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THE GOSPEL IN SINGAPORE
THE IMPACT OF CIVIL RELIGION AND CIVIL LAW

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Mark J Madson
April 2015

Approved by _____
Dr. Thomas Manteufel Advisor

Dr. Robert Kolb Reader

Dr. Victor Raj Reader

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Elizabeth.

I do not despise the grace of God, for if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died in vain.

Galatians 2:21

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PREFACE

Singapore has a variegated religious complexion that is quickly appreciated but slowly understood. When this study began in 2009, it was hoped that researching civil religion within the Republic would yield some direction and insight for pastors and Christian laymen that labor there. Christianity is certainly not novel to any former British Crown Colony; however, the rapid modernization and academic achievements of this bit of land in Southeast Asia make it particularly interesting to students of religion and Christianity. Of particular interest to Lutheran readers are the perennially relevant categories of law, gospel, righteousness and their interaction with civil society. It was hoped that this study would yield perspectives on Christianity and culture in Singapore that would give readers a pair of Lutheran eyes.

From the beginning my advisor, Dr. Thomas Manteufel, has acted as a sounding board for many ideas and possible research directions. He has offered a steady and encouraging voice to the effort while guiding me through the hoops of a doctoral program. His many suggestions and constructive observations have been invaluable to the effort. Also, the comments and critiques of my proposal committee and dissertation readers, Dr. Robert Kolb, Dr. Victor Raj, and Dr. Joel Biermann have enriched the project and illuminated many potential avenues for further thought and work.

To the library staff at Concordia Seminary St. Louis, especially Eric Stancliff.

To Richard Chiu for gathering a critical White Paper and for brotherly encouragement.

To the Christian folk with whom I associated in Singapore and first formed my ideas about religion and culture while living there for seven years, especially Edwin and Mabel Raj, Paul and Siok Tambyah, Chris and Hilda Lee, Dan and Karen Bloomquist, James Lim, Edwin Han, Chris Deng, Nick Singh and Jimmy Khoo. I have fond memories of the fellowship of Christians and the sincerity of their faith.

To Audrey and Gordon, Charles and Carolyn, Virginia and Athar, and Bruce who during the years of study were always a source of encouragement.

To Hannah, Joshua and Luke, who relocated their lives to the city of St. Louis in order to facilitate my theological studies after having spent so much time on the road in Asia.

As always, the author alone is responsible for all statements of fact and interpretation made in this book, as well as any errors.

Mark J. Madson

April 25, 2015

CHRONOLOGY

First Charter of Justice granted to Prince of Wales' Island (Penang) Court of Judicature of Prince of Wales's Island established.	1807
Sir Stamford Raffles appointed Lt. Governor of Java	1811
Raffles founds modern Singapore British East India Company established as tenant.	Jan. 1819
William Farquhar installed as Resident of Singapore	Feb. 1819
Farquhar, Hussein, Abdur Rahman hold informal court	1819-1823
Raffles redistricts community boundaries	Jun. 1819
Raffles issues first law "regulations"	Jan. 1823
John Crawfurd installed as Second Resident of Singapore	1823
Treaty of Friendship and Alliance Seas, straits, and islands within 10 miles of Singapore ceded to East India Company.	Aug. 1824
East India Company consolidates Straits Settlements Penang, Melaka, and Singapore government consolidated.	1826
Second Charter of Justice granted to the Straits Settlements Court of Judicature of Prince of Wales's Island, Singapore, and Melaka established.	Nov. 1826
Straits Settlements Act 1866 Straits Settlements gain recognition as Crown Colony.	1866
Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements Formed	1868
Mohomedan Marriage Ordinance of 1880	1880
Mohammedan Advisory Board Formation	1915
Japanese Military Administration begins	Feb. 1942
British Military Administration begins	Aug. 1945

Straits Settlements (Repeal) Act 1946 Singapore gains recognition as Crown Colony.	1946
Maria Hertogh Religious Riots in Singapore	Dec. 1950
(English) State of Singapore Act 1958 Singapore granted internal self-government.	1958
Shari'ah Court Sole Jurisdiction over Muslim Marriage	1958
(English) Malaysia Act 1963, (Malaya) Malaysia Act 1963 Singapore enters the Federation of Malaysia.	1963
Malay-Chinese Race Riots in Singapore	1964
Independence of Singapore Agreement	Aug. 1965
Republic of Singapore adopts Constitutional Framework Amalgamation of Constitution of the State of Singapore 1963, the Republic of Singapore Independence Act 1965, and portions of the Malaysian Federal Constitution.	Dec. 1965
Muslim Brotherhood Plot	1978
Hindu-Sikh Unrest (Indira Ghandi assassinated 1984)	1984-1989
Religious Knowledge Curriculum in Singapore Schools	1984-1989
Protestant Christian Aggressive Proselytization	1986
Marxist-Catholic Conspiracy	1987
Our National Ethic Speech - Goh Chok Tong	1988
The National Ideology Speech - Lee Hsien Loong	1989
Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act 1990 Presidential Council on Maintenance of Religious Harmony formed.	1990
Shared Values White Paper	1991
Democracy and Human Rights Speech - Lee Kuan Yew	1992
September 11th Attacks	2001

Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests	Dec. 2001
Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles Formed	2002
Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism White Paper	2003
Declaration of Religious Harmony Adopted	2003
Community Engagement Program Launch	2006
Little India Riots	2013
Death of Founding Father of Modern Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew	2015

ABSTRACT

Madson, Mark, J. "The Gospel in Singapore: The Impact of Civil Religion and Civil Law." Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2015. 240 pp.

The author explores the development of civil religion in the Republic of Singapore, paying special attention to its sources in English common law, Confucianism, and the Peoples' Action Party (PAP) ideology of economic pragmatism. Colonial and modern civil religious law, including the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act of 1990, serve as the basis for analyzing the interaction of the state and traditional religious traditions. The Singapore Story, as told by Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP, provides a narrative context for interpreting the terms of Singaporean civil religion. The concepts of harmony and self-cultivation are explored within traditional Confucianism and civil religion. The active righteousness of this civil religion is then compared and contrasted with the passive or spiritual righteousness of Christianity using confessional Lutheran theology. Because civil righteousness is promoted by an authoritarian government so pervasively, it puts at risk a proper understanding of Christian righteousness. Therefore, the Church must respond to civil religion with a public theology. The narrative of this theological response includes distinguishing the passive righteousness of faith from all other forms of righteousness. This public theology need not attempt to Christianize law and society but it must clearly delineate the dual rule of God and the created orders which take on a unique form in Singapore. Finally, some considerations of the limits of obedience to political authority and the direction of service within the orders of Singaporean life are outlined.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Recently, an old book made it into my hands and head. It was *The Law/Gospel Debate* written by Gerhard Forde in 1969.¹ The book is an engaging argument that sixteenth-century Lutheran orthodoxy systematized the doctrine of the atonement in such a way that the law became a speculative construction based on the “static-ontological concept of divine law.”² The law thus became *lex aeterna*, an eternal, unchangeable standard providing a rational framework for the doctrine of the atonement. Forde argues that in nineteenth-century Lutheran orthodoxy this gave rise to understanding law and gospel as the content of propositions, and thus faith became an act of cognition. When historical criticism with its attendant evaluation of scripture entered the picture, verbal infallibility became the means by which to uphold this orthodox propositional truth. Then J. C. K. Hofmann substituted his *Heilsgeschichte* for the moral law, which had been relativized by historical criticism, as a means to salvage the theological system. This, according to Forde, was the historical genesis of the more modern Law-Gospel debate. Whether or not one agrees with this thesis *in toto*, and whether one thinks this a more fair criticism of Reformed theology³ than of Lutheran orthodoxy as a whole, the point is well taken that *as the relationship between the historical situation and the law changes, significant*

¹ Gerhard O. Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1969).

² Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 4.

³ Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 9–14. In this passage Forde links Lutheran theologian E. W. Hengstenberg with 19th century orthodox Biblicism and argues that this brand of theology provoked the attacks of J. C. K. Hofmann and his concept of salvation history as law. Some of his criticism seems to me to be more properly

distortions of the gospel may be more likely within theological reflection. Then these distortions may enter the church through teaching and proclamation. The question at hand is what peculiar risks today's *historical situation* poses to the gospel.

As theologians,⁴ we can do little to control the times and places in which we “live and move and have our being.” We are born into a particular place at a particular time and get on with our theologizing as best we can. To give a more practical point to this, from 1996 to 2003 my family and I lived for a time in the Republic of Singapore. Singapore, a former British Crown Colony, which was formally organized as a republic independent from both Britain and the Federation of Malaysia in 1965, could be termed a rather authoritarian form of democracy.⁵ In the American media prior to 9/11 Singapore was frequently caricatured as a strong arm state where teenage vandals were inhumanely caned for offenses,⁶ where drug trafficking of 500g of marijuana was punishable by death,⁷ and where the state engaged in propaganda campaigns in

directed toward a Reformed understanding of scripture.

⁴ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being A Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 10–19. Here we follow Forde in the sense that theologians are just people who speak about God. As theologians of the cross we acknowledge that there is much out of our control, but we seek to speak faithfully about God, calling a thing what it really is. In terms of the gospel in this dissertation that will mean to “attack the way of glory, the way of law, human works, and free will, because the way of glory simply operates as a defense mechanism against the cross.” This does not mean that the law is of no value in living but simply that it does not justify us before God.

⁵ William Safire of the *New York Times* had a running feud with the policies and pronouncements of Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of the Republic of Singapore, that ran from the early 1990s through 2003. See for example, “Crime in Singapore,” *New York Times*, April 7, 1994; “Malaysian Malaise,” *New York Times*, September 20, 1999; “Bloomberg News Humbled,” *New York Times*, August 29, 2002.

⁶ Joel Hodson, “A Case for American Studies: The Michael Fay Affair: Singapore-US Relations, and American Studies in Singapore,” *American Studies International* 41 (October 2003): 4. Hodson includes a discussion of the flogging of American teenager Michael Fay in punishment for his act of vandalism in 1994 and how this highlighted certain cultural discontinuities between Singapore and the US.

⁷ On the Singapore embarkation card given to and filled out by all arrivals to the country it states "WARNING: DEATH FOR DRUG TRAFFICKERS UNDER SINGAPORE LAW" in large bold red letters. This sentence is carried out by hanging. The offence comes under the Misuse of Drugs Act (Chapter 185), Second Schedule: Offences Punishable Upon Conviction. <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg> under the Misuse of Drugs Act (accessed January 14, 2013).

order to control public behavior.⁸ There are historical reasons for the manner in which the Republic of Singapore is governed. Some of the civil strictures can be traced to the unsettling period of Communist insurrections on the Malay Peninsula during the 1960s that threatened regional stability.⁹ Other strictures trace from the desire to distinguish Singapore as a stable, corruption-free meritocracy ideal for multinational business forays into Asia. Criticism has abated somewhat in the American press as our own response to Islamic extremism has developed¹⁰ and as an appreciation grows that Singapore is located between Malaysia and Indonesia, two countries with significant Muslim majorities where violent radicals at times and places flourish.¹¹ Be that as it may, the Republic of Singapore is undisputedly more forceful than America in the way it teaches, codifies, and enforces rules for its citizens despite the fact that both societies owe their legal systems to a British inheritance. Some trace this to the Confucian emphasis on harmony, communal values, and consensus-style rule in Singapore,¹² as contrasted

⁸ *Insight Guides: Singapore* (Hong Kong: APA Publications, Ltd. 1995), 55, for example, notes, “public education campaigns on the subjects of spitting, littering, flushing public toilets, courtesy, keeping fit, teenage smoking, chewing gum, and speaking Mandarin instead of dialects have sought to create a more hygienic and well-behaved population.” These campaigns are carried out by means of newspaper, TV, and poster advertisements and might well be termed for the most part benign propaganda.

⁹ Chee Kiong Tong, *Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism, and Competition in Singapore Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 233. Tong emphasizes both ethnic and religious conflict between majority Chinese and minority Malay populations as well as the perceived communist threat from unemployed diaspora Chinese.

¹⁰ I personally experienced a dramatic decrease in comments from US colleagues about Singapore's less liberal civil freedoms immediately following 9/11 as the US implemented the Patriot Act and attendant airport security measures.

¹¹ Robert Day McAmis, *Malay Muslims: The History and Challenge of Resurgent Islam in Southeast Asia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 71–90. McAmis makes an analysis of the Islamic cultures of Malaysia and Indonesia and specifically the “Islamic Resurgence” that has developed differently in each country. He uses the term “radical,” 81, as representing a Malay Muslim group that is extreme in rhetoric and action, sometimes violently so.

¹² Christine Han, “History Education and ‘Asian’ Values for an ‘Asian’ Democracy: The Case of Singapore,” *Compare* 37 (June 2007): 383–98. The question of whether there are so-called “Asian” values and an “Asian” style democracy is a fascinating one. Han engages this question from the perspective of how the Singapore situation differs from European democracies as evidenced in history education. She notes European discussions of cultural values are undergirded by reflection of philosophers, social scientists, and politicians (and here we might add theologians!) and institutionalized, but in Singapore “there is in fact a lacuna in terms of the wider values framework and context.” Thus, she sees a greater risk of political ideological indoctrination in Singapore.

with the Enlightenment emphasis on individual rights and autonomy that has developed in America. Others attribute it to the political forces mentioned above.

Does the Singaporean situation merit further investigation from a theological and religious perspective? From the standpoint of religious plurality Singapore is an interesting case because in a small, highly structured, tightly controlled population major Eastern and Western religions are well represented.¹³ Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Taoist, Buddhist, and Christian religious groups are all corporately recognized by the state.¹⁴ Additionally, Singapore represents a modern city-state where economic, social, and cultural forces collide much like stir fry ingredients in a Chinese wok. In this high temperature political situation there is a conscious effort to control and maintain religious *harmony* by the secular government¹⁵ in contrast to the typical Western emphasis to maintain religious *liberty*. This contrast could yield valuable comparative situations for American and Singaporean eyes. Singapore is well educated and highly interconnected, in a sense anticipating the increasing interconnectedness of western society. In the West it is commonly believed that because religious liberty is maintained, people will act with civility. A mutual tolerance for the other will follow from guaranteed liberty. While extremism breeds

¹³ Here the term “religious plurality” is used descriptively. It merely indicates that a situation exists where “various religious, philosophical or ideological conceptions live side by side and in which none of them holds a privileged status.” This definition is from Willem A. Visser ‘t Hooft, “Pluralism—Temptation or Opportunity?” *Ecumenical Review* 18 (1966): 129.

¹⁴ Kenneth Paul Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion, and Political Legitimacy in Singapore,” in *State and Secularism: Perspectives from Asia*, ed. Michael S. H. Heng and C. L. Tan (Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific, 2010), 339–57. Tan, 342, observes that Singapore practices a form of “state corporatism, where the traditional leadership of religious communities and groups is, to some official degree, co-opted, making it more difficult for them to challenge the state since their legitimacy is also derived from the state.”

¹⁵ Seong Chee Tham, “Religious Influences and Impulses Impacting Singapore” in *Religious Diversity in Singapore*, ed. Lai Ah Eng (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), 3–27. Tham observes “The constant reminder that ‘national identity’ must supersede ‘religious identity’ when religious issues of an external provenance threaten harmony is backed up by documented cases of arrest, detention and deportation of trouble makers who use religion to cause mischief and dissension.” Thus the secular government shows an overwhelmingly “pragmatic” sensibility toward religious liberty—it will not let religion interrupt the harmony and modern

extremism, liberty breeds harmony. Yet in our fallen world this increasingly seems not to be the case. In highly interconnected modern society, where economic, social, cultural, and *religious* ‘space’ is lost, conflict comes quickly if not for intervention and the enforcing of harmony.¹⁶ Thus, tensions that arise in the Singaporean situation of rapid nation building amid protected religious plurality and harmony may eventually be felt within the United States or other countries. These observations make the Singaporean situation *generally* interesting from a theological and religious perspective.

It was in this Singaporean *historical situation* that my family and I found ourselves living for seven years. When one enters as a guest into a culture, there is a certain freedom found in assessing both old habits and new customs. For anyone who has lived for a time in two worlds there comes the realization that much of day to day living is contextualized. In light of Forde’s observation concerning the historical situation, the law, and its impact on the gospel, a natural question to ask is—what challenge does this particular *historical situation* pose for Christian theological reflection and the gospel? In the twenty-first century most people would argue *local* customs, *local* rules, *local* sensibilities and *local* laws shape life and theological reflection. This dissertation will take up the question of the kind of theological emphasis that must be maintained in the Singaporean historical situation in order to preserve the gospel.

capitalistic aims of the state.

¹⁶ Jason Pontin, “Free Speech in the Era of Its Technological Amplification,” *Technology Review* 116 (March/April 2013): 60–65. Pontin’s article is a thought provoking reflection on the impact of the internet and social media on free speech in the Western tradition addressed fictitiously to John Stuart Mill. He describes the standard for freedom of speech as absolutist in that “everyone presumes they may say what they like without penalty, unless censors can show that questionable speech would irremediably and immediately harm someone else.” As will become clear, this standard of free speech has not been generally maintained in Singapore.

The Singapore Challenge¹⁷

The thesis of this dissertation is as follows: Singaporean civil religion and law, undergirded with values of harmony and self-cultivation, and promoted by an authoritarian State, put at risk a proper understanding of Christian righteousness. These values, primarily derivative of Confucian and Chinese belief systems and transformed by pragmatic considerations, beg for delineation from the Christian understanding of life comprised within the Lutheran doctrine of the two kinds of righteousness, understood in terms of the two ways in which God works in human lives. This situation can be remedied by a persistent word that clearly proclaims the divine source of Christian righteousness, as distinguished from a civil righteousness of works, in order to maintain the passive righteousness of faith. This word condemns any misplaced trust in righteousness based on the civil order.

The first four chapters discuss the historical situation in Singapore in terms of religion and civil law. This is one aspect of the current status of the question which must be explored. Since Singapore is characterized by religious plurality in a secular state, it should come as no surprise that some of the discussion below entails subjects such as pluralism, religious harmony, secularism, civil religion, and civil law from the perspective of contemporary Singaporean authors outside the Lutheran veil. The method invoked in the discussion is decidedly analytical:¹⁸ First, the effects or problems of religion in Singaporean civil society are described without direct

¹⁷ Tu Wei-Ming, *Confucian Ethics Today: The Singapore Challenge* (Singapore: Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore & Federal Publications, 1984), 131. This subtitle is a direct reference to Part Two where Tu presents a Confucian outline for moral education in the Singapore Religious Knowledge program. This thesis will outline a way to understand civil life and right living such that the Christian gospel is preserved in a culture influenced by Confucian sensibilities.

¹⁸ The method is analytical in the sense of starting with a problem as a whole (the effect) and then breaking it down into constituent causes. This is opposed to a synthetic approach where certain causes would be adduced from scripture or other sources and then the attendant effect or problem would be constructed.

recourse to their cause. The notion of civil religion is described and defined (see Chapters One and Two) in order to explore the interplay between the secular state and the religions. Civil law, in general, and Singaporean religious law, in particular (see Chapter Three), are used as vehicles to get at the primary poles in Singaporean civil religion (see Chapter Four). Then the effects of civil religion as a whole are reconsidered particularly with respect to the use of the gospel. It is found that the competing poles of civil religion (pragmatic utilitarianism, politicized Confucianism, and Judeo-Christian legal influence) bring about dangers to the gospel through encouragement of misplaced trust in the civil order, attempts to curtail religious expression in public, and a tendency to harmonize all religious perspectives as the same.

In Chapters Five and Six the framework of the two kinds of righteousness and the two rules or governments of God is explained and used to assess the current state of affairs in the civil realm. Guidance is offered to the Christian citizens of Singapore for describing and proclaiming the truth about Christian righteousness and coping with the dangers posed from civil religion for losing, abusing, or even never having this unique form of righteousness. It is argued that this proclamation is central and useful to the Christian citizens of Singapore for encouraging and supporting each other and also their neighbors (not excluding political leaders). It is also argued that this proclamation is useful in private conversation but also and especially in the forums and debates of public theology as well as for living and serving under the reign of God in society and the world.

Pluralism and Harmony among the Religions

Vineeta Sinha recounts the history of religious pluralism and harmony in Singapore since its founding in 1965 with a particular emphasis on the impact of the Maintenance of Religious

Harmony Act of 1990 (MRHA).¹⁹ She emphasizes that ethnic and religious pluralism have from the beginning been a cause for “celebration and caution” within the country’s leadership. The recognition that racial and religious differences could easily produce tensions and strife led to the constitutional qualification of religious freedom in Article 15(4), which permits freedom in religion provided citizens do not engage in any “... act contrary to any general law relating to public order, public health or morality.”²⁰ The entire text of the MRHA will not be quoted here, but a brief summary and a quote from the heart of the Act will be offered.

Essentially, the Act establishes a Council for Religious Harmony comprised of six to fifteen religious and community leaders whose function is to assist the Minister of Home Affairs in matters affecting the maintenance of religious harmony in Singapore. This council is appointed by the President, and not less than two thirds of its members are representatives of the major religions in Singapore. As outlined in the Act:

- (1) The Minister may make a restraining order against any priest, monk, pastor, imam, elder, office-bearer or any other person who is in a position of authority in any religious group or institution or any member thereof for the purposes specified in subsection (2) where the Minister is satisfied that that person has committed or is attempting to commit any of the following acts:
 - (a) causing feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility between different 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 practicing any religious belief;
 - (c) carrying out subversive activities under the guise of propagating or practicing any religious belief; or
 - (d) exciting disaffection against the President or the Government while, or under the guise of, propagating or practicing any religious belief.

¹⁹ Vineeta Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk’ about ‘Religious Pluralism’ and ‘Religious Harmony’ in Singapore,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 20 (2005): 25–40. Sinha brings a Hindu perspective to the discussion of religion in Singapore. The following discussion follows her presentation closely.

²⁰ The Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, Article 15(4).

- (2) An order made under subsection (1) may be made against the person named therein for the following purposes:
- (a) restraining him from addressing orally or in writing any congregation, parish or group of worshippers or members of any religious group or institution on any subject, topic or theme as may be specified in the order without the prior permission of the Minister;
 - (b) restraining him from printing, publishing, editing, distributing or in any way assisting or contributing to any publication produced by any religious group without the prior permission of the Minister;
 - (c) restraining him from holding office in an editorial board or a committee of a publication of any religious group without the prior permission of the Minister.²¹

The restraining orders authorized are limited in duration to two years, and before they are put into force both the affected parties and the Council for the Maintenance of Religious Harmony have fourteen days during which to offer written representation to the Minister of Home Affairs on the action proposed. After the restraining order has been put into force the Minister must within thirty days refer the matter and all pertinent grounds, facts and documents to the Council. The Council may then recommend to the President that the order be confirmed, cancelled or varied in any manner. The President may then cancel or confirm the order as made by the Minister within thirty days of its implementation. These are the most prominent aspects of the Act.

Sinha highlights several aspects of the Act raised during the “theorizing” talk of legislative debate in her article. First, the bill was a result of more than five years of planning, debating, and deliberation that followed an Internal Security Department report detailing “the prevalence of inter-religious tensions in Singapore.”²² Sinha indicates these tensions resulted from aggressive

²¹ Government of Singapore, “Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (Chapter 167A), Original Enactment: Act 26 of 1990, Revised Edition 2001: 31st July 2001,” Parliament of Singapore, <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg> (accessed February 13, 2012).

²² Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 26–27.

proselytization on the part of leftist (Marxist) Christians, Islamic fundamentalists, and Christian evangelicals. Second, Singapore is the only country in the world to have such a law.²³ Third, the legislation was drafted with the explicit input of community and religious leaders.²⁴ Fourth, although nonenforceable guidelines and rules were considered, the legislation codifies enforceable means “to restrain ‘trouble-makers’” who attempt to use religion and politics to upset the harmonious coexistence of the various religious communities.²⁵ Lastly, although the \$10,000 fine and two year imprisonment seems severe, offenders may make written representations of appeal to the Minister of Home Affairs and the Council for Religious Harmony detailing their perspective. The President himself is the final arbiter for such appeals and he may confirm or cancel the Minister’s order.

In a detailed and nuanced description of the “Pandora’s box” of public feedback attendant to the legislative debate Sinha makes several telling observations concerning the nature of religion in Singapore. To begin with she notes that “in the Singapore State’s dealing with religious communities ... despite religious diversity, a certain sameness and homogeneity has often been conferred on all religions.”²⁶ Although there was no consensus among the religious communities and leaders regarding the “exact formulation and interpretation” of the legislation, there was agreement that some kind of action was necessary to promote interreligious harmony.²⁷ This was the case despite the varied specific religious responses. Thus, it seems that both the

²³ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 26.

²⁴ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 27. Sinha lists specifically the Singapore Council of Christian Churches, Islamic Religious Council, Graduates’ Christian Fellowship, Hindu Advisory Board, Hindu Endowments Board, Singapore Democratic Party, and the National University of Singapore Political Association.

²⁵ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 27.

²⁶ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 31.

²⁷ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 31.

government and the religious communities themselves were able to find some generalized common ground on which to speak despite having quite different motivations and belief systems.

The public feedback expressed concern that the MRHA could infringe constitutional guarantees of religious freedom. Discussion acknowledged both the individual's liberty to "practise and propagate" religious teachings as well as the impossibility and undesirability of "absolute religious freedom;" here the notion that religion is primarily a "personal affair and should be practised in private" was voiced.²⁸ An official Hindu response was given by the past President of the Hindu Advisory Board in an article published on September 21, 1990 in the *Straits Times*. He expressed the view that "as a minority community" with liberal, broad-based beliefs Hindus are nonetheless concerned with the "dangers of strong proselytization."²⁹ Indeed, "conversion of Hindus to other religions" was in his mind a continuing issue especially given the "process and manner" in which conversion is being carried out in the Republic.³⁰ Other religious communities had different assessments. Much discussion revolved around how the legislation would curtail missionary work and evangelizing among both Christians and Muslims. These two groups had many specific questions as to how the phrase "causing feelings of enmity, hatred, ill will or hostility" would be interpreted, including whether practices such as door-to-door leaflet distribution would be allowed under the new law.³¹

Strikingly, the community feedback also raised questions regarding heterodoxy among each of the Protestant, Muslim, and Hindu communities. Sinha notes that "for the sake of administrative convenience" religions are treated as "singular, monolithic, and homogeneous

²⁸ Sinha, "Theorising 'Talk,'" 31.

²⁹ Sinha, "Theorising 'Talk,'" 32.

³⁰ Sinha, "Theorising 'Talk,'" 32.

wholes.”³² Yet this is hardly the case within at least these three religious communities. Thus, the question of whether “all religious communities, as citizens of the state, have equal right to propagate and practise their interpretation of a given religion” took on increased importance.³³ In addition the discussions made clear that Buddhists, Taoists, and Hindus all characterized themselves as “minority” religions, “numerically weak, and unable to withstand the onslaught of evangelical forces.”³⁴ This is statistically puzzling as according to the 2000 national census the category Buddhism/Taoism comprised 51 percent of the population, the highest of any religion.³⁵ Perhaps it indicates that Chinese traditional religious affiliation is loosely held in practice. Ironically, Sinha maintains that a law “intended to foster greater inter-religious interaction” highlighted religious differences and made it plain for all that it was impossible for the government to treat all religions the same.³⁶

A final area of concern in the debate discussed by Sinha was the attempt to segregate and delineate the boundaries between the spheres of religion and politics. Some members of parliament feared the law could become “an instrument of repression,” others questioned whether a line between religion and politics could actually be maintained.³⁷ In particular the Mufti³⁸ and the head of the Roman Catholic Church felt that clearer definitions of these spheres

³¹ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 31.

³² Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 32.

³³ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 32.

³⁴ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 32.

³⁵ Government of Singapore, “Census of Population 2010, Statistical Release 1, Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language, and Religion,” Ministry of Trade & Industry, Department of Statistics, Republic of Singapore, <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/c2010acr.html> (accessed December 1, 2012), 11.

³⁶ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 33.

³⁷ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 33.

³⁸ The Islamic Council of Singapore includes an Islamic scholar who is appointed by law to fill the Office of

were required. Astutely, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong observed of the entire debate,

It is not really possible to separate the two halves and I concede that. I think I agree with that point of view that it is not easy and perhaps not possible, to separate our spiritual life from our political day-to-day life because politics and religion represent one total way of life. But we must try in the context of a multi-racial and multi-religious Singapore, and for the common good of all Singaporeans.³⁹

This political and ideological concession by the then Prime Minister indicates both the importance of religion within Singaporean society as well as the pressingly felt need to provide a safe public space for all the different religions that coexist there. It also foreshadows and reflects the so-called “pragmatic” stance the ruling party feels is necessary—“we must try” despite the fact that it will be in some sense both religiously and politically imperfect.

It is well to observe that not only local conditions but also global examples of religious strife have played into subsequent assessment of the MRHA. Unrest in Bosnia, Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland all followed closely upon the passage of the legislation and seem to provide the political leadership with vindication for the MRHA. Even closer to home the Bali blasts and the Jemaah Islamiyah arrests in Singapore, both close on the heels of the September 11, 2001 terrorist action in the United States, provide an even more definitive assessment of the need for maintaining religious harmony. Indeed, Sinha herself concedes that “religious pluralism and religious harmony are evidently not two sides of the same coin.”⁴⁰ It seems that ongoing strategies and mechanisms are required in the modern situation in order to maintain economic and political stability in the face of multiracialism and multiculturalism. After the passage of the MRHA Sinha describes how the government has taken an approach of encouraging “more and

Mufti in Singapore. Insight into the nature of the Republic’s support of the official Muslim body can be gleaned by visiting its website at www.muis.gov.sg/oom/.

³⁹*Singapore Straits Times*, February 24, 1990 as cited by Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 34.

better interaction, learning about the customs, traditions, and religions of the ‘other.’”⁴¹ Again she quotes then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong

Some Singaporeans have argued that racial and religious harmony cannot be forced, and hence, these artificial mechanisms will not work. But some things need prodding. In the absence of external stimulus, the natural tendency is to congregate among our own kind. Over the years our race and religious relations have been smooth, Singaporeans have drifted toward this more natural pattern of human behaviour. It is time to give Singaporeans a jolt, to remind them they are living in a multi-racial, multi-religious society.⁴²

In summary, Sinha’s analysis of the religious situation in Singapore using the MRHA and the ensuing political discussions paints a favorable picture of the management of religious harmony in Singapore. She quotes a wide variety of religious and political discourse within the public sphere associated with the Act. The report of the select committee that considered the proposed legislation included approximately 170 pages of written and oral testimony proffered by concerned citizens and organizations.⁴³ Sinha argues to dispel the notion that Singaporean citizenry are passive, repressed, and unresponsive pawns in the powerful hands of a dominant political elite. Sinha is of the opinion that the political and social threats of religious disharmony are real. The political elite, as represented by Goh Chok Tong, view life as an integrated whole where religious belief is best kept out of political life for the sake of the nation. The unexpected outcome of the MRHA was that “events and ‘talk’ surrounding this law have provided a context for making inter-religious and intra-religious differences and disagreements visible and

⁴⁰ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 35.

⁴¹ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 36.

⁴² *Singapore Straits Times*, February 2, 2002, as cited by Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 36–37.

⁴³ Government of Singapore, “Report of the Select Committee on the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill, presented to Parliament on 29th October, 1990,” Parliament of Singapore, <http://www.parliament.gov.sg/publications-select-committee-reports> (accessed February 13, 2012).

admissible.”⁴⁴ So ironically in a society beset with substantial and persistent religious differences where various factions and groups were not talking and interacting with each other, *a law* to maintain religious harmony has generated the forum for religious groups to voice their differing opinions and interact in a meaningful way. This is for Sinha the real progress. Furthermore, she sees hope in the government’s current position of encouraging interreligious interaction in managing the local religious scene.⁴⁵ She even hints that in the thirty-five years since the nation building endeavor began there may be a need to move beyond the idea that “multi-religiosity” merely demands an environment where separate religions have space in order to coexist.⁴⁶ Perhaps she is subconsciously asking the question of whether a Singaporean “civil religion” is necessary to maintain unity and bind society together. As a Hindu it is possible, even likely, that Sinha would be open to a syncretistic civil religion. She understands Singaporean religious culture too well to suggest that, however. Instead she takes an ‘Enlightened’ position where common ground between religions is identified and promoted within the secular society by the government. This is what happened in the early 1990s when Shared Values were proposed and adopted. She wrote the above article in 2005.

Secularism, Pragmatism, and Civil Religion

K. P. Tan has argued simply in a 2010 article that “the discourse and practices of Singapore’s nation-state are a kind of civil religion”⁴⁷ propagated pragmatically by the secular

⁴⁴ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 35.

⁴⁵ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 37. In particular Sinha is holding up post 9/11 government strategies to encourage mixing and interaction across communal groups.

⁴⁶ Sinha, “Theorising ‘Talk,’” 38.

⁴⁷ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 339. The following discussion follows Tan’s overall argument closely.

ruling government elite in order to secure political legitimacy. Tan describes Singapore as a secular state where “the state and politics are insulated from religious institutions and norms, whose de-politicized forms are allowed and at times even encouraged to flourish in the community life of a multi-religious society as long as inter-religious harmony and public order are maintained.”⁴⁸ Contrary to classical secularization theory⁴⁹ in contemporary Singapore the tensions between industrial and postindustrial values “have not led to a decline of religious belief and practices, but to their revival.”⁵⁰ The religions have become more confident and empowered, building on their traditional role as a welfare and social safety net for civil society.

Tan argues that in this multireligious situation the state derives its authority not by “divine mandate of a dominant religion” but by maintaining a policy of neutrality where it distances itself from any particular religious group.⁵¹ He notes this strict neutrality is qualified by state policies that protect racial and religious minorities. In particular the Malay-Muslim community is in view here, and it enjoys government assistance in building mosques and a separate *shari’ah*

⁴⁸ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 340.

⁴⁹ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 339. Tan entertains three different propositions or types of secularization as proposed by Jose Casanova: (1) “secularization as decline of religious beliefs and practices,” (2) secularization as differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms,” and (3) “secularization as marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere.” Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 211. Tan categorizes Singapore as fitting type two.

An alternative to Casanova’s typology is given by Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 109. Berger provides the following, evaluative free, descriptive definition of secularization: “the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the *domination* of religious institutions and symbols. When we speak of society and institutions in modern Western history, of course, secularization manifests itself in the evacuation by the Christian churches of areas previously under their control or influence—as in the separation of church and state, or in the expropriation of church lands, or in the emancipation of education from ecclesiastical authority. When we speak of culture and symbols, however, we imply that secularization is more than a social-structural process. It affects the totality of cultural life and of ideation, and may be observed in the decline of religious contents in the arts, in philosophy, in literature and, most important of all, in the rise of science as an autonomous, thoroughly secular perspective on the world.”

⁵⁰ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 340. Tan cites statistics that show a steady percentage of the population (over 80 percent) maintain a religious affiliation using 2000 census data.

court for certain matters of law. Amid the competing religions the state skillfully maintains both coercive and ideological methods for maintaining political authority. Coercively it enforces various sections of the Penal Code, Sedition Act, Internal Security Act, and Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act to separate religious leaders from involvement in politics. Ideologically the state promotes certain values such as multiracialism and meritocracy to balance multicultural religious tensions. The state exerts overt control over religious groups by forming bodies such as the Presidential Council for Religious Harmony to represent the religions and by ceding a limited power to them. Thus Tan understands the MRHA to be an act of religious domestication where Sinha, above, sees it as a laudable effort in maintaining religious harmony in a politically volatile situation. The state also heavily sponsors certain minority religious organizations such as the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, the Council on Education for Muslim Children, the Hindu Advisory Board, the Hindu Endowments Board, the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board and the Sikh Advisory Board.⁵²

Finally, Tan describes how post 9/11 the government set up Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles “to promote dialogue and build confidence.”⁵³ He cites a post 9/11 code of conduct for religious communities called the Declaration of Religious Harmony:

We, the people in Singapore, declare that religious harmony is vital for peace, progress and prosperity in our multi-racial and multi-religious Nation. We resolve to strengthen religious harmony through mutual tolerance, confidence, respect, and understanding. We shall always recognize the secular nature of our State, promote cohesion within our society, respect each other’s freedom of religion, grow our

⁵¹ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 341.

⁵² Tan makes no mention of the fact that support of these groups is constitutionally grounded and has a long history in the Republic’s history dating from its colonial founding in 1819. Tan is arguing that the state is practicing a form of “corporatism” where all authority ultimately rests in its hands, even religious authority in some sense. An alternative construction is that the state is maintaining room for minority religions in the public space.

⁵³ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 342.

common space while respecting our diversity, foster inter-religious communications, and thereby ensure that religion will not be abused to create conflict and disharmony in Singapore.⁵⁴

Tan does not offer an analysis of how many religious groups subscribed to the above code nor does he analyze the debate that surrounded its adoption. His concern lies in how the government uses these so-called “soft-law instruments” to maintain hegemony over and against the religious leaders.

Moving beyond questions of pure political power, Tan observes that in the years of industrialization following independence religious leaders and even the state itself have become concerned citizens will lose their moral anchors and cultural bearings. Thus the government in the 1980s promoted a Religious Knowledge curriculum in the schools.⁵⁵ The government had hoped that the Confucian Ethics stream would be well received by students, but in fact the students chose the overtly religious streams on Buddhist Studies and Biblical Knowledge. The Religious Knowledge curriculum may even have been responsible for an unintended rise in religious fervor in Singapore detailed in a 1986 Internal Security Department report published shortly before the government curtailed the Religious Knowledge effort and replaced it with a “more secular Civic and Moral Education subject.”⁵⁶ These matters did not escape the notice of

⁵⁴ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 342.

⁵⁵ For a more detailed analysis of government support of religion in the 1980s see, Joseph B. Tamney, “Conservative Government and Support for the Religious Institution in Singapore: An Uneasy Alliance,” *Sociological Analysis* 53 (1992): 201–17. Tamney’s argument is that during the 1980s various governments tried to strengthen the public role of religion. He cites the United States and England among them. Tamney sees an instrumental use of religion by conservative governments in order to reach economic ends. This use, however, is short lived because ultimately economic rationalization undermines commitment to moral values. Also, in increasingly postmodern societies such as Singapore religious tendencies (a mix of “leftist, evangelical, charismatic, supracultural”) are more diverse and often conflict with conservative political agendas.

⁵⁶ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 344–45. Tan notes that Religious Knowledge was discontinued in 1990. He also describes the liberation theology that was gaining traction in the Philippines at the time, which certainly added to government concern about promoting religion too strongly.

religious leaders. They feared that despite their organizations' continued contributions to civic society the public square was being cleansed of religious talk. Tan speaks of a public discourse "dominated by reasoning that is dictated by the profit-making and consumer-driven imperatives of the market and the technically rational policy-making and legitimacy-generating imperatives of the state."⁵⁷ He speaks of a growing "dichotomy between secular and religious modes of understanding and judgment."⁵⁸ Then Tan cites Anglican Bishop John Chew as raising a flag to warn his flock in 2003 that there was a growing threat by those who wanted to curtail public discussion of religious issues in favor of more "progressive" public discourse on issues such as homosexuality.

Tan sees this growing tension between the secular government and institutional religion as the space where civil religion is pragmatically growing in contemporary Singapore. He describes how N. J. Demerath construes civil society and civil religion as being mutually dependent in the United States.⁵⁹ Demerath argues that civil religion and the separation of church and state coexist as two symbiotic entities, separated but in constant tension and interaction. Tan posits that a Singaporean civil religion is needed to prevent the religious cleansing of the public square. He argues that this civil religion cannot be based on any particular traditional religion and must be pursued not in a dogmatic but in a pragmatic manner. It is this very pragmatism, however, which may tend toward "economic opportunism" and global crisis management.⁶⁰ Certain *styles* of pragmatism, in fact, create a resistance to religious rationality in the public sphere.

⁵⁷ Tan, "Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion," 345.

⁵⁸ Tan, "Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion," 345.

⁵⁹ Here Tan is relying on N. J. Demerath, "Civil Society and Civil Religion as Mutually Dependent," in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* ed. Michele Dillon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 348–58.

⁶⁰ Tan, "Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion," 346.

Tan continues his argument by describing the style of political pragmatism that the ruling party, the People's Action Party (PAP), in general and the long-lived first minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, in particular, have embraced since independence in 1965. In 1998 Lee is quoted as saying about his party's rule, "If a thing works, let's work it, and that eventually evolved into the kind of economy that we have today. Our test was: Does it work? Does it bring benefits to the people?"⁶¹ Tan remarks this pragmatism opposes positions "that it dismisses as naively idealistic, unrealistically utopian, or hypocritically high-minded."⁶² It also lends itself to deflecting criticisms that appeal to individual freedom, human rights or religious values. Pragmatism is flexible in that it can align itself against Marxist as well as liberal ideologies while masking its relationship to capitalism. Pragmatism purports to adopt and perfect "value-free" means and methods with a teleological emphasis reducing the public sphere discussion to technical "problem-solving," bracketing questions of philosophy, ethics, and aesthetics.⁶³ Tan contrasts this situation with liberal democracy noting that in Singapore the selection of governmental managers and leaders according to strict standards replaces the system of checks and balances in the West. Thus pragmatism is a polarity in Singaporean society that pulls against true democracy because no principles are maintained "independent of social conditions." More bluntly, in pragmatism the means may always be adjusted and justified to reach the "overriding end" of "continuous economic growth."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Lee Kuan Yew, Speech at the 26th World Congress of the International Chamber of Commerce, October 5, 1978, quoted in F. K. Han, W. Fernandez, and S. Tan, eds., *Lee Kuan Yew: The Man and His Ideas* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1998), 109.

⁶² Tan, "Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion," 348.

⁶³ Tan, "Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion," 347–48.

⁶⁴ It is interesting to note that when criticized for this type of economic pragmatism, the ruling government at times invokes a survival narrative, i.e. Singapore is in a vulnerable economic and military circumstance. Under siege from unfriendly Muslim neighbors to the north and south and a growing Chinese powerhouse in East Asia Singapore

In this situation the government grounds its legitimacy in an instrumental, utilitarian system that rewards citizens with material advantage and gratification. Economic advantage in practice proves to be a thin thread by which to govern, however, and so the ruling party also has attempted to reconstruct “an official Singaporean culture and value system” based on “thrift, diligence, group orientation, and respect for authority.”⁶⁵ Tan uses the terms “transactional” and “transformational” to describe the two opposing leadership styles embraced by the government, the one promoting economic prosperity, the other promoting morality and “ethical aspiration.”⁶⁶ In summary, Tan argues the ruling party “picks and chooses useful and harmful values for the nation-state’s survival and prosperity” and “marks them off arbitrarily as ‘Asian’ and ‘Western.’”⁶⁷ The party then generates an ideology and synthetic culture with the aim of furthering the nation’s capitalist goals and girding up the government’s legitimacy.

As if to illustrate the above “picking and choosing,” Tan describes the debates in Singapore regarding the liberalization of homosexuality and gambling. Religiously conservative Singaporeans opposed both liberalizations on moral and social grounds.⁶⁸ When the government announced a nondiscriminatory hiring policy for even the most sensitive civil service positions with regards to sexual orientation, there was an immediate conservative reaction. In response to

must exercise these pragmatic measures in order to survive and prosper.

⁶⁵ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 350.

⁶⁶ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 349.

⁶⁷ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 350. Thus Tan sees the invocation of Confucian values in the 1980s as largely an economically rationalized authoritarian state policy.

⁶⁸ Richard R. Magnus, “Is Our Public Square Naked” (lecture given to the Graduate Christians Fellowship, The Pines, Singapore, September 15, 2006). <http://www.gcf.org.sg/resources/is-our-public-square-naked?> (accessed December 8, 2012). The situation is not perhaps quite so simple as Tan construes. For instance, Magnus, a retired Senior District Judge with a 40 year distinguished public service career with the Singapore Legal Service and a member of the Graduate Christians Fellowship, gave the above talk and also has served as the Chairman of the Casino Regulatory Authority. One surmises that perhaps he at least is tolerant if not supportive of legalized gambling in Singapore and yet maintains his Christian belief.

this pressure, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong emphatically stated in his National Day Rally speech that he did not “encourage or endorse a gay lifestyle,” nor any policies that would “erode the moral standards of Singapore, or our family values.”⁶⁹ Neither was the homosexual lifestyle normalized by the platform of the ruling party. In contrast, the government legalized gambling in 2004 when it permitted two casinos to be built in the face of conservative opposition. Tan finds these policy decisions problematic because they require some shared moral evaluation. This kind of differentiation requires a shared culture or religion. Tan notes that “for a pragmatic approach to policy-making in a secular public sphere that does not exclude religious reasons, the government will need to upkeep a civil religion that transcends any particular religion and provides a sense of identity, common framework of morality, a shared culture, and a fundamental basis for stability.”⁷⁰ Tan then goes on to describe the civil institutions, practices, and ideology—the *civil religion*—that he sees rising in Singapore to fill this void.

For the moment it is enough to observe Tan believes in order for a government to rule legitimately in Singapore it must seek some kind of grounding in a framework of shared morality and values.⁷¹ He perceives this need based on what citizens voice in public debate⁷² as well as the arguments the ruling party itself makes in justification of its policy. Sometimes Tan voices

⁶⁹ Goh Chok Tong, “From the Valley to the Highlands” (speech given at the National Day Rally, University Cultural Centre, National University of Singapore, Singapore, 17 August 2003), National Archives of Singapore, <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/public> (accessed February 15, 2012).

⁷⁰ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 352.

⁷¹ Heng Swee Keat, “The Worth and Values of Education,” *Knowledge @SMU*, February 16, 2012, <http://knowledge.smu.edu.sg/article.cfm?articleid=1405> (accessed February 22, 2012). As education minister, Heng renewed the call for schools to “demonstrate their commitment to values and character education.” He argued that in the more sophisticated economic situation in Singapore today, schools may offer a wider range of tertiary subjects such as art and sports. He characterizes Singapore’s basic values as “empathy, integrity, and harmony.”

⁷² Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 351. Here, Tan quotes a letter to the editor in *The Straits Times* that made the following veiled threat after Goh Chok Tong had announced the new government hiring policy, “a government that does not appease the wishes of its people may not last long ... the Government has shown quite

concern that the pragmatism of the state is arbitrary and grounded only in economic materialism. At other times he indicates the values and beliefs of Singaporean civil religion are grounded in a passive cultural legacy that seems “to rely for its form, style, and imagery on a Judeo-Christian tradition which, oddly, is held by only about 15 percent of Singapore’s multi-religious population.”⁷³ It is relevant to ask if Tan is missing one important aspect of civil religion in Singapore—Confucianism. It is possible that many of the tensions Tan sees in Singapore civil society and the incoherence of its discourse arise from a civil religion that draws competing values from 3 poles: pragmatic utilitarianism in a capitalist milieu, vestiges of Judeo-Christian tradition left from British colonialism, and *Confucian sensibilities*.⁷⁴ Tan explicitly raises questions about the government’s influence over religion and the religions in this context. Although his primary aim is to locate the evolution of civil religion in a secular state, in doing so he mentions more than once that the government instrumentally attempts to use the religions in order to establish its legitimacy and to achieve harmony and stability. If the pragmatic pole of civil religion consistently marginalizes religious reason and constitutional liberty in order to promote prosperity and stability, theologians should take note.

Civil Religion and Shared Values in Singapore

Another author who shares the strong political perspective of K. P. Tan is Ronald Ch’ng,

clearly by its action that it has lost its moral authority.”

⁷³ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 355.

⁷⁴ Tamney, “Conservative Government,” 201. Tamney’s sociological analysis, which does not explicitly raise the theme of civil religion, quotes then Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1998 as saying, “Singapore had superimposed on its constitutional framework the ideal political leader as a Confucian gentleman, or *junzi*, one who was trustworthy, morally upright and beyond reproach.”

who penned a 1995 doctoral dissertation on Singaporean civil religion.⁷⁵ In a brief historical sketch of Singapore, Ch'ng traces its development as a British settlement and colony at the nexus of Indian, Indonesian, and Chinese trade routes. During the late 1800s Singapore's strategic importance only accelerated with the opening of the Suez Canal, the extension of European telegraph from India to Singapore, the conversion of cargo to steam shipping, and the British "forward movement" in Asia. According to historian C. M. Turnbull, Singapore during this period became "one of the most vital commercial key points of the British Empire."⁷⁶ Ch'ng highlights the increasing prosperity and ease with colonial rule that characterized the island from the 1870s until the Japanese invasion in 1942, when the "impregnable Fortress Singapore" was overcome in only two weeks by an overland invasion from the north. As the headline read in the *Times* of London, this defeat was "More than the evacuation of a town, it was the end of an era."⁷⁷ Thus it was, after the conclusion of hostilities, that the stage was set for the emergence of local leaders to take the mantle of authority from the British colonizers who had failed to protect local citizens from the brutalities of Japanese occupation. These leaders would form the Republic of Singapore in 1965 and have left an indelible mark on its national identity and character.

Ch'ng then takes time to explore the ideology that the ruling party, the PAP, has developed since 1965 to order and to rule.⁷⁸ In particular Ch'ng accents a speech given by then Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew in November of 1992 to a Japanese forum discussing nation states in the

⁷⁵ Ch'ng Teck-Huat, Ronald, "Civil Religion and Shared Values in Singapore" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1995). The following discussion draws extensively from Ch'ng's thought.

⁷⁶ C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore: 1819–2005*, 3rd ed. (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009), 93. Ch'ng relies heavily on Turnbull as well as R. S. Milne and Diane K. Mauzy, *Singapore: The Legacy of Lee Kuan Yew* (Boulder: Westview, 1990) for his sketch.

⁷⁷ Ch'ng, "Civil Religion," 12.

⁷⁸ Ch'ng, "Civil Religion," 54, defines "ideology" as "a pattern of beliefs and concepts, integrated and coherent, seeking to explain complex social phenomena and also directed toward action."

changing world.⁷⁹ In this speech on democracy and human rights Lee maintains that the needs of a people for “good government” trump the need for democracy. Lee questions whether former colonial states lacking the existence of civil society and an educated electorate can immediately take on forms of democracy that have evolved over a period of 200 years in the United States and Britain. In particular, Lee argues that democracy follows stability and economic development, not the other way round. Lee states that the values of a people should determine what constitute good government and these values may depend on culture. Ch’ng picks out key phrases from this speech as giving clues to the major components of the PAP’s ideology: “good government, economic development, stability and discipline necessary for development, values of a people, effective and efficient, opportunities for all to advance themselves, stable and orderly society,” and “a good life.”⁸⁰ Ch’ng then organizes these components under a PAP ideology constituted by “elitism, Confucianism, and pragmatism.”⁸¹

Ch’ng defines “elitism” as the concept that those who are the brightest, wisest, most able, and virtuous should lead the nation. Desirable characteristics of these leaders in the eyes of the PAP are: “integrity, good character, incorruptibility, ability to think and innovate, capacity to administer and govern, ability to work as a team, and ability to take tough decisions and stand pressure.”⁸² To trust democratic processes to select these leaders at this juncture is, according to PAP leaders, unwise. Instead the current leaders paternalistically exercise power within the party and culture to ensure that future leaders of this type are elected. Confucianism is tightly linked to

⁷⁹ Lee Kuan Yew, “Democracy and Human Rights in the World” (speech given at the Asahi Forum, Tokyo, Japan, 20 November 1992), National Archives of Singapore, <http://a2o.nas.sg/stars/public/index.html> (accessed January 17, 2013).

⁸⁰ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 60.

⁸¹ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 60.

this concept of elite paternalism. Additionally it implies “there is a hierarchical order” of unequals which enables this “harmonious universe” to exist where “duties and obligations” operate in the place of the “Western concept of ‘rights.’”⁸³ In this situation the state is seen primarily as an extension of the family, which is the basic unit of society, not as a collection of individuals. In a Confucian style government “peace, stability, security, and prosperity” are necessarily provided by “morally upright and trustworthy leaders.”⁸⁴ Ch’ng finds that PAP leaders align well with these Confucian political tenets. Finally, Ch’ng also outlines the pragmatic stance the party takes towards accomplishing its goals through a ubiquitous form of order and control that includes public social campaigns to control problems such as physical fitness and littering.

Ch’ng furthers the discussion of PAP ideology by introducing the Shared Values (1991) discourse of the late 1980s and 1990s. He reviews landmark speeches by both Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong, men who would later become the second and third prime ministers of Singapore.⁸⁵ The common theme in these speeches is the danger of an uncritical Westernization process in local culture and the challenge for Singaporeans to develop their own national values in the wake of inevitable and rapid industrialization. In order to prevent “superficial” Westernization and an aimless “drift” toward decadent Western evils the Parliament eventually proposed and debated a list of values that entailed “Asian civilization” as it is “distinct from

⁸² Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 61.

⁸³ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 65.

⁸⁴ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 66.

⁸⁵ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 76–87. The speeches referenced were Goh Chok Tong, “Our National Ethic” (speech given at the Neptune Theater Restaurant, Singapore, 28 October 1988), National Archives of Singapore, <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/public/> (accessed May 24, 2012) and Lee Hsien Loong, “The National Ideology—A Direction and Identity for Singapore” (speech given at Margaux Ballroom, Meridien Hotel, Singapore, 11 January 1989), National Archives of Singapore, <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/public/> (accessed May 24, 2012).

other societies.”⁸⁶ These were to be inculcated through the school and family and represented nonpolitical, nonreligious values that could be accepted by all religious and racial communities. Briefly the values are: (1) nation before community and society above self; (2) family as the basic unit of society; (3) community support and respect for the individual; (4) consensus, not conflict; (5) racial and religious harmony.⁸⁷

Ch’ng styles Singaporean civil religion much along the lines of the PAP ideology he has described along with a “necessary moral core”⁸⁸ of Confucianism. He argues that “whether they realise it or not, Singaporeans already exist in a quasi-Confucian society.”⁸⁹ Part of the reason for this is that Singapore is over 75 percent ethnic Chinese. Ch’ng offers an insightful quote on Singapore from Confucian scholar, Hsu Cho-Yun, a Taiwanese native teaching at the University of Pittsburgh:

I found this state to be well-governed, orderly and modernized. Furthermore, three quarters of the population, as well as a majority of the leadership, are actually putting Confucianism into action. The general public, from the leadership of the private sector and the government to the ordinary people, behave much as would idealized Confucians, in a spirit of hard work, mutual help and cosmopolitanism. I see here, for example, a coherent communal relationship and tolerance among different races. Now, the great project of this society is the re-evaluation of Confucianism in the modern day. Yet precisely because Singapore is already such an ideal and almost totally Confucianized state, it follows naturally that one would ask why there is any need to establish or re-establish Confucianism here.⁹⁰

Ch’ng largely agrees with this perspective, though he is critical of turning a blind eye to modern Singapore’s growing problems of class during this time of economic prosperity. He is concerned

⁸⁶ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 88.

