked to powerful units like Europe or America. Where this is the case it is important to guard against the building up of inequality that can stimulate jealousy and resentment with neighbouring religious communities. The Christian must always ask, "Who is my neighbour?" Those interests must be placed alongside their own so that we love our neighbour as ourselves (Matt. 22:39).

Conclusion: The “Ardent Desire” for God

I will close with one last story. In June last year when I was home on the Isle of Lewis (where I was raised) I went to visit my friend the Rev Calum Macdonald who is a minister of the Free Church of Scotland, a Presbyterian. His Calvinist theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith is not the same as my Quaker approach to Christianity, but that is not a difference that needs to divide us.

“The old people of the island,” he said, as I sat down with him for a cup of tea and broke a piece of cake, “maintained that there is only one quality in the human heart that the Devil cannot counterfeit. We call it the *miann*. It is a Gaelic word. It means ardent desire. The ardent desire for God. The old people often said that the one thing the Devil cannot counterfeit in the human heart is the ardent desire for God.”

In this paper I have tried to map out a picture of liberation theology drawing from personal experience in both Indonesia and Scotland. I have focussed especially on overcoming violence, and doing so in contexts of tensions between faiths. I do believe that this is the way of the Cross when properly understood, and equally, the way of Islam. I am not interested in whether a person says that they are a Protestant or a Catholic, a Muslim, Christian or Hindu. I am interested in whether or not we can share rice and coconuts together – like that boy with his loaves and fishes in the feeding of the five thousand. I am interested in whether we can be “always reforming” in ways that are open to the movement of the Spirit of God (John 14:15-20). That is what fills us with the charism of the *miann*. It is what leads us to live not just any old rubbish life, but “life abundant” (John 10:10).

In the name of Christ, God bless you, and *fi amaan Allah* – “May Allah protect you.”

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Note from the author: Those who are not familiar with Indonesian Christianity should be aware that in Indonesian the English word, "God", is translated (via Arabic linguistic influences) as "Allah". Where I use the term here it is intended on an interfaith basis in both this general sense, and in its specific Islamic sense. Neither this journal nor any of the Indonesian bodies that I refer to are responsible for the contents of this piece - the opinions expressed are my own alone, and I hope are expressed with accuracy and fairness. For press reports on my work with my wife, Verene Nicolas, and colleagues from the Centre for Human Ecology in relation to Indonesia, see:

Indonesian: <http://goo.gl/g1qI0j>

English: <http://goo.gl/91TzQl>