⁸⁷ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 101–3.

⁸⁸ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 130.

⁸⁹ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 131.

⁹⁰ Hsu, Cho-Yun, as quoted in Tu, *Confucian Ethics Today*, 136.

that the Shared Values as espoused by the PAP import Confucian values in a manner unrecognized by the average Singaporean. In particular, he is concerned that “the PAP Government insists on a hierarchical, paternalistic stand vis-à-vis its citizens” where “unquestioning obedience” is due to the “State-Father” who provides good things in exchange.⁹¹ Thus, for example, he does not contest the assertion that the family is the basic building block of society, but worries that when this family is “writ-large” in the state, all self-interest is “subjugated” to the greater good of nation building, and paternal state authority is unbridled.⁹² Along these lines he finds the “methods, means and mechanisms” that engender “genuine and persistent discussion and debate” over social and political policies to be lacking.⁹³ In summary, Ch’ng claims that Singaporean civil religion consists of “two aspects: secularized Confucianism, and nationalism” combined in a “Singaporean Way of Life” focused on industrial success and economic prosperity.⁹⁴ Ch’ng’s discomfort with civil religion lies in the recent government shift from a purely economic rationalization of Confucianism to a wider socio-ethical one. This wider rationalization involves indoctrinating all racial and religious groups into particular Confucian constructions of family, government, and values that emphasize authoritarianism and paternalism.

In his final chapter Ch’ng tackles the question of what role the Church should play with regard to civil religion and national ideology while examining two government “campaigns”

⁹¹ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 143–44.

⁹² Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 144.

⁹³ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 149.

⁹⁴ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 181–82. This way of life can be neatly summarized for both the old and young by saying “that young Singaporeans today” pursue “career, credit card, car, condominium, and club membership (the five C’s), unlike older generations who were content with one wife, two children, three rooms, and four wheels,” 203.

from the 1990s: Family Values and Religious Harmony. The Family Values (1994) push came on the heels of the adoption of the Shared Values (1991) and represented a furthering of one of its values, namely, the family as the basic unit of society. The Family Values that were eventually adopted consisted of: (1) love, (2) care and concern, (3) mutual respect, (4) filial responsibility, and (5) commitment and communication.⁹⁵ In political debate and discussion these values, like the Shared Values, were placed in opposition to undesirable trends in Western society, such as a high divorce rate and the lack of support for elders. Ch'ng's concern again is that this is just more of the same. This "new campaign has the same function of hammering home the attitudes, attributes and behavior patterns which puts the nation first in the name of love, *for its economic well-being*" (emphasis added).⁹⁶

Ch'ng criticizes the Singapore church here, maintaining that it has been silent and unable to "look beyond the surface" of the government initiatives, seemingly powerless to grapple with the "underlying ideological issues."⁹⁷ It is in this chapter that Ch'ng tips his own political and theological hand. He forwards South Korean and Philippine models of Church and State interaction, based largely on liberation theology, and he calls on the Church to exercise a decidedly prophetic social role.⁹⁸ He asks, "Has the Church started discerning or interpreting God's will with connection to the way the Government uses the political structures of power to boost its own ideological ends?"⁹⁹ He questions the allegiance of Christian governmental leaders

⁹⁵ Ch'ng, "Civil Religion," 214.

⁹⁶ Ch'ng, "Civil Religion," 221.

⁹⁷ Ch'ng, "Civil Religion," 225.

⁹⁸ Ch'ng, "Civil Religion," 254.

⁹⁹ Ch'ng, "Civil Religion," 258.

and accuses them of “putting the PAP first ahead of any religious considerations.”¹⁰⁰ Ch’ng clearly accuses the State of totalitarianism, where the government seeks “to impose” its own faith and ideology on all its “citizens, and churches” are allowed to “exist only if they are just as happy not to challenge or criticize the State.”¹⁰¹ Finally, he describes Singaporean Christianity as “self-absorbed in personal salvation”¹⁰² and its religious leaders as “preoccupied with staying out of trouble” much to the Government’s delight.¹⁰³ Ch’ng believes the government pursues totalitarianism in order to establish a civil religion that “is used to promote economic growth, with all the fruits of such labour.”¹⁰⁴ Whereas in the United States one might rail against capitalist materialism, in Singapore Ch’ng attacks a civil religion that he considers to be dominated by idolatrous devotion to economic prosperity.

In a stirring last section Ch’ng mounts a critique of the ascendant charismatic Singaporean churches that lack any emphasis on social ethics and preach a gospel of prosperity. Most churches are ruled by an elite cadre of “successful and monied businessmen and executives” who are corrupted, in the words of Robert Bellah, by “luxury, dependence, and ignorance.”¹⁰⁵ More importantly the majority of church members are “*contained*,” by fear and uncertainty engendered by the strong State, “*comfortable*,” with the rising affluence of upper middle class prosperity, and “*complacent*,” because the role for religion as defined by the State consists of “encouraging ... members to lead decent and wholesome lives and to stay out of trouble ... the

¹⁰⁰ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 258.

¹⁰¹ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 262.

¹⁰² Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 264.

¹⁰³ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 267.

¹⁰⁴ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 268.

¹⁰⁵ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 278–79.

rest is silence.”¹⁰⁶

In summary, like K. P. Tan above, Ch’ng sees the modern Republic of Singapore as continuing in its colonial role as a “commercial emporium” due to its strategic geographic location and its limited natural resources. As opposed to Tan, who sees civil religion as an inevitable product of collective life¹⁰⁷ Ch’ng characterizes civil religion as national ideology formulated by the government with the ultimate goal of supporting the economic system of Singapore—economic post-Confucianism. It is no surprise that Ch’ng traces this civil religion directly to the Shared Values, which were mooted by the PAP and then debated and adopted by Parliament in 1991. Ch’ng’s focus on civil religion as ideology is understandable given that he wrote shortly after the Marxist conspiracy crackdown in Singapore against the Catholic Church in 1987, during a period when the government took several actions to formally introduce Asian values in order to shore up national morals during the transition period out of its colonial past.

Singaporean civil religion, according to Ch’ng, is not only to serve economic needs and “to control and disarm the different religions” in a multicultural society, but also “to channel fundamental allegiance to the nation.”¹⁰⁸ The Shared Values serve as a “creed” that the ruling party constantly uses to hector citizens and impress on them a sense of national identity and pride. It also reminds Singaporeans that the country’s “survival depends on” them “giving their all to the nation.”¹⁰⁹ Ch’ng identifies the roots of the Shared Values and the civil religion as lying

¹⁰⁶ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 283–93.

¹⁰⁷ Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 355. Tan quotes Michael Hughey as holding “that every relatively stable society will possess a set of shared beliefs and symbols that express the highest values of the society and that are considered sacred.” Tan notes this is a perspective which originates with Emile Durkheim.

¹⁰⁸ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 2.

¹⁰⁹ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 2–3.

“in Confucian values derived from local culture.”¹¹⁰ Ch’ng also raises some pointed questions for the Christian church in Singapore. Since he construes the civil religion to be a form of sacralized nationalism bordering on idolatry primarily promoted by the government, Ch’ng is particularly concerned that the church identify this religion and “hold its ground” amid the increased touting of the “Good Life of affluence and consumerism.”¹¹¹

Summary Comments on Civil Religion and Civil Law in Singapore

After having described the Singaporean *historical situation* in religious terms from the perspective of a Hindu sociologist, a Chinese political scientist, and a Christian academic, it is time to collect some thoughts about civil religion and civil law in Singapore as they relate to the question at hand: i.e., what kind of civil religion exists in Singapore and how does this civil religion impact Christian faith, and specifically the Christian gospel? The general contours as provided by the above authors might be summarized thus: According to Sinha religious pluralism requires some measures to promote harmony among the religions or else society will fall into constant religious and ethnic conflict. Additionally, in a surprising way, law and regulation of religion provide a meaningful forum for religious differences to be discussed within Singaporean society providing a relief valve, in a way, for religious tensions to be worked out. Despite these religious differences, however, there is at the same time a need for some common ground—perhaps a civil religion—in order to provide some social cohesion in the republic.

K. P. Tan moves beyond the question of whether Singapore *needs* a civil religion—he maintains it already has one propagated by the PAP to secure political legitimacy. Despite the

¹¹⁰ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 3.

¹¹¹ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 3.

fact that Singapore is a secular society, this secularism in the Singaporean *historical situation* has led to a rise in religious fervor among many if not most citizens. In this situation the government maintains a strong hand over the religions using both soft-law instruments and statutory regulation. Because religious rationale is a powerful motive in island life, the government seeks a form of civil religion to justify policies that further its primary economic aims and that produce model citizens. Civil religion meets a need for public discourse about proposed legislation because it provides a “sense of identity, common framework of morality, a shared culture, and a fundamental basis for stability.”¹¹²

Finally, Ronald Ch’ng moves beyond the mere question of political expediency for civil religion as it is practiced in Singapore. He asks what significance and challenge this poses for the Christian church and for the individual Christian. He characterizes civil religion as having gone too far in that it has degenerated into the imposition of party-driven political ideology. He traces some fundamental concerns over the government’s handling of religious groups to the Confucian notion that the State is a Father to whom is due unquestioned devotion and obedience. This is why he expresses great concern over governmental efforts to propagate Shared Values, Family Values, and Religious Harmony. As a strong armed Father the government effectively squashes genuine discussion and debate over vital questions and attempts through many different means to control all political and religious life. Thus, the Singapore government, in Ch’ng’s account, is a modern form of totalitarianism; additionally, Confucian values and ideology are being promulgated through its civil religion. In this economic post-Confucian milieu, the churches have effectively capitulated to the State by largely ceding public debate over questions with

¹¹² Tan, “Pragmatic Secularism, Civil Religion,” 352.

religious implications to the PAP. Individual Christians embroiled in this state of affairs are left contained, comfortable, and complacent, lacking any involvement in society and largely passive in civic life. In fact, the Christian religion has been reduced to “encouraging ... members to lead decent and wholesome lives and to stay out of trouble.”¹¹³

Thus, these authors, who share different political and religious persuasions, uniformly locate a civil religion in Singapore. The political ideology of the ruling elite seems to play a role especially in the sense that it purports to maintain a sense of social cohesion and community over individual rights. Or to put it differently the civil religion has a strong sense of harmony. All the authors acknowledge as well that the State exerts a significant degree of power in regulating religious matters and this power may be characterized as an authoritarian stance toward religious practice. One author even maintains that the State, given its reach and scope, is totalitarian in character. Finally, the author who writes explicitly from a Christian perspective maintains that the State has domesticated religious practice to such a degree that Christian religion may be understood in a sense that is largely defined by the mores of State ideology. If Christian religion has degenerated to this degree, as Ch’ng suggests, it would amount to a severe distortion of the gospel and the Lutheran notion of the two kinds of righteousness.

It bears repeating that this dissertation is an exercise in analyzing the concept of civil religion as it appears in Singaporean society in order to examine its impact on the gospel. Ch’ng examines civil religion in order to take a political position against social forces that compromise the Church’s witness and individual Christian living. His analysis fits into the category of Christ

¹¹³ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 292–93.

against culture from the work of H. Richard Niebuhr.¹¹⁴ It emphasizes the prophetic role of the church in opposing the world. This view tends to ignore that the church *is* pleased when there is social order especially if it coincides with moral behavior as biblically informed. Just because a pluralistic society has social cohesion and social structure enforced by civil law does not imply that the world is encroaching on the church. The right hand work of the church need not be compromised. But in the discussion above the author claims that the civil religion foisted upon Singaporeans amounts to a nationalistic materialism. He also makes an argument that this materialism renders Christians contained, comfortable, and complacent. They have adopted the materialism and exclusive focus on economic success which displaces Christian works of love and mercy. We shouldn't expect the State to preach the gospel, but we shouldn't expect that the Church would be content to reduce the gospel to telling people to lead a decent life and stay out of trouble. Faithful proclamation requires preaching a law that declares all sinners and a gospel that proclaims we are justified, even though we are sinners. Preaching the gospel also includes the declaration that free from the burden of sin we give and live from the position of forgiven sinner and newborn child of God.

Some may argue that the loss of the framework that distinguishes between active and passive righteousness is no big deal, it is only a paradigm. Only the loss of the gospel should concern us. The trouble is that without distinguishing the two kinds of righteousness, the gospel is mixed with the law and it is, in a very real sense, lost through works righteousness. Perhaps it degenerates to giving logical priority to faith over justification in the order of salvation.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, expand. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 45.

¹¹⁵ Carl E. Braaten, *Justification: The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 28–37.

Perhaps it degenerates into a synergism that considers the exercise of our ‘free will’ necessary to conversion (see Michael Paul below). In any case when active and passive righteousness are not distinguished, passive righteousness is lost. Luther argues that, “we set forth two worlds, as it were, one of them heavenly and the other earthly. Into these we place the two kinds of righteousness, which are distinct and separated from each other.”¹¹⁶ The setting forth of the two worlds and the two kinds of righteousness is an *essential* part of preaching the gospel.

While Ch’ng’s critique is helpful as a comprehensive account of the many aspects of civil society, his overall assessment is mistaken. It is going too far to say the state is totalitarian, for instance. Further, Ch’ng is unwilling to concede that certain aspects of civil order and social prosperity are good for everybody. He also seems a bit too concerned that PAP leaders are intentionally introducing Confucianism into state ideology when they openly and repeatedly deny it. The leaders seem to be striving to embrace values that are shared in common by the major religious groups. It is more likely that certain modes of thought and being occur to Singaporeans because of their cultural traditions. In theory this should not concern us as long as these cultural traditions and practices are not understood as a model for the Christian’s standing before God. In order to overcome these cultural traditions and practices the church must set forth the passive righteousness of faith in contradistinction to civil righteousness in order to proclaim the gospel.

Lutheran Two-Dimensional Anthropology—Michael Paul

Some thinkers construe right relations between men as indicative of right relations between

¹¹⁶ LW 26:8,; WA 40.1:22, 28–30.

men and their Creator,¹¹⁷ others, vice versa.¹¹⁸ In both these ways of thinking ethics and theology are connected through “cause and effect”.¹¹⁹ In the first, the fruit of ethics and an ethical life is merit before man that justifies before God. In the second, the fruit of justification before God is righteousness before other men. Both of these conceptions are challenged by the biblical teaching that the doctrine of justification connects ethics to theology. Our life is connected to our Creator because He has saved us through His Son, Jesus Christ, apart from anything that we have done or will do, not through a “cause and effect” that we perform in our human lives. The framework for the doctrine of justification involves the proper distinction between civil and spiritual righteousness, which in Lutheran theology is termed the two kinds of righteousness.¹²⁰

Luther’s brilliant theological insight¹²¹ into this matter revolves around understanding creaturely human living in two dimensions, the vertical and the horizontal. Right relation in each

¹¹⁷ T. Patrick Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 51. Here Burke describes the nature of Confucian religion, “for Confucius ethics has religious significance, because it is mandated by Heaven, and our relationship to Heaven is governed by how we conduct ourselves.” Or consider the reason cited by many, even Lutherans, on why they will spend eternity with God—i.e. because they are good people, meaning that they treat others ethically.

¹¹⁸ F. E. Mayer, *The Religious Bodies of North America*, 4th ed., rev. Arthur Carl Piepkorn (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1961), 305. Consider the Holiness Bodies of the Arminian tradition who believe that “the New Testament baptism of the Holy Spirit” is “the Spirit’s act of “entire sanctification,” an instantaneous and total cleansing from sin and an entire and abiding devotion to God.”

¹¹⁹ Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1962), 1:405–14, contains a fascinating discussion of how such causal relations end with the “hidden God” if faced resolutely. What Luther saw was that the doctrine of justification or the “impact of the Gospel” unites life and theology in an absolutely different way than the ‘cause and effect’ of many ethical systems.

¹²⁰ Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions (1529–1537)*, trans. Gene J. Lund (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1972), 102. A more thorough discussion of kinds of righteousness will be undertaken in chapter five, below.

¹²¹ Robert Kolb, “Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness: Reflections on His Two-Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of His Theology,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (1999): 452. Kolb here contends, “In developing this contrast between passive righteousness—which expresses itself in faith—and active righteousness—which expresses itself in performing the deeds of God’s plan for human life—Luther was bringing to light a fundamental distinction that had escaped articulation by most theologians since the time of the apostles. This distinction recognizes and rests upon Christ’s observation that human life consists of two kinds of relationship, one with the author and creator of life, the other with all other creatures (Matt. 22:37–39).” So, the Reformers maintained this insight was a rediscovery of the apostolic tradition.

of these dimensions constitutes the two kinds of righteousness. The vertical dimension of life is lived before God, and righteousness for the creature is received passively by faith as a gift from the Creator. Vertical righteousness reflects the love and generosity of God, the giver, rather than the worthiness of man, the receiver. Vertical righteousness existed before the Fall and this gift created a relationship of trust between Creator and creature. After the Fall this vertical righteousness is bestowed only because of what God has accomplished in Christ through his life, death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. This undeserved gift of right relationship in or through Christ is received by faith and restores the trust that was broken. In fact this gift calls forth and creates a new man, led by the Spirit, who looks to God for all that is good. This is true Christian righteousness.

The horizontal dimension of life is lived before other human creatures and the creation, and righteousness there is earned actively through good works. Works done in the horizontal dimension in no way earn or merit any favor from God, though they are to be done in accordance with His will and commandments.¹²² These works are not holy exercises done to show love for God but practical everyday endeavors to strengthen the family, build community, and secure the society. Most notably these works reflect the various callings of wife, husband, mother, father, daughter, son, citizen, worker, and so forth. Insofar as these works help the neighbor they are considered good. Good works in the horizontal dimension may be done for many different

¹²²A classic Luther quotation from his Galatians commentary of 1535 on this subject: “We set forth two worlds, as it were, one of them heavenly and the other earthly. Into these we place these two kinds of righteousness, which are distinct and separated from each other. The righteousness of the law is earthly and deals with earthly things; by it we perform good works... But this righteousness [i.e. Christian righteousness] is heavenly and passive. We do not have it of ourselves; we receive it from heaven. We do not perform it; we accept it by faith, through which we ascend beyond all laws and works.” *LW* 26:8; *WA* 40.1:19–22, 28–30. Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand begin the first section of their book, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), which deals extensively with the two kinds of righteousness as a framework for Lutheran theology, with this quotation.

reasons but tend toward peace and harmony within creation, good order in society, and love of our fellow creatures. Much good can come from these works and *all people* can pursue and do them according to reason and their senses. This righteousness may be termed civil righteousness.

The freedom for the Christian in this life consists in the surprising assertion that these two kinds of righteousness are not connected in a strictly causal relationship. Good works are not done in order to prepare for conversion. Believing in the gospel is not a human effort of the will necessary for forgiveness. Obedience to the commandments does not, of itself, result in holiness and sanctification. Conversion, justification, forgiveness, holiness, sanctification are all gifts received from the Father through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. The freedom in Christian life flows from the Word of God preached that proclaims these unbelievable gospel truths despite continued human sinfulness.

The following discussion of Luther's two-dimensional anthropology undertaken by Michael Paul outlines how traditional Lutheran theology maintains a distinction between these two types of relation, or righteousness in order to preserve the gospel. Although Paul does not engage the question of how civil religion and civil law impact the gospel, he does explore the two kinds of righteousness through the thought of Chinese theologian Stephen Tong. Paul demonstrates how the gospel can be lost when human effort enters a calculation of righteousness in the vertical dimension. Paul's study concludes that in Tong's theology maintaining a place for an effort of the human will in conversion endangers the gospel and joyous Christian living.

Paul maintains that Taiwanese and Chinese Christians commonly understand life primarily in terms of "fundamental responsibilities." Through these responsibilities Christians must "establish and maintain a right relationship with God that will ensure their entrance into eternal

life at the final judgment.”¹²³ Paul sees the root of this understanding in a theological anthropology that not only emphasizes the need to exert the will, *juezhi*, at the time of conversion but also teaches ultimate salvation on Judgment day is dependent on continuing human efforts and moral behavior.¹²⁴ From a Lutheran perspective this anthropology fails to distinguish the passive righteousness of faith before God from the active righteousness lived out in service to the neighbor in the life of a believer. Worse yet, it connects them through a causal relationship. This leads to confusion and uncertainty, particularly regarding who will pass through the final judgment into eternal life. An excellent example of this thinking is found in the writings of influential Indonesian Chinese theologian Stephen Tong. Tong influences and reflects not only Indonesian Chinese but the entire Chinese Christian diaspora according to Paul with special emphasis on Taiwan and Hong Kong.¹²⁵

Paul makes an extensive survey of Chinese Luther reflection since the first Lutheran missionary arrived on Chinese soil in 1831. He highlights that Chinese theologians have shown an increasing interest in Luther. Paul presents Tong as the most influential Reformed theologian throughout the Chinese world. His analysis concentrates on Christian theological reflection and avoids engaging questions regarding the civil sphere and politics as regards their influence on the church. He argues that Chinese theologians have understood much of Luther’s theology in general, but they have not appropriated his understanding of human anthropology and the nature of the man-God relationship in ways congenial toward maintaining the passive righteousness of faith. Paul’s own anthropological presuppositions with regard to active and passive righteousness

¹²³ Michael J. Paul, “The Distinctiveness and Application of Martin Luther’s Two-Dimensional Anthropology in the Taiwan Church” (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, 2010), 2.

¹²⁴ Michael J. Paul, “Two-Dimensional Anthropology,” 31. See also 43 and 46.

are in agreement with Paul Althaus, Oswald Bayer, Bernhard Lohse, and Robert Kolb, and he states them in this way: “First, during the entire time of a Christian’s existence—not just at the beginning at baptism—his right standing before God is based completely on the alien and passive righteousness of Christ and is correspondingly never based on one’s own intrinsic or active righteousness. Second, the fact that one is justified by faith is fundamental to the essence of being a human creature.”¹²⁶

Paul nicely summarizes the resurgence in research on the two kinds of righteousness led by Robert Kolb and Charles Arand of Concordia Seminary, St Louis. He discusses three previous dissertations under their supervision penned by Joel Biermann (2002), Guntis Kalme (2005), and Makito Masaki (2008), which explore Luther’s two-dimensional anthropology in terms of virtue ethics, creedal hermeneutics, and Luther’s Wartburg Postil, respectively. None of these studies, it seems, directly discuss the interaction of civil law, civil religion, and the church’s gospel proclamation. Paul’s dissertation includes an exhaustive review of recent scholarship engaging the two kinds of righteousness,¹²⁷ though none deal directly with civil law, civil religion, and the two kinds of righteousness.¹²⁸ One critical point that Paul makes consistently is that in the

¹²⁵ Michael J. Paul, “Two-Dimensional Anthropology,” 5–7.

¹²⁶ Michael J. Paul, “Two-Dimensional Anthropology,” 26.

¹²⁷ Of particular interest: Charles P. Arand and Joel Biermann, “Why the Two Kinds of Righteousness?” *Concordia Journal* 33 (April 2007): 116–35; Robert Kolb, “Christian Civic Responsibility in an Age of Judgment,” *Concordia Journal* 19 (January 1993): 10–34; Klaus Detlev Schulz, “Two Kinds of Righteousness and Moral Philosophy: *Confessio Augustana* XVIII, Philipp Melanchthon, and Martin Luther,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 73 (January 2009): 17–40; Robert Kolb, “Niebuhr’s ‘Christ and Culture in Paradox’ Revisited,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 10 (1996): 259–79; William W. Schumacher, “Civic Participation by Churches and Pastors: an Essay on Two Kinds of Righteousness,” *Concordia Journal* 30 (July 2004): 165–77.

¹²⁸ One Chinese ThD dissertation of interest that Paul does mention by Tai Cheong Ip did deal with applying Luther and Bonhoeffer’s understandings of church and state to the contemporary situation in Hong Kong. Additionally Paul mentions the discussion of civic participation that is explored by William W. Schumacher, “Civic Participation by Churches and Pastors: an essay on Two Kinds of Righteousness,” *Concordia Journal* 30 (July 2004): 165–77.

Chinese Christian church and mind the central tenet of Lutheran theological reflection, justification by grace through faith, is often clouded by a misunderstanding of the role of the human will and human freedom. Paul summarizes the misunderstanding: “there seems to be insufficient acknowledgement among these theologians of the clear distinction between the way in which human creatures live fundamentally passively in relation to God but actively in relation to other human creatures.”¹²⁹ Paul emphasizes that God’s establishment of a relationship of loving trust between Himself and the believer is always one where the believer is dependent on the grace of God. Paul maintains that before the Fall Adam’s will was bound freely to the Creator God. After the Fall Adam’s will was bound to Satan. During conversion the will is freed from Satan and bound again freely to the Creator and Re-Creator God. In this sense there is no free will, as Luther argued famously against the position of Erasmus of Rotterdam. The human will has never been meant to be free from its Creator.¹³⁰

Paul notes that in the context of Taiwanese and Hong Kong culture, influenced by Confucianism, there is a strong moral basis for society. In these societies there is still a strong sense of horizontal active righteousness that comes along with being Chinese. In such situations, when the Christian Church teaches a different sort of vertical righteousness with God, aside from the passive righteousness of faith, “it can be difficult to know where to ‘put’” active righteousness. Thus, in Confucian influenced societies the theological problem of distinguishing properly the two kinds of righteousness is accentuated by the historical situation.¹³¹ Paul notes in

¹²⁹ Michael J. Paul, “Two-Dimensional Anthropology,” 40.

¹³⁰ Michael J. Paul, “Two-Dimensional Anthropology,” 38–40.

¹³¹ Michael J. Paul, “Two-Dimensional Anthropology,” 56–58. Paul helpfully identifies several treatments of Christianity and Confucianism including Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study* (New York:Kodansha International, 1977); John Warwick Montgomery, “A Critique of Chinese Religious Options: What One Believes Determines What One Does,” in *Let Christ be Christ: Ethics and World Religions in the Two*

his concluding chapter that “while Confucian thought appears to be slowly losing its influence on the Chinese, it is generally accepted that Confucianism is still the most prominent force in Chinese thought and culture.”¹³² It is the contention of this dissertation that in a society such as Singapore where vestiges of Confucianism are incorporated into civil religion that there is also a danger that the two kinds of righteousness will not be clearly distinguished.

Conclusions

It is no accident that in these initial pages a Hindu sociologist, a Chinese political scientist, a Christian academic, and a former Lutheran missionary to Taiwan have been appealed to in order to construe the complex and active social, political, legal, religious and racial context of Singaporean society. This effort has been undertaken especially for the reader who is not familiar with the historical situation in contemporary Singapore. It makes no claim to be exhaustive in purview or depth, merely suggestive. The religions are active in the public square of Singapore. The races are engaged in an ongoing discussion about how to get along in an Asian democracy that prides itself on meritocracy and harmony. This is the case at least within the confines of the academic community. Whether these discussions take place on terms congenial to an American understanding of freedom of speech and freedom of religious practice is not, however, the central focus of this dissertation. This dissertation will move forward by considering these different aspects of society—the social, political, legal, and religious—under the rubric of civil religion. Civil religion promises to be a fruitful term for organizing and thinking about the generalized

Kingdoms: Essays in Honor of the Sixty-Fifth Birthday of Charles L. Manske, ed. Daniel N. Harmelink (Huntington Beach, CA: Tentatio, 1999), 201–18; and Stephen Oliver, “The Moral Visions of the Epistle of James and Zhongyong” (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary Saint Louis, 2002).

¹³² Michael J. Paul, “Two-Dimensional Anthropology,” 297.

religious situation in Singapore. Civil law and civil religion are mutually dependent upon each other, and the former is in many cases a concrete expression of the latter.¹³³ From the civil law we will gain an understanding of the boundaries of civil righteousness in Singaporean culture. This understanding can then be integrated into theological reflection to place civil religion, civil law, and civil righteousness in proper perspective with Christian righteousness.

Thus, after the dissertation considers the nature of civil religion and civil law in Singapore it will move on to consider issues of Lutheran reflection on the two kinds of righteousness in order to illuminate the Singapore situation theologically. The goal of such theological reflection is gospel proclamation that frees the conscience from the ongoing burden of sin and preserves the passive righteousness of faith. The dissertation will adopt a faithful Lutheran stance based on the historic confessions of the church in order to accomplish this.

¹³³ This proposal to look at civil law as a way to ‘get at’ civil religion is not unique. See, for instance, Phillip E. Hammond, *With Liberty for All: Freedom of Religion in the United States* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), xv. Here Hammond states that in the context of contemporary American society “legal institutions replace churches as the place where society (as distinct from the individual) engages the profoundest ethical issues, and legal-moral language replaces theology.” Furthermore, he goes on to state that in his book he is undertaking the sociological task of “looking for the religion *of* the Constitution by looking at the way the Constitution separates church and state. In so doing,” he discerns “the religion *behind* the Constitution.” This, then, is American civil religion according to Hammond.

CHAPTER TWO

CIVIL RELIGION AND THE CIVIL ORDER

Civil Religion

On the general relation of theology to culture,¹³⁴ of religion to the civil order,¹³⁵ of law to religion,¹³⁶ much has been written. Since this dissertation purports to deal with the interaction of civil law and theology in the Republic of Singapore, this literature is certainly germane to the

¹³⁴ Works such as H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, originally published in 1951, which typifies various theological stances toward culture and their implications for religious life, come to mind. Niebuhr's work is still influential today and many students of theology's relationship to culture deal with it explicitly. For a Lutheran evaluation see Kolb, "Niebuhr's 'Christ and Culture in Paradox' Revisited," cited above. Stanley Hauerwas is another more recent American theologian who writes on such topics from a Mennonite/Yoderian perspective. His books such as *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000), *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), and *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989) written with William H. Willimon, raise provocative themes on the relationship of the Christian community to political life in America emphasizing themes such as the church as community, the politics of nonviolence, and post-Constantinian Christianity. Hauerwas favors an endeavor "where the theological task is not merely the interpretive matter of translating Jesus into modern categories but rather to translate the world to him. The theologian's job is not to make the gospel credible to the modern world, but to make the world credible to the gospel," *Resident Aliens*, 24. Thus, the Christian task becomes preeminently an exercise in ethics, reforming life and the church into a "credible" polis.

¹³⁵ Since the concomitant social and political reforms following the Protestant Reformation, theological reflection on Church and State has multiplied. Whether one marks the historical beginning of this tradition at the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 or the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 the literature on the separation of church and state developed along with the modern nation-state. The doctrine of the two kingdoms was adopted by both Luther and Calvin and thus undergirds much political philosophy of Europe and America. For a recent treatment of the two kingdoms doctrine and natural law see David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). For an introduction to Lutheran notions on church state relations see John R. Stumme and Robert W. Tuttle, eds., *Church and State: Lutheran Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), especially the first three chapters.

¹³⁶ For an introduction to this thought see John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander, eds., *Christianity and Law: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). In the Introduction Witte notes "Over the past two generations, a new interdisciplinary movement has emerged dedicated to the study of the religious dimensions of law, the legal dimensions of religion, and the interaction of legal and religious ideas and institutions, norms and practices. This study is predicated on the assumptions that religion gives law its spirit and inspires its adherence to ritual and justice. Law gives religion its structure and encourages its devotion to order and organization. Law and religion share such ideas as fault, obligation, and covenant and such methods as ethics, rhetoric, and textual interpretation." Witte refers especially to the work of Harold J. Berman and cites his "anchor text" *The Interaction of Law and Religion* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974). Whether this effort began over the past two decades or has merely been rediscovered by modern academics after a period of secularization could certainly be disputed.

task at hand. Singapore is a self-professed secular state with no established religion.¹³⁷ One way of approaching the interaction of law and theology through secular sociological literature is to begin with “civil religion.” Civil religion itself is a term and concept associated with constant theological disputation.¹³⁸ Since the term was reintroduced in contemporary American discussions of the sociology of religion by Bellah in 1967,¹³⁹ a number of understandings have been put forward. More recent discussion has acknowledged that much contemporary argument results from “uncritically mixed modes of analysis and the confusion of models by different interpreters.”¹⁴⁰ Wilson introduces a four part typology to deal with the mixed mode analysis that permeates the literature and finds considerable, perhaps rhetorical, ambiguity even in Bellah’s defining essay on the subject. Wilson’s typology is (1) social, (2) cultural, (3) political, and (4) theological. He cites the Yankee City Memorial Day observances in Newburyport, Massachusetts; Will Herberg’s American cultural analysis in *Protestant, Catholic, and Jew*; the civic rights, duties, and obligations discussed by Jean Jacques Rousseau as concomitant with

¹³⁷ Tan, Seow Hon, “Religion in the Abortion Discourse in Singapore: A Case Study of the Relevance of Religious Arguments in Law-Making in Multi-Religious Democracies,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 26 (May 2011): 505–39. Tan, a Harvard educated lawyer, summarizes the political situation in Singapore as follows, 509, “The Wee Chong Jin Constitutional Commission referred to Singapore as a “democratic secular state.” Unlike the United States Constitution, the Constitution of Singapore does not have a religious non-establishment clause, although the freedom of religion clause specifies that no person shall be compelled to pay any tax the proceeds of which are specially allocated in whole or in part for the purposes of a religion other than his own. Additionally, special mention is made of religious minorities in Art 152(1), which notes “the responsibility of the Government constantly to care for the interests of the racial and religious minorities in Singapore.” The special position of the Malays as the indigenous people of Singapore is also provided for in the provision recognizing “the responsibility of the Government to protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social and cultural interests and the Malay language.” Additionally, the legislature is required to provide for the regulation of Muslim affairs by law.”

¹³⁸ Richard V. Pierard, “Civil Religion,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 267. See also his entry on civil religion in Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *The encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 583–88.

¹³⁹ Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” in *Religion in America*, ed. William G. McLoughlin and Robert N. Bellah (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), 3–23.

¹⁴⁰ John F. Wilson, *Public Religion in American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 148.

Enlightened government and religion; and the mythic interpretation of Puritan American life offered by Sydney Mead in *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*; as examples of these four types, respectively. In another typological analysis Richey and Jones outline five different understandings of the term civil religion, including (1) folk religion, (2) a universal religion of the nation, (3) religious nationalism, (4) democratic faith, and (5) Protestant civic piety.¹⁴¹ These two typologies well characterize the manifold positions sociologists, political scientists, and historians take toward the term civil religion.

A brief survey of this literature reveals there is a unique explanatory power for the term civil religion in many of the different cases cited in the literature. For instance, in the field of sociology where practitioners tend to bracket consideration of “God” due to their conception of proper methodology,¹⁴² civil religion is a powerful descriptive term for the way in which society itself is a religious phenomenon.¹⁴³ Social anthropology, too, as an empirical study of man’s

¹⁴¹ Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, eds., *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 14–18.

¹⁴² Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy; Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 179. Berger in an appendix explicitly deals with the nature of sociological and theological perspectives and observes, “Questions raised within the frame of reference of an empirical discipline (and I would emphatically consider sociological theory to be within such a frame of reference) are not susceptible to answers coming out of the frame of reference of a non-empirical and normative discipline, just as the reverse procedure is inadmissible.”

¹⁴³ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Durkheim begins his work by developing the following definition of religion: “*a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibition—beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church.* The second element that takes its place in our definition is therefore no less essential than the first: demonstrating that the idea of religion is inseparable from the idea of a church suggests that religion must be something eminently collective.” In this definition Durkheim sees the sacred and religion as things that transport Man out of his turned inward individualism and utilitarianism, which is to say, in his terminology, the profane. As Durkheim’s argument proceeds, it is clear that he expands the idea of religion as being based on “church” to religion as being based on “society.” Durkheimian religion is then by its very nature civil religion, although he does not himself use this term. Later sociologists such as Robert Bellah and Phillip Hammond do. This use of the term “civil religion” is also congenial to the thought of sociologists Peter Berger and Clifford Geertz.

interactions tends to move in the same direction.¹⁴⁴ In historical studies the term is readily employed to describe particular embodiments of the relations between church and state. Say, for instance, the situation where church and state were unified in the Roman Empire into a Constantinian synthesis. In this case civil religion might be easily understood as the religion mandated by the ruler for his subjects, “the universal religion of the nation” in the typology above. Insofar as religious affiliation is enforced, then, there is a coercive sense to the term in this usage. Again during the Reformation after the Peace of Augsburg there was a relation of church and state under the rubric *cuius regio, eius religio*, although private belief and practice was not always controlled. In these cases the term civil religion is a placeholder for the manner in which church-state relations are carried out within a political entity. Does the church dominate and influence the state? Does the state dominate and influence the church? Do rulers and citizens understand and aim for a strict separation of institutions? These are questions and themes that naturally flow from such consideration.

Thus the term “civil religion” has a unique explanatory power dependent on context and authorial intent. It is best, then, to state just how this term will be used.¹⁴⁵ This dissertation will make use of the term “civil religion” simply to mean the complex of commonly held beliefs and practices within a political entity such as the United States of America or the Republic of

¹⁴⁴ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 176. Berger comments on anthropologist Thomas Luckmann, “Luckmann’s conception of religion is the capacity of the human organism to transcend its biological nature through the construction of objective, morally binding, all-embracing universes of meaning. Consequently, religion becomes not only *the* social phenomenon (as in Durkheim), but indeed *the* anthropological phenomenon *par excellence*.” Also see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 88. In his essay, “Religion as a Cultural System,” Geertz observes relative to social anthropology from 1920 to 1970, “Durkheim’s discussion of the nature of the sacred, Weber’s *Verstehenden* methodology, Freud’s parallel between personal rituals and collective ones, and Malinowski’s exploration of the distinction between religion and common sense—seem to me inevitable starting-points for any useful anthropological theory of religion.” Durkheim’s sense of the sacred is, as noted above, that it resides in the invisible forces of society.

¹⁴⁵ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 175. Berger includes an excellent discussion on the nature of definitions and the

Singapore appealed to directly and indirectly by citizens and officials so that acceptable law can be written, taught, and followed within the society as a whole, especially law relating to religious belief and practice. For convenience, this law is identified as the “civil law” that is a consequence of the “civil religion” of the political entity. This does not imply that this law is understood within the society as an expression of Divine will but merely that it is the result of social agreements or contracts necessary for the maintenance of civil order as it relates to religious belief and practice. National aspirations that flow from any sense of national destiny are also distinguished from this law, although civil argument could logically consider such expectations. This definition of civil religion, as the complex of beliefs and practices appealed to in public discourse concerning the regulation and ordering of religious belief and practice, falls close to the field of jurisprudence as it relates to religion.¹⁴⁶ This fact is simply accepted with the caveat that the study of civil religion is explicitly a sociological (and in this dissertation also a theological) endeavor, whereas jurisprudence concerns itself primarily with a philosophy of law that seeks to explain and legitimize a particular legal system or theory. The goal of the dissertation’s examination of civil religion and civil law is to understand how various beliefs and practices within a state impact the Christian gospel. The thesis states that the civil righteousness that follows from civil religion and civil law threatens a proper understanding of Christian righteousness.

Thus, the notion of civil religion this dissertation will use is not primarily the “secular nationalism” that affords a nation a manner in which to see its destiny and interpret its historical

possibility that even flawed definitions can illuminate discussion from the standpoint of the sociology of religion.

¹⁴⁶ Hammond, *With Liberty for All*, xiii. Hammond maintains “America has many religions, all of which are supposed to experience maximum liberty, but, at the same time, American legal theory embraces an ideology that, among other things, justifies that religious liberty. Many have called this ideology a “civil” religion.”

experience. Nor is it a theological legitimization of the state in line with the religious eschatology of a national religion. It is not merely faith in democratic ideals and process. It is not a homogenized Christian civic piety tracing itself to Puritan roots. It is not a *Volk* religion of national faith and mythic legend used to maintain some sense of *Kultur*, worth and self-identity.¹⁴⁷ Rather, the notion of civil religion used in this dissertation is the result of the understanding that political discourse and cultural converse proceed by appeal to religious sentiments, concepts, practices, and symbols at various times and that these sentiments, concepts, practices, and symbols are more or less commonly held by a large number of the citizens of the state. To refine this perspective further, it may be that in particular times and at particular places there “exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion,”¹⁴⁸ yet this clear differentiation and institutionalization is not necessary for the concept of civil religion to be valid. It is my intention, then, that the term “civil religion” is used in a restricted Durkheimian sense. First, it is understood as a product of collective social life. Second, it is pervasive and even at times invisible to those in the culture. Third, it expresses something that is true and a reality for people who live in this society. But this civil religion does not intentionally compete with other religions as would be the case in the sense of a state religion taught in order to displace other religious affiliations or a so-called “primitive” religion of a tribal group. Instead it is understood to lie behind and support the civil law within civil society in a general sense.

¹⁴⁷ For a recent discussion of American Civil Religion within the context of German National Socialism and the theology of Karl Barth see Craig M. Watts, “Barth, Barmen and American Civil Religion,” *Pro Ecclesia* 14 (Summer 2005): 287–305. Watts along with Barth connects natural theology with civil religion and maintains there is no place for it in the church’s theological discourse. By avoiding the terms natural theology and natural law I am trying to sidestep this discussion, instead connecting civil religion with civil law.

¹⁴⁸ Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” 3. This is the well-known and much quoted phrase with which Bellah

Civil Law and Pluralism

Hammond has argued the twin concepts of pluralism and law can be shown to have engendered the development of American civil religion in the sense that it is an emergent property of social life.¹⁴⁹ His argument runs closely along Durkheim's (and this dissertation's) concept of civil religion. First, Hammond notes that to the degree a collection of people is a society it will exhibit a common religion. This common religion is an expression of the unity they share as a single moral community. The rites of this common religion periodically reaffirm the social group. Here Hammond maintains along with Durkheim that "religion is more the expression of an integrated society than it is the source of a society's integration."¹⁵⁰ Hammond follows Durkheim in arguing that experiences of social unity lead to ritualistic expressions of unity. From a theological perspective we disagree with this idea that unity and sense of community precede religion. This is the major weakness of the sociological view of religion from a theological perspective—it privileges man and not God in creating community. This is much the same as nature is privileged over God in many modern scientific accounts of creation. Seen theologically, God through creation bestows *both* a social unity *and* a religious unity to man. Spouse, family, and community constitute man's bestowed social unity. God's image and the divine relationship of trust constitute man's bestowed religious unity. Thus Hammond and Durkheim posit a certain false dichotomy where either social or religious unity precedes the other, when in fact, a more biblical position would be that they coexist and have coexisted from

begins his 1967 essay.

¹⁴⁹Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond, "Pluralism and Law in the Formation of American Civil Religion," in *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 138–63. The following discussion closely follows Hammond's argument and perspective in this essay.

¹⁵⁰ Bellah and Hammond, "Pluralism and Law," 139.

the beginning.

Be that as it may, according to Hammond, in America the expressions of unity overcome the disunity flowing from denominations, ethnic traditions and class differences. Reversing terms in the “common interpretation” of Durkheim’s thesis that “a society is integrated to the degree it possesses a common religion,” Hammond contends that to “the degree society is integrated the expression of its integration will occur in ways that can be called religious.”¹⁵¹ In this view many public ceremonies, such as repeating the national pledge before school begins, take on a religious character. Disruptions to social unity can also occur, such as when a member of the Jehovah’s Witnesses claims that saying the national pledge is prohibited by his personal religion. When such civil disagreements occur, the scene of their resolution is “a likely scene for the expression of civil religion.”¹⁵² In a religiously plural democratic society legal institutions are this scene.

For Hammond religious plurality does not just mean multiple religious groups with the same or similar beliefs. Instead he conceives that these groups have a multiplicity of nonempirical belief systems. Each belief system is a moral architecture of how people make sense of the world. When these belief systems collide, they don’t just coexist in a stable manner. In fact, the moment “religions” is conceived of as a term, the meaning of the term “religion” changes. Hammond goes on to quote Smith who argues the rise of the term “religions” connotes that “one contemplates from the outside, abstracts, de-personalizes” what a “religion” means.¹⁵³ This domestication of the “religions” is accomplished both through individual autonomy, which arises from the privatization of religion, as well as state hegemony, which flows from the state’s

¹⁵¹ Bellah and Hammond, “Pluralism and Law,” 140.

¹⁵² Bellah and Hammond, “Pluralism and Law,” 141.

¹⁵³ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 43.

adjudication between the different belief systems. In order to maintain impartiality the state must distance itself from any particular belief system. In the Western tradition this distance is accomplished through the separation of church and state. The critical point to observe is that different meaning systems exist and compete in the pluralist situation. Yet because there is common discourse within the larger society, individuals and groups need to appeal to some shared ultimate ends.¹⁵⁴ Since the institutions of “church” are not allowed to facilitate discussion and to adjudicate competing claims, civil legal institutions take on this religious function. Thus the combination of pluralism and separation of church and state force law and legal institutions to take on a religious character, and this constitutes to a large degree civil religion on the American stage. This situation may also hold true in Singapore.

To summarize, Hammond argues that in a secular situation where religious plurality and a strong legal system coexist, a civil religion may obtain. This dissertation’s perspective is that once this civil religion has been established the converse is also true. In other words, once a civil religion is established in a secular situation with religious plurality, associated civil law may obtain.¹⁵⁵ As stated above, in this dissertation the term “civil law” will be used in the sense that this law flows from the beliefs and values contained by civil religion. Thus the legal distinction commonly used in jurisprudence between common law and civil law is not primarily in view. Both are comprised within the category of civil law flowing from the commonly held beliefs and values of the society. Civil law in this sense may be codified in written statute, taught as custom,

¹⁵⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 236. According to MacIntyre such politics degenerates into “civil war carried by other means,” but, even if one does not take such an extreme view, a rational civil discourse requires some level of shared vocabulary and ends.

¹⁵⁵ In fact, as noted above, Hammond also makes this assertion, at least in terms of the Constitution, when analyzing the American situation in *With Liberty for All*, xv.

or merely subconsciously followed throughout the society at large. The interest will not be so much in the form the law takes as the source from which it is drawn in order to identify the sources that lie behind civil religion. Here it will be of particular interest whether lawmakers and citizens conceive of the source of law to be nature, ancient custom, religious reason, economic expedience, or political power. Also, it is worth noting that because ethnic Chinese comprise nearly 75 percent of Singaporeans, the customs and reasoning of Confucianism, though technically a philosophy and not a religion, are of particular interest. It is enough to state for the moment what one Western religious scholar has observed about Confucianism:

But for Confucius ethics has religious significance, because it is mandated by Heaven, and our relationship to Heaven is governed by how we conduct ourselves. This is especially true of the ethics of the governing class. His doctrines assume the framework of traditional Chinese religion. As we have seen, Chinese religion was a function of government, the governing class was the nearest thing to a priesthood, and so the philosophy of the governing class was an integral part of the religion. Confucius created a philosophy and a set of values which in its broad outlines was adopted by the Chinese scholarly and administrative class for some 2000 years.¹⁵⁶

A Hypothetical Example of Religious Civil Law

In the discussion above civil religion is defined in such a way that it lies behind the negotiated discourse of society that is carried on in order to frame for its members what is lawful concerning religious belief and practice within the civil order. For example, public discourse and sentiment might allow for a law to be passed that required employers to let workers observe a holiday on the Hindu festival of lights, Deepavali. This might be done with the understanding that other religions would also have holidays set aside each year which would be publicly observed. So Vesak Day, which commemorates the Buddha's birthday, might be set aside, and

¹⁵⁶ T. Patrick Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 130.

Hari Raya Puasa, which celebrates the breaking of the month long Ramadan fast, might also be set aside. The freedom to observe these various legal holidays would be understood as part of the civil religion. This is not a result of all the members of the society ‘believing’ or adhering to a civil polytheism, but a reflection that the various religions are tolerated and accommodated within civil society. Figure 1 graphically illustrates how different religions and their beliefs and values might be conceived as relating to civil religion and civil values.

The tentative nature of the civil claims regarding a holiday law, such as described above, could be illustrated from the fact that its observance is made possible through the law but such observance is not obligatory for any individual. So there is a civil value called “freedom of religious practice” which operates in the civil religion of the state that allows *or even encourages* a particular practice of a particular religion within the civil realm. Since a secular state takes a “neutral stance” toward all religions, certain civil values that work toward this end tend to be guaranteed in written constitution and law: religious toleration, religious freedom, religious harmony, freedom of private belief and so on. These civil values then give rise to certain civil practices such as legal observance of religious holidays, customary accommodation for prayer at certain times of the working day, protection of religious confession in public speech, guarantee of assembly for the purpose of worship, protection (or prohibition) of certain religious dress and markers, and so on. Again the state may take the position that the observance of these practices is not obligatory for all, but it may protect them, and this legal protection encourages certain religious practice. The kinds of practice protected are not arbitrary or theoretical but reflect the concrete civil religion operative.

Through the civil values of the state, two kinds of “religious” practice are protected. The first kind operates at the level of the civil values themselves, practices such as free speech, free

press, and equal treatment of religions as they are codified under the civil law. The second kind of practice operates at the level of the religions' values and these are the actual religious practices themselves: the observance of Deepavali, the wearing of a headscarf, and reverencing a deity in public. Both of these kinds of practices are allowed for in the civil religion through civil law which is observed in order to promote civil order. For the purposes of this dissertation the civil values and both types of religious practice associated with them would constitute civil religion as it is practiced within a particular state. In the broadest possible sense these beliefs, values, and practices define the national ethos. If a state were to pass a law such as is discussed above, both "freedom of religious practice" and "the celebration of Deepavali" would be construed as civil religious practices within the civil religion.

To reiterate, the perspective of this dissertation is that matters of civil religion appear in discourse about civil law, especially as it concerns religious belief or practice within a state. Thus, in the situation where civil law predominantly recognizes the practice of a single religious tradition, one could argue that the national ethos is predominantly formed by a single religious tradition. So, for instance, in the United States, where legal holidays are regularly taken from the Christian religious tradition, one could argue that there still is a strong sense of a Christian civil religion despite the fact that civil law protects many religious traditions. The distinction between what does and what does not fall into civil religion is based on the percentage of citizens who share a belief or practice or the nature of the civil law which protects or encourages a belief or practice. For civil religion *public* creed and statute or *public* practice are the strongest markers. So, for instance, the swearing of an oath of office on the Koran instead of a Bible would reflect something about civil religion in a state. When Keith Ellison, the first Muslim elected to the United States House of Representatives, chose to reenact the official ceremony in 2006 using

Thomas Jefferson's Koran, this reflected something about American civil religion. A public practice of religious faith had been explicitly incorporated into a civil ceremony. Admittedly, it would have a greater and different significance for American civil religion if 10 or 20 percent of representatives publicly practiced this kind of oath-taking or if the Koran was mentioned as an alternative holy text in written statute. The fact that Ellison was allowed to pose formally in the reenactment using the Koran indicates that in America, individual religious conviction is tolerated within civil religion. Furthermore, it indicates that private conviction in matters of civil ceremony often trumps any perceived difference in religious doctrine insofar as it informs civil life and order.

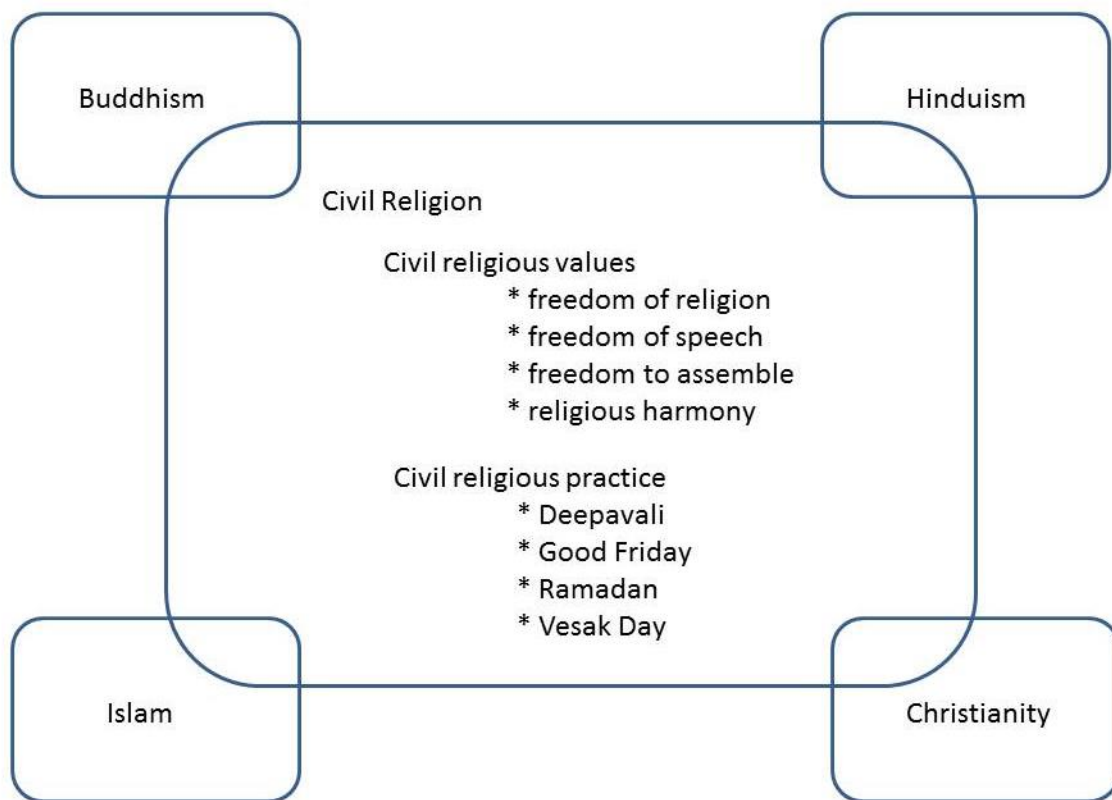


Figure 1. Civil and Traditional Religions.

A Unified Model of Law and Religion

Sociologists of religion and theologians are not the only contemporary thinkers who connect religion and law in the fashion just discussed. Legal historian Harold J. Berman, among others, does as well. In the Lowell Lectures on Theology delivered at Boston University in 1971 Berman takes up the “relationships between the institutional structures of a society and its fundamental beliefs.”¹⁵⁷ Though it was written at a time of upheaval and disarray of both religious and legal traditions in American society, in this work Berman analyzes the social relationship between religion and law in a manner that is helpful, especially in terms of civil religion. Like Bellah when he wrote his original article on civil religion in 1967, Berman is concerned that American society is embroiled in “demoralization,” and he believes this demoralization is related to the severing of the relationship between law and religion. At root Berman believes the “prevailing concepts of law and religion” have become too narrow.¹⁵⁸ Law as narrowly construed is mere rules for behavior motivated by the will of the legislator. Religion narrowly construed is confined to private belief. Instead Berman conceives of law as the “structures and processes of allocation of rights and duties” and religion as “society’s intuitions of and commitments to the ultimate meaning and purpose of life.”¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, he argues that law and religion in all cultures share the elements of “ritual, tradition, authority, and universality.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Berman, *The Interaction of Law and Religion*, 7.

¹⁵⁸ Berman, *The Interaction of Law and Religion*, 12.

¹⁵⁹ Berman, *The Interaction of Law and Religion*, 12.

¹⁶⁰ Berman, *The Interaction of Law and Religion*, 49.

Just as Hammond does above, Berman maintains law has a religious character. He argues not that the cause is primarily the pluralistic religious situation but that legal systems inherently adopt the aforementioned elements and law itself exists in a dialectical tension with religion. Berman maintains twentieth century legal scholars tended to ignore these aspects of law and instead presented it as “a secular, rational, utilitarian system” invoked for pragmatic purposes.¹⁶¹ He notes, though, that this analysis falls apart when legal *processes* are considered, the processes which codify, interpret, and apply the law. From these processes legal symbols and sanctity emerge: “Law has to be believed in or it will not work. It involves not only man’s reason and will, but his emotions, his intuitions and commitments, and his faith.”¹⁶² Thus Berman maintains that every legal system, not just pluralistic ones, has a religious element that engages man’s whole being and prevents a wooden legalism from developing. This legal-religious relationship is not just that law has a religious dimension but also that all religions include a legal dimension. As Berman puts it, “in every religion there is and must be a legal element—indeed, two legal elements: one relating to the social processes of the community sharing the particular religious faith, the other relating to the social processes of the larger community of which the religious community is a part.”¹⁶³ This dissertation’s analysis of civil religion in Singapore is concerned with how the “social processes of the larger community” are influenced by prevailing religious attitudes within the general population and further how these shared social processes and religious attitudes impact the Christian faith despite the fact that Singapore is an avowedly secular state.

¹⁶¹ Berman, *The Interaction of Law and Religion*, 14.

¹⁶² Berman, *The Interaction of Law and Religion*, 14.

¹⁶³ Berman, *The Interaction of Law and Religion*, 79–80.

In a later work, where he explores the foundations of the western legal tradition and places them firmly on Christian religious metaphor, analogy, and conception,¹⁶⁴ Berman contends that law naturally operates in an integrated fashion in society where it is bound up closely with religion, politics, economics, and filial loyalties. In the western legal tradition this meant that folklaw and custom governed the actions of a people through a “legal dimension of social life.”¹⁶⁵ A crucial part of Berman’s historical argument is that in the West prior to the Papal Revolution of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries there existed an “integrated *populus christianus* in which there was neither a separation of church from state nor a separation of law from other modes of social control,” and it was from this society that later “diverse, autonomous, competing systems of law” emerged.¹⁶⁶ In other words, church and state were largely fused before the Papal Revolution of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. When the Investiture Struggle and Gregorian Reforms established an independent ecclesiastical polity with its attendant legal system, a plurality of secular legal polities and jurisdictions also resulted: “imperial, royal, feudal,

¹⁶⁴ Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 165. Berman states, “It has been said that the metaphors of the day before yesterday are the analogies of yesterday and the concepts of today. So the eleventh-century legal metaphors were the twelfth-century legal analogies and the thirteenth-century legal concepts. The legal metaphors that lay at the foundation of the legal analogies and concepts were chiefly of a religious nature. They were metaphors of the Last Judgment and of purgatory, of Christ’s atonement for Adam’s fall, of the transubstantiation of bread and wine in the sacrament of the eucharist, of the absolution of sins in the sacrament of penance, and of the power of the priesthood “to bind and to loose”—that is, to impose or remit eternal punishment.” It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine in detail the particularities of these claims; however, Berman gives a convincing overall argument that western law was historically shaped by religious metaphor and reason at several crucial points in its history. He gives ample evidence that this occurred during several “revolutions” in the history of the west, namely, the Papal Revolution of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Lutheran Reformation, the English Revolution, the American and French Revolutions, and the Russian Revolution. Berman’s argument is drawn out in further detail in *Law and Revolution II: The Impact of the Protestant Reformations on the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹⁶⁵ Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 80.

¹⁶⁶ Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 83.

manorial, mercantile, urban.”¹⁶⁷ This all is simply to say that in *any* “secular” state it may be fruitful to go behind the secularity to some integrated culture where ultimate religious values and law are inevitably related to each other despite any qualifications that are necessary. This is, in a sense, what sketching a picture of civil religion purports to do.

This religio-legal dimension of social life is not limited to western traditions according to Berman but includes other societies, such as those strongly influenced by the Confucian ethic. Although some have argued that Confucian societies lack law in the western sense, Berman states “it is not that a family—or a village—governed by the Confucian ethic has no law, but rather that the legal dimension of its life” may be “wholly subordinated to the nonlegal, the *fa* to the *li*.”¹⁶⁸ Thus both western and eastern cultures share the “social ordering” associated with law as understood broadly, and this law is at least interwoven or loosely tied to religion. Part of Berman’s emphasis is that law is a plural endeavor with inherent tensions and competing polities. So, sketching how law is related to religion necessitates distinguishing different sources of law. The entire body of modern law requires an integrated perspective on this view. Thus Berman distinguishes the historical, moral, and positivist sources of modern law in the West.¹⁶⁹ This approach is consistent with the definition of civil law offered above as written statute or

¹⁶⁷ Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 273.

¹⁶⁸ Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 80. Here *fa* is simply law and *li* ritual. Berman is relying on Derk Bodde and Clarence Morris, “Basic Concepts of Chinese Law” in *Traditional China*, ed. James T. C. Liu and Wei-Ming Tu (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 92–108. Bodde and Morris maintain that what most concerned premodern Chinese law “were all acts of moral or ritual impropriety or of criminal violence which seemed in Chinese eyes to be violations or disruptions of the total social order,” 93. Since this social order in the Chinese mind was inextricably linked to the “total cosmic order,” by necessity religion and law, as defined by Berman, were closely linked.

¹⁶⁹ Harold J. Berman, “Toward an Integrative Jurisprudence: Politics, Morality, History” *California Law Review* 76 (July 1988): 779–801.

societal custom drawn from a variety of sources including nature, religious reason, economic expedience and political motives.

Consonant with Berman's comments above, in the imperial Chinese context the connection of law to religion has been challenged by many Western legal scholars and historians beginning with Montesquieu down to the present day.¹⁷⁰ Post-cultural-revolution Chinese academics largely adopt a Western positivist interpretation of law and apply it to traditional Chinese legal studies as well. They are motivated by a desire "to justify the Chinese revolution or to promote modernity."¹⁷¹ For many of these writers, especially those who write from a Western perspective, a connection between religion and law is conceived along the lines of a divine law received through revelation akin to Moses' reception of the Decalog. Since Chinese religion lacks a parallel instance of legal revelation, these scholars tend to posit a secular understanding of Chinese law as the imposition of the will of the ruling elite in order to maintain power and control.¹⁷² This line of argument has been challenged by scholars who conceive of traditional Chinese law as embodying the cosmology of traditional religion. On this view traditional Chinese law, specifically the Ming dynasty law code, serves as a vehicle to educate and form both ruler and subject in the order of heaven.¹⁷³ This argument is engaged using broad

¹⁷⁰ Jiang Yonglin, *The Mandate of Heaven and the Great Ming Code* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 5. Jiang notes the conventional assumption of most Western academics has been that "law in imperial China was used as an arm of state, serving the ends of social control and as a secular instrument for exercising naked power." He lists "classical" students of Chinese law including Montesquieu, Hegel, and Weber as sharing this basic assumption regarding the lack of "an independent and rational legal system." More modern Western academics such as John K. Fairbank, Joseph Needham, and Roberto Unger share the same type of assessment with varying emphases.

¹⁷¹ Jiang, *Mandate of Heaven*, 6.

¹⁷² Jiang, *Mandate of Heaven*, 9.

¹⁷³ Jiang, *Mandate of Heaven*, 13. Jiang puts his perspective nicely, "Chinese imperial law, as the making of The Great Ming Code indicates, did not serve as a punitive tool for controlling society without any provisions for protecting people; rather, it was perceived as a powerful device for maintaining social boundaries, even for

social definitions for the terms law and religion in keeping with Berman's argument above, which makes the same style of argument for the western legal tradition. Thus in this dissertation, it will be argued that Confucian cultural values, which embody traditional Chinese religious values, influence Singaporean civil religion and are evident in the republic's civil law.¹⁷⁴ This linkage will be demonstrated through the Confucian ideals and rhetoric of Singapore's ruling party.¹⁷⁵

Conclusions

The goal of this initial chapter is to set the context for an exploration of civil religion and civil law within the Republic of Singapore, laying the foundation for an analysis of how they impact the Christian gospel. The definition of civil religion that has been adopted hews close to the concept of religion as a product of social relationship as discussed by Durkheim. This kind of social force, especially operating amid a plurality of religions in a community with a developed

restraining the arbitrary forces of the emperor and his civil and military representatives. Furthermore, envisioned as an instrument to manifest the Mandate of Heaven, the Chinese law code served as a moral textbook to educate the people and transform society. In their efforts to achieve these ends, then, the early Ming ruling elite endowed law codes with religious meaning; religion and law were unified as indispensable components of their social practices and belief system."

¹⁷⁴ For a fascinating sociological analysis of the religious aspect of Confucianism and its resurgence in China since 2000 see, Sébastien Billioud and Joël Thoraval, "The Contemporary Revival of Confucianism: *Anshen liming* or the Religious Dimension of Confucianism," trans. Christopher Storey, *China Perspectives* 2008:3, 88–106. Billioud and Thoraval outline three distinct efforts to institute Confucianism in China today as (1) religion on par with other official religions, (2) state religion, and (3) civil religion. In their analysis they note that in Hong Kong the officially recognized Hong Kong Confucian Academy has four goals: "to establish Confucianism as a full-fledged religion, to establish Confucius's birthday as an official national holiday, to promote the comprehensive incorporation of Confucian principles into the nation's educational program, and finally, to create study halls dedicated to the master or Confucian Youth Associations in cities across the country in the hope that Confucianism can once again penetrate daily life."

¹⁷⁵ Jiang, *Mandate of Heaven*, 17. Jiang also attempts this argument for the Ming period of Chinese period and expands the definition of religion beyond the classical Western formulation of "belief in spiritual beings ranging from souls of the departed dead to the gods of the universe." He argues for a definition based on the writings of sociologists of religion Emile Durkheim, Mary Douglas, and C. K. Yang. Jiang settles on a working definition of religion composed of three elements that reflect a belief in a "superhuman force": a belief system, ritual practice defining the human place in the cosmos, and a pathway for human transformation which reflects the relationship

legal system, is likely to take on a religious character, as Hammond argues, because it must adjudicate between competing religious claims in the public square. Civil law, especially where it regulates or concerns religious belief and practice, is closely related to civil religion and takes on a religious dimension in this kind of situation. Furthermore, law itself is in many ways connected to religion historically as well as conceptually in both western and eastern legal systems as supported by the studies of Berman and Jiang. It is well to note that civil religion is oftentimes what is hidden behind the institutions, law, and custom which operate within society.

A hypothetical civil law legalizing the celebration of a religious holiday has also been forwarded as an example of how civil religion could operate in a largely benign and nonconfrontational, but nonetheless preferential, manner within society. In a secular, religiously plural state, complete religious neutrality seems a difficult, if not impossible, political goal. Perhaps a more desirable and honest paradigm—instead of that of an impartial or neutral judge—is to imagine that a secular civil government is continually adjusting civil law to reflect the prevailing religious attitudes and sensibilities shared within its borders. The fact that there are competing religious attitudes and forces within a society is not surprising to most people. The fact that behind civil practice and theory lay certain assumptions that constitute a civil religion *is*, especially in secular situations when it must be admitted that this civil religion and its attendant civil law allows and even encourages particular diverse religious practices. Or to rephrase this in terms that echo the Singapore ruling party's rhetoric, with the wide latitude in religious belief and affiliation among the population of Singapore, the government must implement a pragmatic policy which maintains religious order and harmony despite the fact that this policy must favor

between superhuman forces and human beings.

some religious beliefs over others because complete neutrality in a pluralistic situation is unachievable.

The fact that secular government is not, indeed cannot be, completely neutral with respect to religious practice and attitudes should be of interest to the various religions, whether Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, or Christian. Adherents of all faiths feel the tugs and pulls of society's prevailing attitudes and beliefs through civil religion. It will be the focus of following chapters to illustrate and argue that civil religion in Singapore is a compelling force within the Republic as illustrated through the types of civil laws legislated and discussed. In particular, the overwhelming emphasis on religious harmony and the expectation that self-cultivation lies at the heart of true religion pose direct challenges to a Christian understanding of the gospel especially when such emphasis on harmony and self-cultivation is largely put in service of a comprehensive utilitarian goal of economic prosperity.

CHAPTER THREE

RELIGIOUS LAW IN SINGAPORE

Before diving directly into a discussion of religious law a few comments on scope and purpose are necessary. First, this chapter's goal is not to *exhaustively* review, in the common law tradition, every court ruling and all of the statutory legislation that regulates or impinges upon religious belief and practice since Singapore's founding as a British colony in 1819. Instead the approach endeavors to give some sense of historical law in Singapore in colonial times in order to set the cultural stage; then it proceeds to describe the modern constitutional framework and legal system; finally it moves to a more detailed analysis and discussion of religious legislation after the Republic's founding in 1965. Particular emphasis is placed on the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act. Second, as mentioned in chapter two, one of the goals is to 'get behind' the legislation that has been enacted in order to understand the source from which law has been codified or from which legal argument is informed. This allows a closer examination of the assumptions and presuppositions behind legislation and legal discourse. This chapter lays out initial evidence that Judeo-Christian belief, Confucian sensibilities, and economic utilitarianism all inform the Singaporean legal tradition, which emphasizes interreligious harmony at the expense of religious liberty. The chapter also demonstrates that from the founding of modern Singapore race and religion have been conflated in legal tradition with an eye toward maintaining the peace. Due to this somewhat limited scope and purpose, it is not possible to investigate and probe many aspects of legislation and legal debate. For instance, a detailed analysis of the constitutional framework and the human rights guaranteed therein as compared to

the United States Constitution or the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights is not attempted.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, the nature of the judiciary in Singapore and in what sense it maintains reign on the executive powers of government is not a central focus of the chapter although logically such questions are important to students of Singaporean political and religious culture.

From Island to Colony

Colonial Beginnings

From its beginnings in January of 1819, “when the local chieftain, the Temenggong of Johor, signed a preliminary treaty with Sir Stamford Raffles, agent of the East India Company, permitting the British to set up a trading post”,¹⁷⁷ English common law has entered into the legal system of modern Singapore through the rule of colonial government. During the initial establishment of a trading factory set against the backdrop of British and Dutch maneuvering for control of the Malay Archipelago, Raffles exceeded limits set by the British Foreign Office. He had been sent forth as a “commercial representative with no authority to make any political arrangements”.¹⁷⁸ Initially, Raffles dabbled in local politics by intervening in the Johor sultanate succession controversy. He sided with the elder rival, who was the nephew of the Temenggong of Johor. This enabled him to broaden his treaty agreements to include the regional leader in the Malay cultural universe. Raffles continued his political activities when he grouped the Malay, Chinese, and European communities “in specified areas under their own headmen”¹⁷⁹ by May of

¹⁷⁶ For a thought provoking comparison of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and American religious law see, John Witte, Jr., “American Religious Liberty in International Perspective,” in *Oxford Handbook of Church and State in the United States*, ed. Derek Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 404–22.

¹⁷⁷ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 19.

¹⁷⁸ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 30.

¹⁷⁹ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 32.

1819. Hussein Mahomed Shah, the Raffles backed elder rival and recently installed Sultan, and *Temenggong* Abdur Rahman led the Malay community; a *kapitan* held sway over the Chinese and other Asians; the Resident, William Farquhar, ruled over the Europeans. Together these leaders held a weekly court in order to keep the peace. The Resident settled disputes according to “common sense.” Raffles’ long term duties with the East India Company lay in Benkulen, Sumatra as Lieutenant-Governor, but whenever in Singapore he laid down guidelines for colonial rule.

At first the legitimacy of English law as applied to local residents and non-British Europeans was negligible due to the fact that the original treaty had merely established the East India Company as a tenant.¹⁸⁰ Thus for the first three years of modern Singapore’s existence, Farquhar, Hussein, and Abdur Rahman justly believed that the Malay leaders retained rights to land, to law, and to levy trade taxes. The Malays were “lords of the soil”.¹⁸¹ This situation suited neither Raffles’ nor Britain’s long term designs for Singapore, however. As Raffles neared the end of his tour of the East, he sought to remedy this by clarifying the administration of Singapore on terms that were in line with his vision to establish a “Hindu-Buddhist culture with the best in Christianity and modern Western scholarship for the intellectual enrichment of both Asians and Europeans” over and against previous regional colonizers as well as Muslim influences.¹⁸² One important aspect of putting the settlement on a firm footing was to buy out the judicial and land rights of the sultan and temenggong. Raffles made a step toward accomplishing this on June 7,

¹⁸⁰ Roland St. John Braddell, *The Law of the Straits Settlements: A Commentary* (1915; repr., Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), 144–47. Braddell’s commentary, first published in 1915, serves as a reliable guide to early law in the settlements. The text of the 1819 treaty is found on the above pages.

¹⁸¹ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 35–36.

¹⁸² Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 42.

1823 by signing an agreement to the effect that, aside from lands designated for their personal possession, “all land within the island of Singapore and islands immediately adjacent [are] to be at the entire disposal of the British government.”¹⁸³

In January of 1823 Raffles also issued regulations that stated “the general law of Singapore should be English law, modified with due consideration to the usage and habits of the people, applied with mildness and common sense and a patriarchal kindness and indulgent consideration for the prejudices of each tribe”.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, he made provision that Malays would be able to observe their own law “in all cases regarding the ceremonies of religion and marriages and rules of inheritance.”¹⁸⁵ As time went on, however, the second Resident of Singapore (1823–1826), John Crawfurd, formed the opinion that even the agreements of 1823 were not sufficient to establish British rights to full sovereignty and property. The Government of India, which ruled Singapore for the British Empire, agreed. Therefore on August 2, 1824 Crawfurd drew up a new Treaty of Friendship and Alliance¹⁸⁶ with the sultan and temenggong, which ceded to the East India Company “all seas, straits and islands within ten geographical miles” of the island of Singapore in return for further payments over the course of their lives.¹⁸⁷ Propitiously, the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance entered into with the sultan and temenggong was in harmony with the recently concluded Anglo-Dutch treaty of March 17, 1824¹⁸⁸ that had been negotiated in London, the details of which had been unknown to Crawfurd.

¹⁸³ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 44.

¹⁸⁴ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 40.

¹⁸⁵ Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman, “Muslim Personal Law within the Singapore Legal System: History, Prospects and Challenges,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 29 (March 2009): 109.

¹⁸⁶ Braddell, *Law of the Straits Settlements*, 153–59. The text of the 1824 treaty is given on these pages.

¹⁸⁷ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 47.

¹⁸⁸ Braddell, *Law of the Straits Settlements*, 160–66. The text of the Anglo-Dutch treaty is given on these pages.

Two years later in 1826 the administration of Singapore was consolidated with Penang and Melaka, but together the “Straits Settlements” were still under the authority of the Calcutta Office of the East India Company. A Royal Charter of Justice, which had been requested by Crawford earlier, was granted by the Crown to the Settlements on November 27, 1826. The charter imparted to Singapore “her first judicial system” with “citizens of standing” open to appointment as grand jurors or justices of the peace.¹⁸⁹ The need for a charter of this type and the basis for the *lex loci* in English colonies had been discussed in an *Ur* text of English law, Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. In this work colonies are divided into two classes, “those gained from other States by conquest or cession” and “those acquired by the right of occupancy only; that is by finding them desert and uncultivated and peopling them from the mother country.”¹⁹⁰ For colonies of the first type, the laws already in force remain in force unless “contrary to the fundamental principles of the British constitution”; for colonies of the second type, “all the English laws then in being, including the Acts of Parliament passed before its acquisition, come immediately into force”, subject to the provision that English law is received “only in so far as it is applicable to the circumstances of the place and modified in its application to those circumstances.”¹⁹¹ Historically speaking, Penang and Singapore were considered colonies of the second type; Malacca was a colony of the first type, since the Dutch had occupied and established legal courts there before the English had gained sovereignty in 1795. Legally speaking, however, judicial authorities of the Straits Settlements during the colonial period

¹⁸⁹ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 53.

¹⁹⁰ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1765–1769), 1:107, as cited in Walter J. Napier, *Introduction to the Study of Law Administered in the Colony of the Straits Settlements*, (Singapore: Fraser & Neave, 1898), 19.

¹⁹¹ Napier, *Study of Law*, 20.

uniformly held that the laws of England on the date of the Charter of Justice were introduced to all three jurisdictions.¹⁹²

Cases from the Colonial Period

There were many changes to the culture, politics and demographics of Singapore during the period from 1826–1867 when it was aligned with Penang and Malacca and generally fell under the government of India. A sense of how law came to be practiced by the time the Straits Settlements gained recognition as a Crown Colony, independent of Indian administration, in 1867¹⁹³ is apparent in the preface to an early work on case law authored by a Singapore based Straits Settlement Supreme Court advocate, Robert Carr Woods, Jr., in 1869,

The omission in our Charters of Justice of any special provisions for the native laws being administered to the Oriental races resident in the colony has naturally created a conflict of Laws, which is in no way alleviated by H. M's. Letters Patent good-naturedly directing the administration of the Laws of England "as far as circumstances, and the religions, manners and customs of the inhabitants will admit." The Courts at present are inclined to allow the native customs to prevail when injustice would follow from strict adherence to our English Law, but the matter may still be considered as a *vexata quaestio*, which may hereafter be finally determined in favor of our native subjects more by the force of local precedents than otherwise.¹⁹⁴

First, it is clear that the *de facto* law of the Straits Settlements is the "Laws of England," and this has been consistently interpreted as the "whole corpus of English law as it had existed at the date

¹⁹² Napier, *Study of Law*, 23–30. Napier reviews this question in detail at the end of the 19th century. For a more modern treatment see, "The Applicability of English Law in Singapore" in *The Singapore Legal System*, Walter Woon, ed., (Singapore: Longmans, 1989). It should be noted that in the literature the Charter of 1826 is called the Second Charter of Justice because Penang had been granted an independent Charter of Justice in 1807.

¹⁹³ The Government of the Straits Settlements Act 1866, 29 & 30 Vic c115, as cited by Walter Woon, "Singapore" in Tan Poh-Ling, *Asian Legal Systems: Law, Society, and Pluralism in East Asia* (Sydney: Butterworths, 1997), 316.

¹⁹⁴ Robert Carr Woods, ed., *Selection of Oriental Cases Decided in the Supreme Courts of the Straits Settlements* (London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1911), ix–x.

of the promulgation of the charter”,¹⁹⁵ November 27, 1826, insofar as it does not unduly oppress the native peoples. Second, the “conflict of Laws” arising from the plurality of race and religion presented a continuing challenge to the legal profession in the application of English Law. Third, the judiciary hoped that over time “local precedents” determined in favor of native sensibilities would accumulate and prevail in terms of equity.

The points concerning the reception of English law and the conflict of Laws are discussed at length in the first case of Wood’s work, *In the goods of Abdullah*. Sir Benjamin H. Malkin (1827–1835), the second Recorder to serve the Straights Settlements, but the first Recorder to actually convene a court in Singapore, ruled on this dispute.¹⁹⁶ So, the precedent for receiving English law into Singapore dates to its first active Recorder. The case itself was quite straightforward: a married Muslim man had died, and the administration of his estate had been granted to his widow in conformity with Muslim law. Subsequently, a will, which professed to distribute the whole of the testator’s property, was discovered. Insofar as Muslim law only allowed the testator to dispose of a third of his property, the widow challenged the validity of the will. In his opinion Malkin held, first of all, that “the King’s charter” had introduced into these settlements “the existing law of England” except where it was “modified by express provision, and had abrogated any law previously existing.”¹⁹⁷ He went on to observe that “the general impression the charter seems to have intended” was “to give a certain degree of protection and

¹⁹⁵ Woon, “Singapore,” 335. Woon notes that in 1858 the “first Chief Justice of the Straits Settlements, Sir Peter Benson Maxwell” interpreted a directive in the charter to “give judgment in civil cases according to ‘justice and right’” as introducing all of English law into the Settlements. This 1858 ruling is anticipated in 1835 by the ruling of Sir Benjamin H. Malkin, the second Recorder to serve in the Singapore courts from 1827–1835, in the case discussed below, *In the goods of Abdullah*.

¹⁹⁶ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 53. The first Recorder of the Straights Settlements, Sir John Claridge, refused to leave Penang due to “disputes about travel arrangements and expenses” and was dismissed.

¹⁹⁷ Woods, *Oriental Cases*, 2.

indulgence to the various nations resorting here, not clearly defined, yet perhaps easily enough applied in particular cases, but not generally, to sanction or recognize their law.”¹⁹⁸ In other words, the recognition of the national law of the testator in no ways set aside the legitimacy of the English law should the testator appeal to it instead of to his own national law. Thus in Malkin’s mind the “general result” was that “the administration granted to the widow must be revoked, the Will of Abdullah being established as a valid instrument”¹⁹⁹, and so English process and procedure must be followed through probate.

Such cases where religious or native “community law” conflicted with English law were not confined to Muslims. Woods’ work includes Straits Settlements precedents for Chinese and Hindu law and custom as well. For instance, *In re Chong Long’s Estate* is a case that was brought to the Singapore court to consider whether “religious observances” funded by rents and profits from the estate of a deceased person and directed in his will were legal. The individual in question was Chua Chong Long, “a wealthy Chinese, a native of Malacca”²⁰⁰, who wished that “his own ghost or spirit and the spirits of his deceased wives” be fed in keeping with the common Chinese belief that ancestor spirits who are not provided for have to beg for food, clothing, and money. In the words of the Recorder, Sir Richard McCausland, “the performance of this duty is regarded as the highest evidence of filial duty and obedience.”²⁰¹ The will specified that a structure be built and maintained for the purpose of holding “Sin-chew”, which was found

¹⁹⁸ Woods, *Oriental Cases*, 5.

¹⁹⁹ Woods, *Oriental Cases*, 9.

²⁰⁰ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 72–73, describes Chua Chong Long as a Baba Chinese merchant who served as a go-between for the European and Chinese communities. As with other merchants he was oftentimes aligned with the ruling class. Yet Turnbull maintains that “however hospitable and cordial their (merchant) behavior towards the ruling community, even the most Westernized clung to their Chinese customs, traditions, and sense of values.” This is certainly borne out in Chua’s Will as described in the case included by Woods.

²⁰¹ Woods, *Oriental Cases*, 14.

by the court to be a religious ceremony held in commemoration of deceased ancestors. The court found that none of the provided monies could be construed as being applied to “the purposes of Religion”, or “the education of Youth”, or “for the benefit of the Poor”, and as such the estate was dedicated to “a superstitious use, according to the English Law.”²⁰² Yet the court still found in favor of the deceased and of his right, according to the religion, custom, and manner of his land, to fund the ceremony of “Sin-chew”. This ruling was largely justified by logic that the “framers of the Charter” were trying to attract as many people as possible to domicile in Singapore, and the Recorder’s opinion that English statutes written to prevent superstitious uses and accumulation of income could not be transferred without “great incongruity of effect”²⁰³ to Singapore.²⁰⁴

The interplay of race, religion and the nominally operative English law is perhaps best illustrated through a reading of cases dealing with the institution of marriage. The issues in dispute in these cases deal with subjects such as Chinese marriage law and custom, the property rights of Muslim wives, the ability of Muslim wives to enter into contracts independent of their husbands, and the legality of Hindus to enter into a brokerage of marriage contract. What is striking is the attitude and opinion of the recorders as they pronounce judgment: first, they uniformly defend Christian marriage as a unique institution not comparable with Chinese, Muslim, or Hindu institutions; and second, they maintain that the bulk of the population

²⁰² Woods, *Oriental Cases*, 20. These purposes would constitute charity in English law and would be lawful to establish through a trust in perpetuity.

²⁰³ Woods, *Oriental Cases*, 21.

²⁰⁴ Woods, *Oriental Cases*, 45–54; this decision was later overturned in the case of *Choa Cheow Neo v. Spottiswoode* by then Chief Justice Benson Maxwell in 1869. Maxwell CJ’s opinion held that it was not the normal custom of Chinese to establish funds to perform Sinchew in perpetuity, and that there was no public benefit to such a bequest. Hence, Maxwell maintained the normal application of English law was neither unjust nor oppressive and so

comprised of Chinese, Indian, and Malay ethnic backgrounds are in fact living as “foreigners” in Singapore and may be regarded as “persons having foreign domicils (*sic*) and governed for many purposes by this law (that is, ‘native’ laws and usages), and as if they were residing among us temporarily.”²⁰⁵ For instance, in the case of *Hawah v. Daud*, Benson Maxwell describes that English law gave the husband, upon marriage, rights to his wife’s real estate and personal property as well as any debts owed to her; on the other hand, by English law he also was bound to support her throughout the marriage. This situation is “the law of a people which (*sic*) whom the marriage contract was once indissoluble” and if it was now “dissoluble”, only due to the greatest breach of it, and not dissoluble by the party, “but by a Court of Justice.”²⁰⁶ Maxwell contrasts this with the case of a Muslim marriage where the husband is at liberty to dissolve the marriage at his own “will and pleasure.” Since Muslim marriages are by definition dissoluble, Maxwell argues that it would be a grave injustice to deny independent property rights to the wife during the marriage contract. In fact he goes further to maintain that if the husband chooses to dissolve the marriage, the wife is entitled to be restored to the same property that she possessed when she entered the estate by an implied contract or trust.²⁰⁷

Colonial Observations

As mentioned above, part of the purpose of this discussion of colonial law in Singapore is to demonstrate that ‘Christian’ law and custom entered the island through the system of English law that was promulgated after 1819 but especially after the Charter of 1826. During the British

there was no need to adapt or modify the operative law of the Settlements.

²⁰⁵ Woods, *Oriental Cases*, 31.

²⁰⁶ Woods, *Oriental Cases*, 27.

²⁰⁷ Woods, *Oriental Cases*, 30.

colonial administration it is certainly true that several separate communities coexisted within Singapore, each with their own “language, religion, customs, social organization and economic activity”²⁰⁸ and in a very real sense, law.²⁰⁹ In this period British rule “continued the tradition of basic noninterference in the everyday affairs of the local communities.”²¹⁰ Yet, after the Charter of 1826 the various communities were regulated through English law, which in this study has been construed as a Christian law that was applied by an English Recorder and Legislative Council. In a sense, *a society* was formed from the various communities in the colonial period, though it could hardly be said that all residents shared a common belief or value system. The situation in general was one of peaceful coexistence. Schematically, the colonial relationship is shown in figure 2.

²⁰⁸ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 73. Turnbull states of the early colonial government between the years of 1826–1867, “The natural divisions in Singapore’s mixed population were so deep that the authorities had no need to employ any conscious “divide and rule” policy. Chinese, Malays and Indians were separated in language, religion, customs, social organization and economic activity.”

²⁰⁹ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 284. The distinctness is illustrated by the fact that marriage law operated differently in each racial/religious community in Singapore until the Women’s Charter was passed in 1961. This Charter “required marriages to be registered, prohibited polygamy, except among Muslims, and made divorce illegal other than by court order.”

²¹⁰ Milne and Mauzy, *Singapore*, 44. Milne and Mauzy relate that this policy of noninterference had to be modified in order to deal with the “wars” between rival Chinese secret society gangs in the late 1800s. The rise of Chinese nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s also triggered “surveillance and suppression of Chinese political organizations.” Up until the postwar period only a few English-speaking Chinese were involved in local affairs and there was little demand for more political rights.

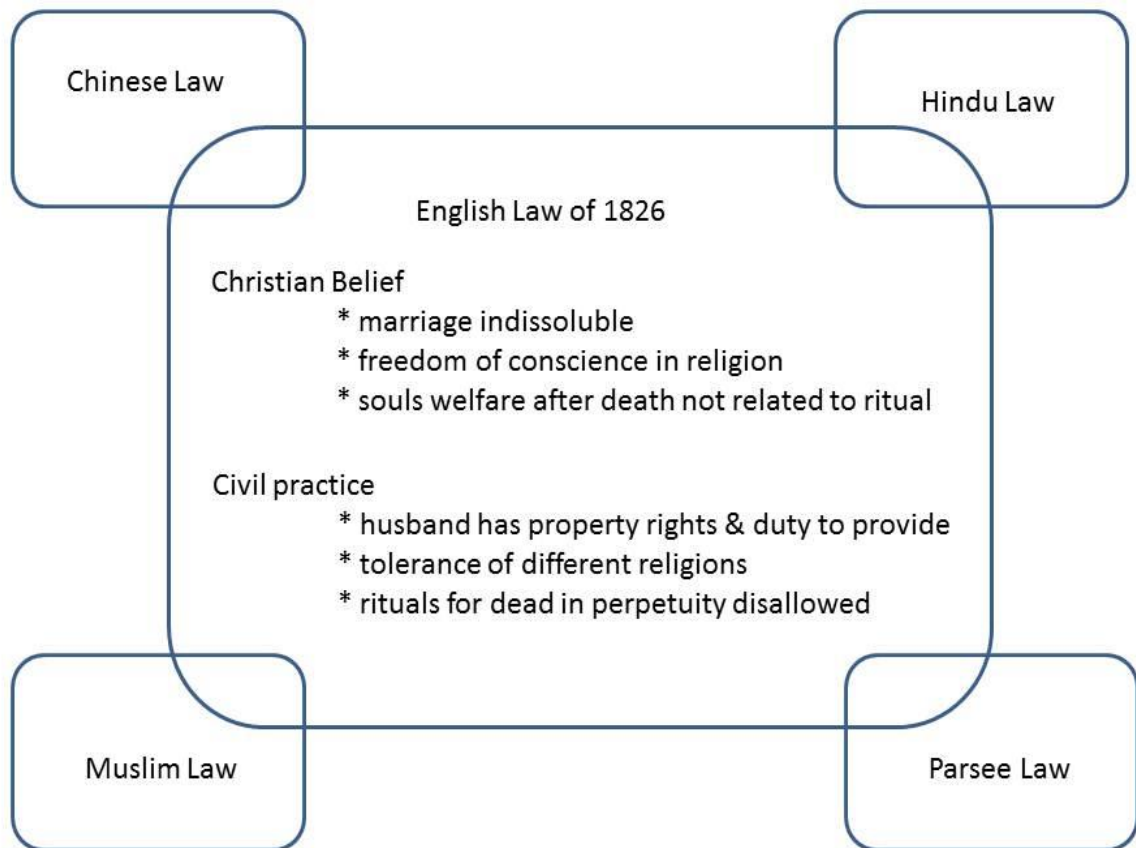


Figure 2. Colonial Period: English and Religious Law.

On the one hand, in the colonial situation, when matters of English law in local circumstances resulted in injustice or oppression, concessions had to be made to the Christian *lex loci* established in 1826.²¹¹ On the other hand, when other religious law and custom impinged upon Christian civil practice or sensibilities, as in the case of the necessity for a Muslim woman to retain a means of support after marriage or in the case of using property and capital to support

²¹¹ See footnote 234 below for a discussion on the distinction between the concepts of ‘modification’ and ‘suitability’ as they relate to the reception of English law.

the dead and not the living, concessions had to be made to local religious law and impulses. The purpose here is not to establish the dominating nature of Christian belief or practice in the colonial situation. Indeed, a sympathetic reading of the Charter of Justice shows that in many ways it showed deference to a plurality of religions and races so long as their law and custom did not go against “the law of nature.” Instead the discussion merely illustrates that Christian beliefs and values were introduced through the type of society that was established in colonial Singapore and that the basis of law in this society was strongly influenced by the Christian religion.²¹²

Colonial rule did not outlaw Muslim, Hindu, Chinese or any indigenous law or custom *de facto*; instead English law, influenced by Christian religion, became the foundation for colonial rule through the local legislative council and judicial system that exercised a degree of tolerance toward many different religions while attempting to maintain public order using an overarching Christian legal ethos.

Modern Constitutional Framework and Legal System

Moving from the colonial to the modern situation in Singapore, perhaps one of the most provocative questions one may ask is whether the basic legal framework as to how religion is treated has changed in any meaningful way and if so how? To answer this question in more detail, it is necessary to review briefly the nature of the constitutional government that was

²¹² Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Rethinking Raffles: A Study of Stamford Raffles's Discourse on Religions Amongst the Malays* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005). Aljunied's is a brief but enlightening account of Raffles' changing attitude toward religion, in general, and Islam, in particular. Raffles' increasingly negative assessment of Islam influenced subsequent policies toward the religion of the Malays, especially in the colonial period. Aljunied, 52, observes, “In Raffles' mind, the pagans and Malays in general needed only three elements to raise them towards a higher stage of civilisation—Colonialism, Christianity, and Colleges.” Thus Raffles embarked on projects of converting Malays to Christianity and establishing educational institutions catering to Malays mainly from the perspective of inculcating a higher form of civilization, not any true concern for their eternal destiny. Colonialization, construed in this way, meshes well with a form of law based, civil religion. It is a far cry from the religion described in the Scriptures.

instituted in 1965 during the transition from colonial government, especially as it relates to religion.

In an analysis of the Singaporean constitutional framework Thio Li-ann observes, “Constitutional governments worldwide rest upon the same theoretical bedrock and drink from a common conceptual pool of principles in the crafting of constitutional institutions” where historically the goal has been to resist and curb the evils of absolutism.²¹³ Constitutional law attempts to accomplish this through a two-sided approach: first, it prescribes a division of power so that “sovereignty” is held in “disparate hands”; second, it declares rights for both the individual and groups so as to limit legitimate “government intervention in the sphere of individual autonomy.”²¹⁴ The principles upon which this constitutional order is founded, most notably the principle of freedom, assume “some objective moral law which overarches rulers and ruled alike.”²¹⁵ Since Constitutionalism “traces its genesis to the traditional values and beliefs of the West, being fed by the Greco-Roman influence which spurred the European Renaissance and the Judeo-Christian belief system which inspired the Reformation”, it may be in tension with the “indigenous values” of non-Western countries that inherited this form of government.²¹⁶

In the colonial situation, legislative and judicial powers in Singapore were given through the British Parliament to a local governor who was “a sort of limited local monarch”, influenced indirectly by public opinion and the local press.²¹⁷ Representation in the local legislative council

²¹³ Thio Li-ann, “The Constitutional Framework of Powers,” in *The Singapore Legal System*, 2nd ed., ed. Kevin Yew Lee Tan (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1999), 68.

²¹⁴ Thio, “Constitutional Framework,” 67.

²¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, “The Poison of Subjectivism,” as quoted in Thio, “Constitutional Framework,” 71.

²¹⁶ Thio, “Constitutional Framework”, 71. Thio is taking the analysis of Carl J. Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Democracy* (Boston: Ginn, 1950) as a basis for her thought.

²¹⁷ Kevin, Y. L. Tan, “A Short Legal and Constitutional History of Singapore,” in *Essays in Singapore Legal*

comprised both official and unofficial members who were appointed by the governor.²¹⁸ Through the Second World War British policy bolstered the “position, authority and prestige of the Malay rulers”²¹⁹ in the larger Malay world, of which Singapore was a part. Since Chinese outnumbered Malay inhabitants in Singapore, indirect rule was favored over a more popular representative style of democracy, which would have shifted the balance of power to the Chinese majority. In general, most considered a community “so divided by race, religion and language, with a large number of aliens, transients, and illiterates” as ill equipped to elect a government prepared to maintain justice amid the pressures from a prosperous commercial class.²²⁰ Although some Western Europeans desired greater representation in local rule, “most Asians seemed content with the limited opportunities to participate in Singapore’s public life” through the prewar period. Asians born on the island became British subjects and could serve appointments to “the Executive, Legislative, or Municipal Councils.”²²¹ At the same time numerous administrative boards that governed education, the port, official licensing, and hospitals were open to local appointees.

These restrictions on self-governance gradually gave way after World War Two, culminating in the independent constitutional framework of the sovereign Republic of Singapore, adopted peacefully on December 22, 1965. The constitution is comprised of three separate documents (the Constitution of the State of Singapore 1963, the Republic of Singapore

History, ed. Kevin Y. L. Tan (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic & the Singapore Academy of Law, 2005), 40.

²¹⁸ Tan, “Constitutional History,” 37–40. The official members of the council were officials in the colonial government such as the attorney-general. The unofficial members were private citizens and were outnumbered by the official members until constitutional changes following the Second World War in March 1948.

²¹⁹ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 162.

²²⁰ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 163.

Independence Act 1965, and portions of the Malaysian Federal Constitution imported through the Republic of Singapore Independence Act), and has been called the “untidiest and most confusing constitution that any country has started life with.”²²² In fact, no consolidated version of the constitution existed until March 1980 when the Attorney-General amalgamated the several documents. The constitutional mishmash resulted from Singapore’s abrupt ejection from the Federation of Malaysia in August of 1963, which necessitated a hasty move to total independence. Singapore’s constitutional framework defines a modified Westminster style of government consisting of an executive, a single house legislature, and a judiciary. The executive arm is a hybrid, with a prime minister selected by the parliament but a president who is elected by national referendum. The prime minister and his cabinet, “although a ‘product’ of Parliament, actually dominate it.”²²³ This results because the prime minister is traditionally the leader of the party with a majority in Parliament, and there is one party rule in Singapore with strict discipline.

The rapid pace of political change at independence led to the appointment of the Wee Chong Jin Commission, which was charged with protecting minority rights and interests.

Specifically, the commission was asked to

- a. receive and consider representations on how the rights of the racial, linguistic and religious minorities can be adequately safeguarded in the Constitution;
- b. consider what provisions should be made to ensure that no legislation which by its practical application is considered likely to be discriminatory, against members of any racial, linguistic or religious group, should be enacted before

²²¹ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 164.

²²² David Marshall, ‘Singapore’s Untidy Constitution,’ *Straits Times* (21 December 1965) as cited by Tan, “Constitutional History,” 51. David Marshall served as the first Chief Minister of Singapore under the Rendel Constitution from 1955–1956. He unsuccessfully pushed for full internal self-government in talks with the Colonial Office in May 1956, resigning shortly thereafter.

²²³ Milne and Mauzy, *Singapore*, 77.

adequate opportunities have been given for representation from parties likely to be aggrieved;

- c. consider what remedies should be provided for any citizen or group of citizens who claim that he or they have been discriminated against by any act or decision of the government or the administration of any statutory board or public body constituted by law and to recommend the machinery for the redress of any complaints; and
- d. consider how such provisions can be entrenched in the Constitution.²²⁴

When the Commission issued its report in 1966, it included the recommendation to create an advisory body called the Council of State that would advise Parliament on the effect of impending legislation on racial, linguistic, religious or cultural minorities. So, from its inception, the Republic of Singapore has evinced a strong concern for the protection of religious minority rights and has provided for the same through a government advisory body. It also continued the colonial tendency, with some justification²²⁵, to conflate race and religion.

The Constitution of the Republic of Singapore outlines eleven different fundamental liberties. The first is the liberty of the person, including habeas corpus, the right to be informed of the grounds of any arrest and to be defended by a legal practitioner, and the right to appear within 48 hours before a magistrate. The second is the prohibition of slavery and forced labor, which was outlawed in its gross form by Raffles in 1823.²²⁶ The third involves the protection

²²⁴ Government of Singapore, *Singapore Parliamentary Debates, Official Report* (22 December 1965) at cols. 429–30 as cited by Tan, “Constitutional History,” 54.

²²⁵ Government of Singapore, “Census of Population 2010,” 14, for instance, shows that even in 2010 the correlation between race and religion remains high. Ethnic Chinese are 57.4 percent Buddhist/Taoist, 21.8 percent No Religion, 20.1 percent Christian, and 0.4 percent Muslim. Malays are 98.7 percent Muslim, 0.7 percent Christian, 0.2 percent Buddhist/Taoist, 0.2 percent No Religion, and 0.1 percent Hindu. Indians are 58.7 percent Hindu, 21.7 percent Muslim, 12.8 percent Christian, 1.1 percent No Religion, and 0.8 percent Buddhist.

²²⁶ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 41, notes that in early Singapore, “it was more difficult to wipe out debt bondage, and the hidden slavery of immigrant labour persisted for decades. The interpretation of slavery was open to ambiguity, particularly in Malay society where everyone had obligations for service, although they might not be bought and sold for money.”

against retrospective criminal laws and repeated trials so that a person cannot be punished for an act or omission which was not punishable by law when it was committed nor tried by the same court twice. The fourth gives all people equal protection of and before the law. This precludes discrimination on the basis of religion, race, descent or place of birth, except as provided by the Constitution, in any law or the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority, or in the administration of any law relating to the acquisition of property or the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment. Walter Woon notes that “this article does not, however, restrict *private* employers from practicing *de facto* discrimination on racial, religious or sexist grounds. Unlike some other countries, Singapore has no laws outlawing racial or religious discrimination.”²²⁷ Additionally, through the Constitution, the government is charged to preferentially provide for the political, educational, economic, social, and cultural interests of the indigenous Malays.

The fifth and sixth fundamental liberties provide the right to move freely throughout Singapore as well as to reside there. The seventh, eighth, and ninth are the freedoms of speech, peaceable assembly, and association. Again Woon observes in his 1997 comparative essay,

These fundamental liberties are among the most circumscribed in the Constitution. Although Singaporeans enjoy freedom of speech, they can be sued for defamation, committed for contempt of court or prosecuted for contravention of the Official Secrets Act (Cap 213). In addition, there are laws against sedition and inciting racial or religious violence. The right to form associations is circumscribed by the Societies Act (Cap 311) which ostensibly is for the control of secret societies. However, the Act is drafted widely enough to cover any society of 10 or more persons, no matter how innocuous their purpose. In practice, Singaporeans do not feel entirely free to express views critical of government policy (lest they cross the line and get in trouble with the law) despite the urging of the present government that Singaporeans openly debate public matters. Although there are signs that these inhibitions are

²²⁷ Woon, “Singapore,” 320 (emphasis added).

slowly being shed, it is still evident that most Singaporeans are extremely circumspect in publicly expressing views at variance with the official one.²²⁸

The tenth liberty guaranteed in the Constitution ensures every person the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion. As noted above this freedom is subject to the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act that was passed in 1991. The MRHA will be discussed further below. The eleventh and final constitutional liberty guarantees freedom from discrimination in the administration of public education and financial aid. It also guarantees religious groups the right to establish and maintain schools for the education of their own children. Additionally, no one may be required to receive instruction or participate in any ceremony or act of worship of a religion not his own.

In summary, modern Singaporean constitutional history reflects a relatively peaceful and orderly transition of power, unlike many colonial Third World nations.²²⁹ The continuity of English law in terms of constitutional law and common law is noteworthy if at first untidy.²³⁰ The status of English law on the island was further clarified in 1993 when Parliament passed the Application of English Law Act. This Act “reiterates the applicability of the principles and rules of English common law and equity” and “also attempts to encompass all applicable English statutes or Acts of Parliament.”²³¹ Of course, there is still legal ambiguity in Singapore, and there are different perspectives on both the purpose of law as well as the effectiveness of the legal system. The move from colonial to self-rule has resulted in what has been called a shift from ‘a

²²⁸ Woon, “Singapore,” 321.

²²⁹ Tan, “Constitutional History,” 61.

²³⁰ Andrew B. L. Phang, “The Reception of English Law,” in *Essays in Singapore Legal History*, ed. Kevin Y. L. Tan (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic & the Singapore Academy of Law, 2005), 7. Phang asserts “English law is the foundation of the Singapore legal system. This is especially so in civil (as opposed to criminal) matters.”

²³¹ Phang, “Reception of English Law,” 15.

rule *of law*' to 'a rule *through law*' as the State has adopted a more formalistic legal approach.²³² In this sense, the beliefs and values of a people, 'the English people', are over time being removed from the Singapore legal system. In place of English sensibility, indigenous sensibility is gaining legal and cultural traction.²³³ One manner in which to construe this situation is as 'law' takes on a more positivist emphasis, room is opened up for beliefs and values outside the 'law' to influence legal practice. If 'local' mores and values do not adequately fill the space of 'English' mores and values, the legislators' or rulers' needs and aspirations to power take on increased importance. So, for instance, the parliament could gain greater latitude to legislate areas of life hitherto outside their purview. Additionally, the ruling party could more easily justify imposing its moral or economic agenda.²³⁴ This change from an 'English' to a 'local' jurisprudence should not be overstated, however, as the English law as administered in Singapore has always been subject to the concepts of suitability and modification²³⁵ as discussed in the colonial "Oriental cases" above.

In assessing the modern legal situation in Singapore scholars tend to make guarded comments. On the one hand, Singapore has successfully negotiated the rocky shoals of its colonial past with few outright problems of anomie and disorder, a framework for constitutional governance has been established and adapted to local circumstances, and basic clarity with

²³² Tan, "Constitutional History," 62.

²³³ Phang, "Reception of English Law," 20. Here Phang argues that the development of an "indigenous Singapore legal system more attuned to the mores, needs, and aspirations of its society is imperative" for reasons of national pride, a spirit of legal professionalism, and increased legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

²³⁴ This line of thought takes us back to one theme in C. S. Lewis' essay, "The Poison of Subjectivism" quoted by Thio above.

²³⁵ Phang, "Reception of English Law," 10–11, observes this legal terminology and notes, "In essence, if an English statute or case was found to be unsuitable having regard to the local circumstances, it would not be received as part of the corpus of Singapore law. This relates to the concept of 'suitability'. If, on the other hand, an English statute or case was otherwise suitable to the local circumstances but would, if applied, cause injustice or oppression,

respect to most divisions of the law has been reached.²³⁶ On the other hand, citizens feel restricted with respect to their fundamental liberties as constitutionally defined, tensions remain with regard to the balance between individual and group liberties²³⁷, there continues to be fear that a one-party state will circumvent intended constitutional checks and balances²³⁸, and there is a growing body of statutory law and state initiatives that encroach on private life.²³⁹ Above all scholars call for Singaporeans themselves to engage in political processes and social debate, without which constitutional democracy is not possible in its fullest sense.²⁴⁰ Macroscopically, at

then that particular statute or case could be modified.”

²³⁶ Phang, “Reception of English Law,” 21. Phang quotes Chief Justice Yong Pung How who comments favorably concerning law in the republic, “Singapore is fortunate in having a legal system with all these attributes. We inherited from the British a system of law which is familiar to most, if not all, international businessmen and corporations. What the law in Singapore is, is readily ascertainable. Contractual and property rights are recognized and given binding legal effect. Access to the courts is open to all.”

²³⁷ Thio, “Constitutional Framework,” 80. Here Thio suggests, “What is noteworthy in the local context is that while Part IV (of the Constitution, which outlines the fundamental liberties) is individual-centric in that its prime beneficiary is the individual, the prevailing government ideology suggests that group interests ought to be weighted more heavily than individual interests.”

²³⁸ Tan, “Constitutional History,” 62. “The party system with its whip-enforced discipline was inherited from the British, and lovingly cherished by the PAP. This allows the ruling party to change the Constitution almost at will, and the ease with which amendments are constantly made erodes its sanctity as the *supreme* law and its legitimacy as the nation’s legal beacon of light.”

²³⁹ Jothie Rajah, “Policing Religion: Discursive Excursions into Singapore’s Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act,” in *Examining Practice, Interrogating Theory: Comparative Legal Studies in Asia*, ed. Penelope Nicholson and Sarah Biddulph (Leiden: Nijhoff, 2008), 273. Rajah states, “It is impossible to overstate the pervasive nature of state power in Singapore, a power to which Singapore’s extraordinary economic success can be attributed.”

²⁴⁰ Tan, “Constitutional History,” 63, states “if Singaporeans are looking to their Constitution to help control and limit government, they will come away disappointed for they will discover that control on government is not achieved through the hallowed words of a sanctified and revered national document or activist intervention of the courts. Checks on government power can, ultimately, only come from the people themselves.”

In a similar vein, Thio, “Constitutional Framework,” 102–3, observes, “Constitutions per se do not make for good government though the organization of state power contributes to this. The goals of a polity such as political freedom, social equality and economic success are aided by a constitution which enunciates the principles of government accountability, promoting responsible government. Success in achieving these goals depend on many other factors beyond the ken of constitutional control, on intangibles like the caliber of government leaders, a culture which prizes freedom and civic responsibility, a community commitment to common purposes and a shared morality, good faith efforts to accommodate conflict, a willingness to respect the outcome of periodic free and fair elections. In the final analysis, ‘any constitution is not a panacea but an experimental attempt at arriving at a viable and legitimate government.’”

least, the modern legal framework with respect to religious law seems strangely unchanged from the colonial past, in that a powerful ruling class, this time the PAP government elite not the English-educated colonial elite, maintains a position to strongly influence, if not to regulate and to control, religious life through civil law and civil religion. This is depicted schematically in figure 3. Finally, it must be stated explicitly that the primary purpose in reviewing the constitutional framework and the continuity in English law from the colonial to the modern period is to establish that the Judeo-Christian tradition forms a significant pole in the civil law and civil religion of Singapore, not to make a case that the colonial situation is a desirable form of church/state fusion.

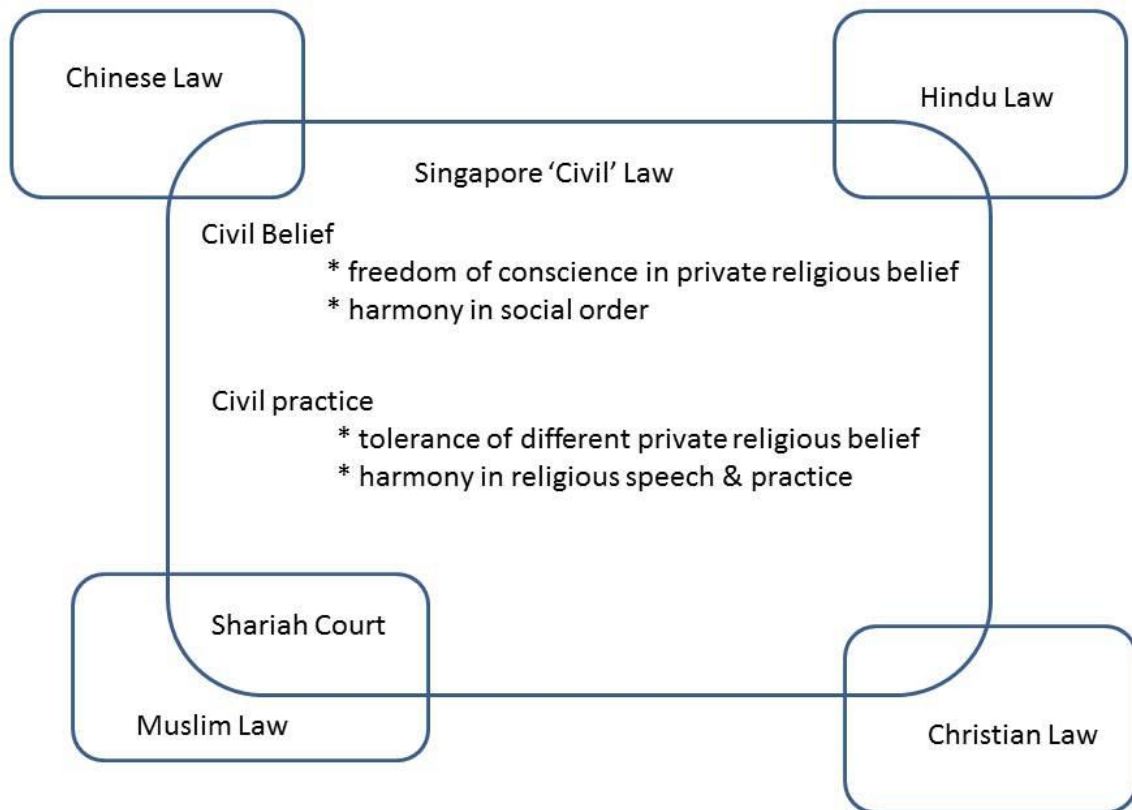


Figure 3. Modern Period: Civil and Religious Law.

Excursus on Islam and the Shari'ah Law as Regards Civil Religion

Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman argues that maintaining a separate space for Muslim law within the legal institutions of Singapore “concretizes the values the community cherishes and is fundamental for integration within the larger society in which it exists.”²⁴¹ Rahman begins her discussion by noting that Muslim personal law has been recognized in Singapore since colonial times when in 1823 Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of modern Singapore, “laid down rules” for the Sultan of Johor and the Chief of Singapore “to the effect” that “in all cases regarding the ceremonies of religion and marriages and rules of inheritance, the laws and customs of the Malays will be respected where they shall not be contrary to reason, justice or humanity. In all other cases, the laws of British authority will be enforced with due consideration to the usages and habits of the people.”²⁴² This pronouncement was later codified in the Mahomedan Marriage Ordinance of 1880 by the British colonial authorities. This policy was consistent with other colonial territories such as India where “a cautious approach that refrained from introducing the English civil law in matters of intestate succession, marriage, divorce, adoption and all other family relations as a comprehensive code, had been observed, for fear of reprisals by groups that would regard such a move as a displacement of their religion and custom.”²⁴³

In the twentieth-century the Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca, and Singapore

²⁴¹ Rahman, “Muslim Personal Law,” 109.

²⁴²R. Braddell, *Law of the Straits Settlement*, (Singapore: 1931), 1:159–60 as cited by Rahman, “Muslim Personal Law”, 109. In the reprint edition available to the author of this dissertation, this quotation appears on page 152, Roland St. John Braddell, *The Law of the Straits Settlements: A Commentary*, (1915; repr., Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), 152.

²⁴³ Rahman, “Muslim Personal Law,” 110.

continued to develop Muslim law. The formation of the Mohammedan Advisory Board in 1915 began a relationship with the colonial governor which spawned Muslim cemeteries and instituted religious teaching in vernacular schools. In 1958 the Shari'ah Court was given sole jurisdiction to "hear and determine disputes pertaining to Muslim marriages and divorce not arrived at by mutual consent."²⁴⁴ In all other areas of procedural, civil and criminal matters English law reigned supreme. "After independence, this dual legal arrangement for Singaporean Muslims persisted," despite the nation's secular foundations. In 1966 further legislation strengthened the links between observant Muslims and this colonial history of personal law.²⁴⁵ The Shari'ah Court, the Muslim Religious Council of Singapore, and the Registry of Muslim Marriages are three key institutions that carry out these legal mandates. Rahman notes that there is a degree of interdependence between these institutions and civil courts because Muslim law practitioners have "introduced legal reasoning and principles based on the English law and procedure into the administration and construction of Muslim law."²⁴⁶ She also notes that the civil High Court serves as the venue for appeals of inheritance.

Interestingly, Rahman notes that a Fatwa Committee operates under the Muslim Religious Council and issues legal opinions (*fatwa*) on issues of importance to Muslims. Though the *fatwa* are not binding, they serve the critical purpose of "conditioning conduct and attitude."²⁴⁷ They may also be cited by civil courts on the island. Rahman observes that no government legislation

²⁴⁴ Rahman, "Muslim Personal Law," 110.

²⁴⁵ Rahman, "Muslim Personal Law," 111. The legislation that was passed in 1966 is called the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA). Rahman observes "This piece of legislation...applies to all Muslims and presumably ceases to have application only in the event of a Muslim abjuring Islam or declared an apostate by the Majlis Agama Islam Singapura or the Muslim Religious Council of Singapore."

²⁴⁶ Rahman, "Muslim Personal Law," 111.

²⁴⁷ Rahman, "Muslim Personal Law," 112.

defines the boundaries of Muslim law. In practice, though, the Muslim personal law “emanates from selections of jurisprudential sources derived primarily from or justified on the basis of principles and interpretations of the Qur’an, and the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions.”²⁴⁸ Thus these legal institutions and the personal law serve as a strong marker of religious identity. Rahman argues further that “well considered *fatwa*” greatly assist Muslims to negotiate modern industrial pluralistic Singapore society. Rahman is a proponent of an active and dynamic Muslim legal system so that Muslim law is not reduced to “mere formalism” cut off from the evolving modern society as a rigid and static relic. She wants to discover and perpetuate the ethical values and principles of the law without being trapped by “complete, final, and infallible” legal opinions of the past.²⁴⁹

Rahman uses the examples of divorce, child custody, maintenance for wives following divorce, and inheritance in order to flesh out her conception of how Muslim law should be adapted to the changing situation. She highlights that in the matter of divorce “wives seeking divorce must prove sufficient grounds” while a husband has an “unrestricted right of repudiating his wife.”²⁵⁰ In the case of child custody Rahman laments that a strong Muslim legal precedence granting the mother “custodial rights over her children below the age of seven” trumps testimony from welfare officers and other secular experts. She would rather “the welfare of the child” serve as the dominant criteria for court rulings over a “literal application of the Muslim law *per se*.”²⁵¹ The maintenance for wives provides another example of the inequality between men and women in a literal interpretation of the law. Here she points out that beginning in 1984 “a standard sum

²⁴⁸ Rahman, “Muslim Personal Law,” 112.

²⁴⁹ Rahman, “Muslim Personal Law,” 113.

²⁵⁰ Rahman, “Muslim Personal Law,” 113.

for maintenance and *mutaah* (compensation) calculated on the basis of service of wife to husband analogous to the workmen's compensation" well illustrates the current problems with the law.²⁵² Finally, Rahman highlights that in the case of inheritance decisions there is little discretion given to the court but to grant sons "double proportion of shares relative to daughters" irrespective of past duties and obligations.

In her discussion of this situation Rahman argues that it is the "ambivalent attitude towards reason" which plagues and limits the Malay Muslim community in Singapore.²⁵³ This attitude leads toward "literalism and dogmatic application of the letter of the law" which fails to appreciate the contemporary situation and adjust the law to specific situations.²⁵⁴ It is reason and a positive individualism that Rahman believes is the key to maintaining a dynamic and vital law and legal system for Muslims. In this sense it is crucial to recognize that law "is conditioned by the exigencies" of society and that it seeks "adjustment of human relations in conformity with the moral sense of the community."²⁵⁵ Rahman believes that the end of the law is "the promotion of the welfare of men both individually and socially and not for the glorification of the Lawgiver."²⁵⁶ She also mentions other interpretations of Islamic law where it is a "complete system encompassing all aspects of life."²⁵⁷ In this alternative view no institutions have "the right to legislate" since Allah has set down law in the Qur'an for all human beings in all times and

²⁵¹ Rahman, "Muslim Personal Law," 115.

²⁵² Rahman, "Muslim Personal Law," 115.

²⁵³ Rahman, "Muslim Personal Law," 117.

²⁵⁴ Rahman, "Muslim Personal Law," 117.

²⁵⁵ Rahman, "Muslim Personal Law," 118.

²⁵⁶ Rahman, "Muslim Personal Law," 118.

²⁵⁷ Rahman, "Muslim Personal Law," 119.

places.²⁵⁸

Rahman concludes her discussion by warning that certain factions within the Singaporean Muslim community seek to make Islam into a comprehensive religion. She characterizes this as a utopian attitude which leads to a populist, millenarian character among many Muslims. She is concerned this attitude feeds some of the ambivalence toward the existing social order and Muslim institutions in Singapore. This is why she wants to strengthen these institutions: in order to better integrate Muslims into the existing social and cultural order. She emphasizes that Muslims are from a larger “plural society sharing common legal history, traditions, and principles.”²⁵⁹ Rahman believes it is possible to import legal tradition from civil courts and civil legal systems because they too “uphold principles of justice and fairness that are relevant.”²⁶⁰ To the end of assimilating such legal tradition and secular reason she argues the Fatwa Committee in Singapore should consult not only Muslim theologians but also other “experts with grounding in modern knowledge” in order to develop well considered *fatwa* that consider “religious heritage as well as relevant modern knowledge.”²⁶¹ She draws attention to rather thin natural reason in two recent *fatwa* on organ transplantation and embryonic stem cell research to illustrate her point.

Again a few comments are necessary. First by including Rahman’s discussion this dissertation is not attempting to enter into a debate over contemporary legal institutions in Singapore. Rather it is attempting to illustrate that Muslims in Singapore believe their legal institutions, though implemented in a plural society, still represent to some degree their religious

²⁵⁸ Rahman, “Muslim Personal Law,” 119.

²⁵⁹ Rahman, “Muslim Personal Law,” 121.

²⁶⁰ Rahman, “Muslim Personal Law,” 122.

values and beliefs. While there is not uniform comfort with pluralist secular states among Muslims, at least some scholars in this community believe that by strengthening the existing social institutions through active Muslim participation a stronger religious identity results. Thus it seems that the legal system and the law are natural places to begin a dialog about shared public values and civil religion with Muslims. Indeed Rahman argues explicitly that the common values and principles which underlie Muslim law offer an effective means of integration into “the larger plural society” in which Muslims live. *Rahman’s analysis highlights that when a minority religious community is constitutionally and legally privileged in a multireligious society, as the Malay-Muslims are in Singapore, it can have the effect of both isolating the community as well as marginalizing any influence they might have on civil religion.* In fact, Rahman’s appeals to integrate Muslim law into the larger society goes against the prevailing tendencies, dating from colonial times, to deal with the Malay-Muslim community through a kind political policy where Muslim beliefs and values are treated separately from society at large. Thus Islam as practiced by the Malay community does not figure significantly in Singaporean civil religion.

Modern Religious Legislation through the Lens of the MRHA

The Singapore Parliament has passed several pieces of legislation that impinge on religion directly, but there is one bill in particular that has generated a provocative and reasonably thorough government White Paper as well as significant public and academic debate: The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act of 1991. By engaging in a close reading of the government White Paper and putting it into legislative and cultural context, other statutory legislation regarding religion also comes into focus. The goal of this section is to demonstrate

²⁶¹ Rahman, “Muslim Personal Law,” 122–23.

that from the perspective of maintaining the law and order that is necessary for political stability and economic prosperity, the MRHA coincides with the pragmatic utilitarianism characteristic of the People's Action Party ideology. The MRHA also closely dovetails with certain 'Asian' attitudes toward religious tolerance and respect that conflict with certain 'Western' attitudes toward radical religious liberty. Thus the MRHA illustrates two poles in Singapore civil religion—pragmatic utilitarianism and Confucianism—that pull in a different direction from some of the constitutionally defined fundamental liberties discussed above. This is contrary to the unqualified claim in the Maintenance of Religious Harmony White Paper that states, “the proposed legislation on religious harmony will not affect or conflict with” Article 15, Article 152, and Article 153 of the Constitution.²⁶² Before moving into the specifics of the White Paper, it is worth considering how Lee Kuan Yew places the MRHA into the Singapore political world,

When the Christians became very active and evangelical ... wanting to convert the Muslims, and the Catholics decided to go in for social action, we were heading for trouble! So the Buddhists reacted. And this Japanese group, Nichiren Soshu, very active group—huge Buddhist groups were growing rapidly in our polytechnics and universities and in reaction to all these Christians—they were being threatened. We would have headed for trouble quite unnecessarily. We've just got out of one trouble—communism and Chinese chauvinism and Malay chauvinism—and you want to land in another? Religious intolerance? It's just stupid. Stay out of politics. The Religious Harmony Act was passed; after that, it subsided.

You cannot begin converting others and taking a tough line and expect others not to react, because they are losing their followers. You use the church for political purposes, the other religions will also enter the political arena, or they will lose out. So, as I told the Catholics and the Christians, “The Muslims must react. The Buddhists are reacting. And I will help the majority because the Buddhists are in the majority. And do you want that?” So they stopped and agreed.

Well, it's part of the law, and it will be enforced if anybody breaches it. But, if you ask the human rights groups, that's a violation of human rights, we should allow

²⁶² Government of Singapore, Maintenance of Religious Harmony White Paper, Cmd. 21 of 1989, 26 December 1989, 3.

everybody to do what they like. Free speech and free conversions, then you'll have an enlightened society. I do not accept that as the happy conclusion or outcome.²⁶³

1989 White Paper on the Maintenance of Religious Harmony

In the White Paper on the Maintenance of Religious Harmony the government makes clear that the legislation is in response to an “increase in religious fervor, missionary zeal, and assertiveness among the Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and other religious groups in Singapore.”²⁶⁴ The government also concedes that the causes of this situation “lie beyond Singapore, and are not within our control.”²⁶⁵ The government sees that as Singapore becomes a more geographically mobile society where different races and religions come into frequent contact with each other, interreligious tensions have the potential to increase. Because of the fragile nature of the religious harmony that has always existed in the Republic, the government feels that it must act to ensure “two vital conditions” are observed: “firstly, the followers of different religions must exercise moderation and tolerance, and do nothing to cause religious enmity or hatred. Secondly, religion and politics must be kept rigorously separated.”²⁶⁶

As to the first point regarding religious moderation and tolerance, the constitution does guarantee the liberty to proselytize as part of the freedom of religion in Article 15. Both Muslims and Christians have terms for this activity such as “*dakwah*” and “bearing witness”. Here, however, the White Paper distinguishes between preaching to a person who is interested in the faith and “denigrating” the religion of another faith community with the aim of somehow eventually converting someone. In addition to avoiding such a direct confrontation in

²⁶³ Lee Kuan Yew as cited in Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 190.

²⁶⁴ Maintenance of Religious Harmony White Paper, 3.

²⁶⁵ Maintenance of Religious Harmony White Paper, 3.

²⁶⁶ Maintenance of Religious Harmony White Paper, 4.

proselytizing, the various religions also need to exercise caution in their doctrinal instruction. The government discriminates against neither inclusive religions, such as Buddhism, nor exclusive religions, such as Islam and Christianity. It acknowledges the need for some religions to engage in teaching which points out conflicts and disagreements between religious doctrines in order to uphold the truth. Yet, the language and rhetoric used by teachers is extremely important. No religion should use language that offends or incites another community to violence or a public feud. Terms such as “infidel” or “lost soul” should, according to the White Paper, be avoided. The government also argues that drastic changes in the demographics of religion are likely to cause strong reactions among the religions who perceive they are losing followers, and for this reason no religion should seek to dominate society. In summary, the government maintains that all Singaporeans, in order to avoid disharmony, ill-will and hostility²⁶⁷ in exercising their religious freedom, should,

- a. Acknowledge the multi-racial and multi-religious character of our society, and the sensitivities of other religious groups;
- b. Emphasise the moral values common to all faiths;
- c. Respect the right of each individual to hold his own beliefs, and to accept or not to accept any religion;
- d. Not allow their members, followers, officials or clergy from acting disrespectfully towards other religions or religious groups; and
- e. Not influence or incite their members to hostility or violence towards other groups, whether religious or non-religious.²⁶⁸

An appendix to the White Paper, an Internal Security Department report entitled “Religious Trends—A Security Perspective”, bears witness to various situations in the past when these

²⁶⁷ It should be noted that causing feelings of ill-will and hostility are considered an abuse of religion and threat to the state under the Sedition Act, which will be discussed further below.

guidelines were not adhered to by religious leaders and followers. According to the report, “the compilation is not meant as criticism of the religious groups”, and it merely serves “to show how inter-religious tensions can arise when persons try vigorously to promote their own faiths and convictions, perhaps with good intentions, but without adequately considering the sensitivities of other groups.”²⁶⁹ The report calls out different instances of insensitive proselytization that increased interreligious tensions in the past, many perpetrated by Christians. It names Protestant churches and organizations as primary offenders. Some were university students who tried to convert fellow students “who felt depressed after failing their examinations.” Some were medical students who tried to convert non-Christians on their death beds in the hospital while non-Christian relatives were present. In August of 1986 some Christians pasted posters announcing a Christian seminar at the entrance of a Hindu temple. Also in 1986 Christians composed pamphlets in the Malay language using “Allah” as the word for God. The Muslims found this offensive because they consider the word “Allah” as specific to Islam. Finally, Protestant Christians circulated materials that denigrated the Roman Catholic Church, claiming the Pope was a communist and the anti-Christ.²⁷⁰

In summary, the first vital condition necessary in the practice of religious freedom in Singapore is to exercise moderation and tolerance toward the ‘other’. The Singapore historical situation from colonial times has required an extra measure of sensitivity towards others that exceeds the deference shown in most Western countries. One reason for this is that race and religion act as positive feedback loops in civil unrest, building on each other so that seemingly

²⁶⁸ Maintenance of Religious Harmony White Paper, 5.

²⁶⁹ Maintenance of Religious Harmony White Paper, 13.

²⁷⁰ Maintenance of Religious Harmony White Paper, 13–15.

minor offenses to religious or racial sensitivities are quickly blown out of proportion. The Report of the Select Committee on Religious Harmony alludes to the Maria Hertogh riots in December 1950 to illustrate this danger.²⁷¹ Although the government already has at its disposal other laws such as the Sedition Act, which defines the promotion of “feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes of the population” as a seditious tendency, the Penal Code, which criminalizes various offenses such as “injuring or defiling a place of worship, disturbing a religious assembly, trespassing in any place of worship, or uttering words to deliberately wound the religious feelings of any person”, and the Internal Security Act, which may be invoked to “detain a person whose ‘religious activity’ is likely to set different religious groups against one another”, these pieces of legislation are, according to the White Paper, “too severe and disproportionate” for many situations.²⁷² Instead through this legislation the government seeks a way to nip these religio-racial problems in the bud through the use of restraining orders that do not require a trial. This procedure, in effect, lets the Minister of Home Affairs issue a warning to the offending party to prevent a pattern of inflammatory or provocative statements. Thus the MRHA is a pragmatic strategy to deal with the intractable problem of religion at the expense of civil liberty; philosophical, metaphysical, and religious arguments about human nature and the

²⁷¹ Report of the Select Committee on the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill, 10. Also Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 247, comments “Maria Hertogh was a thirteen-year old Dutch Eurasian girl who had lost contact with her interned parents during the Japanese Occupation and she was brought up by a Muslim family. The custody battle between the natural parents and the foster family roused considerable passion among Malay, Indonesian, and Indian Muslims in Singapore. The judge’s decision to send the girl back to the Netherlands, coupled with irresponsible pictures in the English-language press showing her praying in a convent, sparked off violence, which was stoked up by the vernacular Malay press. The Commissioner of Police allowed the situation to get out of hand, and in two days of rioting, Europeans and Eurasians were attacked indiscriminately. Eighteen people were killed, 173 were injured, 72 vehicles were burned, and 100 damaged.”

²⁷² Maintenance of Religious Harmony White Paper, 8.

nature of life together are not invoked; instead, pragmatic considerations of order, stability, and social harmony are pitted against any philosophical, religious or constitutional notions.

As to the second point, that religion and politics should be kept separate, the White Paper makes an argument that “the social fabric of Singapore will also be threatened if religious groups venture into politics, or if political parties use religious sentiments to garner popular support.”²⁷³ The government stakes its legitimacy on secular arguments for political rights, democratic values, and democratic institutions. It encourages the use of constitutional checks and balances to hold the government accountable, not religious movements. It recognizes the right of all individual citizens to express political opinions but argues religious leaders have the duty to express them “circumspectly” because of their influence. The White Paper also grants that there are legitimate religious concerns about public policy such as abortion, conscientious objection to National Service, and some aspects of social action. On balance, however, the government argues the hurly-burly of social discourse with respect to religion is unhelpful and even dangerous in Singapore. Therefore “*mutual abstention from competitive political influence* is an important aspect of religious tolerance and harmony.”²⁷⁴ That is what separating religion and politics means in the MRHA.

Historical Singaporean examples of mixing religion and politics in ways that violate this governmental ground rule are also offered in the appendix. Most prominent are past Catholic and Muslim oversteps in politics although local Hindu and Sikh politics surrounding the assassination of Indira Gandhi are also mentioned. Catholic priests in the mid-1980s formed a Church and Society Study group whose activities included criticizing government trade union

²⁷³ Maintenance of Religious Harmony White Paper, 5.

and labor policies. The priests made use of booklets, pamphlets, and a newspaper to pioneer their causes, which included liberalization of citizenship, censorship, and foreign worker law. This group of socially active priests also sided with other priests behind the Marxist Conspiracy in 1987. Despite an order from the Catholic Archbishop in 1987 several of these priests continued to use the pulpit as a vehicle to forward their political arguments against the government regarding both labor policies and the Marxist detentions.

Muslim theologians come under censure for criticizing government policies as well as attempting a plot to overthrow the government. The government criticism came from one Indonesian lecturer in 1973 who lamented the loss of a village mosque. He alleged the government did not support new mosque construction in modern housing estates and branded local Malays and Muslims “stooges” for their passivity. Later in 1982 a Muslim missionary from South Africa called for militancy among the local Malay community. He alleged that whereas South African Malays, with proper supplies, would “wipe out all the Jews and Christians from Cape Town to Cairo,” Singaporean Muslims were complacent and had failed to convert the local Chinese. Finally a Malaysian religious teacher in 1984 branded mosque destruction in urban redevelopment as “the destruction of Allah’s house.” Later in 1986 he went further and claimed that the island “belonged to the Malays as they were natives of the island.” He called on the Malays to unite against the majority race of Chinese. Finally an alleged plot by the Ikhwan, or Muslim Brotherhood, in 1978 is outlined in some detail. Basically, groups of preuniversity and university students were to be formed under the guise of religious discussion groups. These groups would train writers and religious teachers to promote revolutionary ideas and the rule of

²⁷⁴ Maintenance of Religious Harmony White Paper, 7.

Islamic law similar to that in Saudi Arabia or Iran. These religious societies penetrated two educational institutions in Singapore, Ngee Ann Technical College and Singapore Polytechnic, before the government arrested five of the leaders under the Internal Security Act.

One significant aspect of the MRHA is the formation of a Presidential Council on Religious Harmony, which together with the Minister of Home Affairs and the President, advises the government on how best to handle particular “sensitive religious issues.” The council is comprised of representative religious leaders as well as lay persons, distinguished in public service and community relations. Not surprisingly, perhaps, this council may be conceived schematically in much the same way as figures 1, 2, and 3, in that a centralized, government run council is placed in the center of the religious world of Singapore in order to bring harmony and order to the local religious scene. This is shown schematically in figure 4. As noted by Vineeta Sinha above, some commentators on the MRHA maintain that one of its primary benefits has been to allow previously taboo religious topics to be addressed in public debate over the law and its exercise. Others note that the language in the Act is intentionally vague, so that public discourse is an integral part of the actual functioning of the law within society.²⁷⁵ Since public analysis and discussion of religious behavior proceeds within the Presidential council, it is undeniable that the government, in general, and the PAP, in particular, has gained another avenue by which to engage and moderate religious-political discourse in Singapore. In a way the law and the formation of the Presidential council acknowledges that the religions are not capable of policing themselves.

²⁷⁵ Rajah, “Policing Religion,” 267. Rajah draws attention to the words “religious”, “political” and “religious harmony” in his analysis of the MRHA. Since these words are not defined in the Act, their meaning must be discursively constructed in a continuing conversation. Others analysts have made similar observations about the vague nature of the phrase “causing feelings of ill-will”.

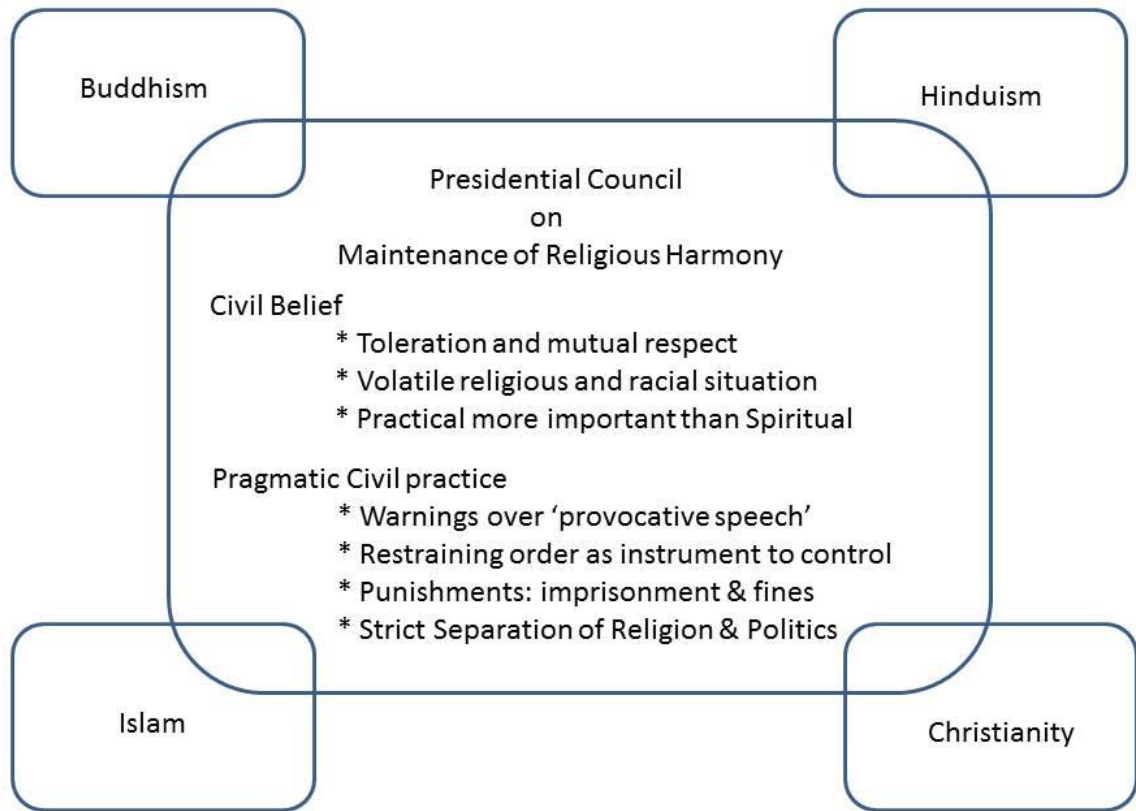


Figure 4. Presidential Council and the Religions.

Concluding Comments

Before moving on to the consideration of civil religion in Singapore more explicitly in chapter four, several aspects regarding civil law and the ordering of society deserve consideration. First, a predominantly Christian law and tradition entered the Singapore cultural mainstream through the legal system. When sovereignty was transferred to a local government after World War II, it opened the legal system to processes by which the ultimate grounds for law could change from the Judeo-Christian basis for English law. Though the Republic of Singapore is constitutionally established in the Western tradition, the basis for the constitution

has been open to competing constructions. Some, such as Thio, still maintain there is a divine, if not Christian, basis for the constitutional framework and fundamental liberties which are guaranteed there. In addition the checks and balances between the different arms of government imply a certain understanding of human nature as deeply flawed. Others, such as the People's Action Party ideology, seem to forward a more utopian view of society, where the ruling elite may be trusted to act wisely and judiciously without opposing institutional powers.²⁷⁶ It will be some time before these opposing tensions in Singapore civil society work themselves out, if ever.²⁷⁷ Thus it will be some time before a truly indigenous legal system grows from the red clay earth that covers this equatorial island. Still, even today, it is clear that new forces have entered into the legal discourse in Singapore: local mores, local needs, and local aspirations.

Second, the current government has placed itself in a central position with regard to regulating religion in Singapore instead of trusting local religious bodies to regulate themselves. This tendency is not new in Singapore culture; it has been traced to the earliest days of the colonization of the island.²⁷⁸ The new development, however, is that a local political party, the

²⁷⁶ Thio, "Constitutional Framework," 73. Thio maintains that the Madisonian cynicism regarding the corrupting nature of power is consistent with a Christian constitutionalism while the "Neo-Confucianist political philosophy" of the government fails to restrain the power of the governors in Singapore.

²⁷⁷ Woon, "Singapore," 350–52. In this section Woon discusses the Maintenance of Parents Act, which he introduced into the legislature in 1994. This bill was debated on the basis of whether it introduced Confucianism into the Singapore legal system. Woon believes the debate demonstrated the deep divide separating the "traditional Chinese-speaking intellectuals from the English-educated intelligentsia." In summing the matter up he concludes, "The Chinese-educated Chinese have a deeply-rooted distrust of courts and the law. They prefer to do things on a personal level, trusting to personalities rather than institutions, and prefer the law to be vague and imprecise, leaving implementation to a class of upright magistrates (in the Confucian sense) with wide powers. It has been said by an influential politician that the Chinese prefer strong leaders. The English-educated Singaporeans (Chinese, Malay, Indian and others) are more inclined to push for strengthening of institutions as a bulwark against arbitrary government. They prefer to have laws precisely drafted so as to circumscribe the power of officials, and are suspicious of unchecked power in the hands of individuals. The tension between these two tendencies will characterize the Singapore legal system for some time to come."

²⁷⁸ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 371. The following observation about the continuity between the colonial and contemporary styles in governing Singapore is made by Turnbull, "In many respects it (the political system) suited the pragmatic nature of Singaporeans and grew naturally out of their Asian and colonial traditions. The electorate

People's Action Party, is now able to inject a pragmatic theme into the religious conversation of the nation. This pragmatic utilitarianism privileges economic prosperity and political stability over metaphysical or religious arguments de facto. Furthermore, the ruling government argues that because religious worldviews are incompatible by nature, and religion and politics quickly escalate racial conflict, religion and politics have to be kept strictly separate. Thus one expects that gradually Singapore law will be consciously secularized, in that English-Christian notions for legal grounds will be replaced by alternatives. Some of these notions may be borrowed from Confucianism, which is construed as a coherent system of values which reflects Asian sensibilities. To date, pragmatic utilitarianism influences the nature of religious freedom by circumscribing personal liberties in the name of political stability and economic prosperity much as Tan and Ch'ng argued in their respective treatments of Singaporean civil religion.

Finally, it is worth noting that in the past when one religion was sequestered from the cultural mainstream in Singapore, i.e. Islam in the form of the Malay community, the effect was to marginalize its influence on Singaporean civil religion. In other words, the strict separation of religion and politics in fact can strengthen the dominant strain of civil religion and marginalize other religions that can no longer enter into civil discourse in a persuasive way. If religion as a whole is divorced from public discourse, this could open the door to values and law deeply at odds with all religious traditions.

and the local press shared an Asian distaste for confrontational or abusive politics, and were prepared to accept authority and show respect towards leaders as long as they were ruling effectively and for the common good. During the heyday of the British colonial era, the constitution of governor, executive, and legislative councils provided a strong, paternal administration, and it was commonly said that the population was quite content to leave their colonial masters to "repair the roads and fix the drains", while they busied themselves making money and looking after family interests."

CHAPTER FOUR

SINGAPOREAN CIVIL RELIGION

Singaporean Civil Religion

In 1955 Alan J. A. Elliott, in his monograph published by the London School of Economics and entitled *Chinese Spirit-Medium Cults in Singapore* described the local situation as follows

The social life of the Malay, Indian, Eurasian and other inhabitants of Singapore remains outside the scope of this account, if only for the reason that they lead existences of their own which are almost entirely remote from the Chinese community. Singapore is, in fact, a place which, after 130 years of growth, has still to develop a culture it can call its own. There is no *lingua franca*, except a crude form of Malay, and English which serves the better educated persons of all communities. The apparent amity in which so many ethnic groups live side by side in Singapore is based more on ignorance than upon any active virtue of tolerance. The 1947 Census showed that over sixty per cent of the population had been born in Malaya. Although it is now possible to discern the emergence of a ‘Singaporean’, to use the term which the local Press likes to popularize, as yet this amounts to little in terms of an independent culture. Singapore is a city to which many people have come, chiefly for the sake of economic advantages, but it is still a place to which few consider themselves genuinely to belong.²⁷⁹

This passage describes the postwar colonial organization of community life on the island where ethnic groups maintained separate spheres of education, housing, economic livelihood, religion, and culture. The island was not so much a melting pot as a “can of vegetable soup” with some blending of flavors, but with sizable chunks containing their own juices.²⁸⁰ Today, 80 percent of

²⁷⁹ Alan J. A. Elliott, *Chinese Spirit-Medium Cults in Singapore* (1955; reprt., London: Athlone, 1990), 16. The first edition was published by the London School of Economics as part of a monograph series in 1955. Though somewhat dated, this book presents many of the origins of traditional Chinese religion as it was practiced in Singapore just prior to independence. It should be noted that the percentage of Chinese Singaporeans has remained roughly the same, 80 percent in 1955 and 74.1 percent in 2010.

²⁸⁰ Milne and Mauzy, *Singapore*, 27. Indeed as Milne and Mauzy wrote in 1990 there was still this sense that a

Singaporeans are literate in English, the *lingua franca* of international business²⁸¹; ethnic groups are largely intermixed through incentives implemented by the Housing Development Board²⁸²; compulsory public education does not segregate by ethnicity but streams by accomplishment²⁸³; all males engage in two years of national service; and there is a significantly enhanced Singaporean identity and pride. Part of the argument of this dissertation is that shared language, shared housing, shared education, and shared identity all lead toward some core of beliefs and practices that are consciously and subconsciously shared by *Singaporeans*, a term marginalized as recently as 1955 by Elliott, the British colonial anthropologist. As stated in chapter two, these shared beliefs and practices include some religious sentiments, concepts, and values that are appealed to when writing, teaching, and following civil law. There is no doubt that this national *ethos* has developed significantly during the period of nation building following Singapore's independence in 1965.²⁸⁴ The government of Singapore has identified the beliefs and practices it considers essential explicitly in its white papers on Shared Values and Family Values as detailed by Ch'ng.

The dissertation made a wide ranging review of civil law in the Republic in chapter three

sense of national identity was in its nascent stage.

²⁸¹ Government of Singapore, "Census of Population 2010," 11. This report indicates that 79.9 percent of the total population over the age of 15 is literate in English. This is largely due to over 70 percent of the population speaking two or more languages as only 32.3 percent speak English at home, as a first language.

²⁸² Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 368. Turnbull notes that while "the policy of mixing different racial groups in public housing and integrated schools appeared to cause little friction," the different races still had some tendency to keep separate. Still gross disparities in housing conditions and education were largely overcome by the government's measures.

²⁸³ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 313–17. Turnbull describes the rather intricate series of events where "ironically the policy adopted in 1956, to give equal official weight to all four languages and provide bilingual education for all Singapore children, resulted in English emerging as Singapore's major language." It must be noted that these same events led to a largely integrated school system as well.

²⁸⁴ Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 371. In this vein Turnbull notes of the island's permanent residents in 2005, "Singapore was no longer a collection of divided transient immigrant communities, but a settled prosperous, literate,

beginning with its colonial founding in 1819. An argument that the *lex loci* in Singapore contains a strong continuity with English common law, equity, and constitutionalism was made based on legal discourse among Singaporean jurists. Important elements of religious law in colonial and modern times were also reviewed. Here, too, continuity was found between the nature of colonial religious law where Christian-English sensibilities constitute the framework for the peaceful coexistence of a plurality of religions and the nature of modern religious law where, increasingly, pragmatic utilitarian sensibilities constitute the secular framework for the mutual toleration and respect. *An important element of this new framework for religious toleration and respect is mutual abstention from competitive political influence.* Thus two elements of Singapore civil religion, Judeo-Christian beliefs and traditions and the pragmatic utilitarianism of the People's Action Party, were presented. It was also asserted that the modern legal tradition, which emphasizes interreligious harmony at the expense of religious liberty, dovetails with certain "Asian" or Confucian attitudes toward religious liberty. Specifically, in this situation, personal liberties are circumscribed in order to protect group interests in the form of political stability and economic prosperity.

As noted earlier in the dissertation, "it has been said that that the metaphors of the day before yesterday are the analogies of yesterday and the concepts of today." This was applied to the development of the Western legal tradition by Harold Berman. What is true of the Western legal tradition is no less true of civil religion in Singapore. Thus in painting a portrait of Singaporean civil religion chapter four will invoke one powerful metaphor from cultural discourse—the Confucian gentleman—as it lays out the three poles of civil religion and the

largely home-owning society, no longer ripe for communism."

inevitable challenge civil religion makes to the authority of Christian religion, despite the secular nature of civil society. Given the extensive reach civil religion commands in a communitarian and technologically modern society, it is argued that civil righteousness is easily confused with Christian righteousness. The goal is not to engage in a pejorative exercise of East versus West, instead it is to detail the nature of civil religion as it is experienced in a largely successful and prosperous Southeast Asian democracy and to consider how Lutheran theology meets the challenging social forces in Singapore. But before engaging in a portrait of the Confucian gentleman as Singaporean leader we shall review some aspects of the portrait of civil religion that have emerged thus far.

Confucianism in the Values or in the Water?

In chapter one, Ronald Ch'ng's dissertation, *Civil Religion and Shared Values in Singapore*, was forwarded as an example of a socio-political contemplation of civil religion and how one academic viewed its impact on Christians. Ch'ng maintains that the ideology of the People's Action Party is found in the central tenets of elitism, Confucianism, and pragmatism. As mentioned above, Ch'ng claims that Singaporean civil religion consists of "two aspects: secularized Confucianism and nationalism" combined in a "Singaporean Way of Life" focused on industrial success and economic prosperity. This conception of civil religion is narrow in its focus; it does not try to fill in the complex and competing values and beliefs appealed to in civil discourse but instead focuses on civil religion as an ideology that is propagated by the PAP through a ruling elite. Ch'ng's discomfort with civil religion lies in the government shift from a purely economic to a wider socio-ethical rationalization of Confucianism that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This wider rationalization, according to Ch'ng, involves indoctrinating all racial and religious groups into particular Confucian constructions of family,

government, and values that emphasize authoritarianism, paternalism, and unquestioning obedience.

This conception of civil religion largely ignores the significant Judeo-Christian strand in the civil society of Singapore that has coexisted with Confucianism since colonial times as demonstrated in chapter three. In fact, much civil law and civil custom finds its roots in English law influenced by Christian principles and values. Ironically, Ch'ng's own argument may be viewed as a part of the competing Judeo-Christian strand of civil religion that he fails to address. Ch'ng's treatment also conflates pragmatism, in the sense of pursuing material economic policies and stable economic growth, with the religio-philosophical values of Confucianism. Thus, Ch'ng's analysis borders at times on a diatribe against capitalist materialism because he renders the Neo-Confucianism of Singapore as primarily economic in nature. There is some truth to this construction because the pragmatic-utilitarian political leadership pulls the entire society towards economic rationalization. Yet, the deep moral nature of Confucianism, which takes seriously the reciprocal duties and obligations of social life as well as personal responsibility for individual action, is ignored.

Ch'ng also fails to highlight that the civil religion in Singapore of colonial times was heavy-handed in its own way toward religions outside the veil of Christianity though Christians were a small minority. Importantly, Ch'ng does not struggle with the 'facts of life' in secular, religiously plural democracies: in these situations civil religion will be a mongrel composed of values and beliefs that come from competing poles. He seems to believe that a nation like Singapore can continue its life with no civil religion as a cosmopolitan collection of individual communities loosely confederated on a small island with no natural resources. This is one vision

for a nation such as Singapore, but strangely it looks little different than “colonial rule” by a new elite.

Ch’ng’s analysis does provide some helpful guidance, however. First, he identifies Confucian constructs of family and state as critical for understanding the Singaporean situation. The state is the family writ large and for this reason tends toward a paternalism that is remarkable to those hailing from western liberal democratic societies. This form of paternalism makes statements by leaders of the ruling party largely normative in assessing government positions and policy. Second, Ch’ng helpfully locates critical debate concerning civil religion in the public discourse concerning the National Ideology constituted by the Shared Values and Family Values as well as the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act. Third, Ch’ng repeatedly notes that the government has many pathways into the hearts and minds of its constituents ranging from public campaigns that influence behavior, to religious knowledge programs that inculcate morals, to press oversight that foregrounds official positions. It is the span of control over so many aspects of life which constitutes a “monopoly of the definition of culture.”²⁸⁵ Ch’ng makes a strong argument that the government rationalizes programs, policies, values, and moral exemplars by grounding them in pragmatic economic considerations to the exclusion of wider metaphysical or anthropological arguments. Finally, Ch’ng does suggest, as he quotes Confucian academic Hsu Cho-Yun, that Singapore already is “an ideal and almost totally Confucianized state.” In other words, Confucianism isn’t being *introduced* by the Shared Values, the Family Values, or the National Ideology proposed by the PAP, it is *already* in the water.

²⁸⁵ Ch’ng, “Civil Religion,” 68.

Of a Word—Jen

When and if a religious tradition may be characterized by the definition of one word, everything depends on that definition. In an analysis of Chinese religious options John Warwick Montgomery argues that “Confucianism is a one-word religion.”²⁸⁶ The word Montgomery speaks of is *jen*, which is made from the Chinese characters for ‘man’ and ‘two’. Behind the hybrid character is the concept that there is another man, a second man, beside the first. This second man has always to be considered in determining what is proper and right for the first man. Montgomery suggests that “altruism” is the best translation of the character *jen*.²⁸⁷ Confucius closely associated *jen* with another concept *shu*, which Montgomery glosses as the “ethic of reciprocity.” Together, these concepts form the basis for an articulation of the Golden Rule: treat your neighbor with the consideration that you would like. Or in the negative construction of Confucius: Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.²⁸⁸ This teaching was put more concretely by Mencius, Confucius’ disciple, when he admonished “treat with due consideration and regard the aged ones of our own and extend the same to the aged of others, in the same way, treat the younger ones of our own and extend the same to the younger ones of others.”²⁸⁹ Thus, altruism and reciprocity form a way of life, an ethic, for Confucians that extends from family and clan to community. D. C. Lau deepens these ideas when he pairs *shu* with *chung*; *shu* he takes as “investigating what others wish to have done to them” and *chung*

²⁸⁶ Montgomery, “Chinese Religious Options,” 210, quoting Y. C. Yang, *China’s Religious Heritage* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1943), 63.

²⁸⁷ Montgomery, “Chinese Religious Options,” 210.

²⁸⁸ Confucius, *The Analects* trans. D. C. Lau (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 112, 135.

²⁸⁹ Mencius, *Mencius* as quoted in Montgomery, “Chinese Religious Options,” 210.

“doing one’s best.”²⁹⁰ Thus, *jen* consists in the reciprocal idea of investigating the world, understanding our neighbor’s need and then striving to meet it.

Philosophically at least, Confucianism shares an outward concern for the neighbor not unlike Christianity. Also, like many Christians, “Confucius is wary of claiming detailed knowledge about the motives or intentions of Heaven,”²⁹¹ since he does not claim to reveal understanding about all of life’s particularities. According to Confucius, the most direct insight into the Will of Heaven has been made known to man through his own nature. As it is stated in *Maintaining Perfect Balance*, “What Heaven decrees is called “the nature”; to follow the nature is called “the Way”; to cultivate the Way is called “instruction.”²⁹² Confucianism differs from Christianity in that it considers human nature to be good. Through the cultivation of human nature man follows the Way that Heaven intends. As Gardner explains, following the Song philosopher Zhu Xi, “Heaven endows each of the myriad creatures with both psychophysical stuff and principle. In the case of humans, principle is one with human nature. To accord with human nature, thus, is to accord with the Way. But most people will find according with human nature difficult because their psychophysical stuff, which differs with each individual, almost always obscures the nature. This is where cultivation comes in.”²⁹³ If one makes the leap to

²⁹⁰ D. C. Lau, “Introduction” in Confucius, *The Analects* trans. D. C. Lau (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 14–16.

²⁹¹ T. Patrick Burke, *Major Religions*, 131.

²⁹² Daniel K. Gardner, *The Four Books: The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 110. Gardner is explaining Confucian understanding of the Four Books according to Song philosopher Zhu Xi whose commentaries formed the standard interpretation of Confucianism during the later imperial period from 1200 to 1900 AD. In Confucian tradition Zisi, the grandson of Confucius, wrote down *Maintaining Perfect Balance* and passed it to Mencius, Confucius’ close disciple. The four books in the Confucian canon, which were traditionally studied for eight to ten years before civil examinations by aspiring young scholars, consist of *The Great Learning*, *The Analects*, *The Mencius*, and *Maintaining Perfect Balance*.

²⁹³ Gardner, *The Four Books*, 110.

associate the psychophysical stuff with ‘original sin,’ the parallel with a biblical understanding of man ends there since self-cultivation or instruction is able to purify the stuff.

Some modern Confucians, such as Tu Wei-Ming, translate the word *jen* as humaneness or “the moral and spiritual process of learning to be human.”²⁹⁴ Here the Way means following the moral dictates of human nature in a process of self-realization. In this perspective the self is conceived not individualistically but as caught up in and cultivating a web of relationships in family, community, and country with the family being of first importance. Historically, Confucius conceived of his followers as royal aristocrats who would rule over the common people, and so the embodiment of one who followed the Way was the nobleman or *junzi*. But over time the term *junzi* came to mean any person of noble conduct and is often translated “gentleman.”

With its emphasis on human relations and conforming man to the pattern of human nature found within, it should be no surprise that Confucianism is often paired with moral philosophy. Indeed self-cultivation is understood to be inculcating certain virtues that Confucius conceived as critical to bring society into a stable and harmonious balance. As mentioned above, the governing virtue in this system is *jen* or humaneness. Y. C. Yang comments that two other virtues, *yi* and *li* can be explained using the analogy of a tree.

Jen or Benevolence (in the larger Confucian sense) is the root of all moral, good and proper, action. *Yi* or Righteousness is the trunk of the tree, the manifestations of *Jen* in its applications to life and living. *Li* or rules of Propriety (including etiquette and ceremony but larger than both) are the various branches of the trunk, or the concrete detailed rules of conduct based upon the idea of Righteousness which springs from Benevolence (comparable to the laws of the Pharisees).²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ Tu, *Confucian Ethics Today*, 4.

²⁹⁵ Yang, *China's Religious Heritage*, 80–83, as quoted in Montgomery, “Chinese Religious Options,” 211.

Understanding human nature and what constitutes proper behavior in the various relations of life is one aspect of Confucian thought. But the abiding concern of its great teachers lies in “examining *how* it is that a person can act morally, that is what enables a person to become a good human being.”²⁹⁶ Since all people are endowed with a nature that is in essence good, “the challenge every person faces is to give realization to that goodness, to fulfill his heavenly endowed potential. *It is this process of self-cultivation described in the Four Books that offers to every individual the means of achieving moral perfection.*”²⁹⁷

Upon consideration, one quite quickly comes to the conclusion that in Confucianism there is more involved than just ‘one word.’ While the above sketch can hardly do justice to the ‘way of life’ taught in the later imperial period, it is at least clear that there are many enduring and even endearing aspects to this ‘way of life’ which is Confucianism. There is a deep reverence for human relationship and recognition that our lives are ethically ‘thick’ in both inward and outward directions. Family, community, and nation are all highly prized while the individual is also acknowledged as a significant reflection of the Will of Heaven. Moral effort and putting into practice the principles of right action are praised because rightly done they reflect how the universe is meant to be—a natural law of sorts. The theme of attainable moral perfection is problematic from a Lutheran Christian perspective; it will be dealt with later. This also is not to diminish the abuses which historically creep into Confucianist practice. As Tu puts it, we cannot overlook the negative side of Confucianism, the politicization of Confucian values. If Confucianism becomes politicized,

²⁹⁶ Gardner, *The Four Books*, 131.

²⁹⁷ Gardner, *The Four Books*, 132 (emphasis added). In his evaluation Gardner discusses how Song philosophy combined the contemporary metaphysical concept of *qi* in order to explain the individuation of human beings.

the self, originally conceived of as a dynamic centre of expanding relatedness, is expected to adjust to its relationships and to the world. Instead of actively developing through creative tension and experiential learning, the self is taught to value submissiveness. The *harmonization* of relationships, instead of being the result of reciprocity and mutual stimulation, degenerates into the passive acceptance of authority. Relationships become internally hierarchical, even arbitrary. The self, far from growing in reverence, retreats in self-deprecation without dignity. Communal participation no longer means the extension and deepening of one's humanity. Instead, it requires one to become a passive member of a large group and to sacrifice oneself to a politicized ideology.²⁹⁸

Here the ideal of self-cultivation through the practice of virtue is sacrificed to authoritarian politics with disastrous effect on the individual and society. East Asian political culture developed along these lines in the mid-nineteenth-century Confucian states, which in turn failed to respond to the challenge from Western expansion and colonialism. This perception of Confucianism has endured within many parts of Asia and the West;²⁹⁹ the abuses perpetrated relate to how harmonization is conceived and achieved within the created orders whether they be nation, community, or family.

Concerning 21st Century Confucian Humanism

In order to update Confucianism to contemporary times it is worth noting the material developed by Tu Wei-Ming for the Confucianist module of the Singaporean Religious Knowledge education effort.³⁰⁰ This gives an academic perspective on a contemporary form of

²⁹⁸ Tu, *Confucian Ethics Today*, 105–6.

²⁹⁹ Tu, *Confucian Ethics Today*, 107.

³⁰⁰ Choong Chee Pang, "The Fate of Confucian Humanism in Singapore," *Ching Feng* 37 (November 1994): 255–56. Choong reviews a prior Confucian revival movement from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century in Singapore and Malaysia in order to place the 1980s situation in context. In particular he notes that both efforts included curriculum development, research and training, visits of overseas Confucian scholars and bilingual education. Whereas the earlier movement attempted to revive nationalist support for the Chinese "motherland" as well as to establish temple sacrifice and rituals, the twentieth century movement was focused on reviving "Confucian ethical values, especially in response to some of the "undesirable influences from the West."

Confucianism, conceived of as a philosophy which can coexist with Christianity,³⁰¹ developed by a highly regarded and practicing Confucian for use with teenage students, much as catechism instruction is used within many churches. In laying out his overall approach to the subject, Tu holds up the inner logic of Confucian ethics as a process with two major emphases: broadening and deepening. Both take the individual, not the community or the ruler, as the point of departure. Broadening involves moving outward through a series of concentric circles from the self to community to country to world and beyond. This is a dynamic process where care and responsibility is engaged beyond the individual and results in a new sense of self-awareness. Deepening involves the “moral transformation” of the self. It expands the self to include not only body but also mind, soul, and spirit. Individuals become aware of horizons beyond the physical senses. Virtues such as compassion and good judgment are lived out. The process of character building, which combines both broadening and deepening movements, involves putting into action increasingly high ideals in an “ever-enlarging community of fruitful human interaction.”³⁰² To use a saying of Confucius, “wishing to establish oneself, one seeks to establish others; wishing to enlarge oneself, one seeks to enlarge others.”³⁰³

Schematically Tu includes a diagram, see Figure 5, that shows both the broadening and

³⁰¹ Tu, *Confucian Ethics Today*, 138. While on an extended trip to Singapore to discuss the proposed curriculum, Tu comments on the concerns of those who subscribe to other religions: “In response to these questions, first we must note that Confucianism not only covers ground that religions do not usually cover. As a form of humanism, Confucianism emphasizes human affairs and human relationships. Both Confucius and his followers left the spiritual dimension of dealing with God out of the discussion. Only late in Chinese history were questions of metaphysics and what we could call religious concern brought into the discussion. This was not because Confucius himself did not hold any faith. Rather, it was either because Confucius, as a modest and honest person, did not wish to discuss what he did not know or because he wanted to let others make their own choices. In the case of Singapore, I would prefer to assume that Confucius would have left it to each individual to make his or her own choice. He would have felt that it was not for him or his followers to decide the relationship between God and man. Therefore, to the people who have questions along these lines, we can say that Confucianism is not going to displace other religions.”

³⁰² Tu, *Confucian Ethics Today*, 219.

deepening processes. The diagram draws upon the eight steps included in the text of the *Great Learning*, written down by Mencius. The four steps below the center represent processes of deepening of the self. The three steps above the center represent processes of broadening of the self. The center step, cultivation of personal life or self-cultivation, represents the union of these two movements and serves as shorthand for the entire process of character formation.

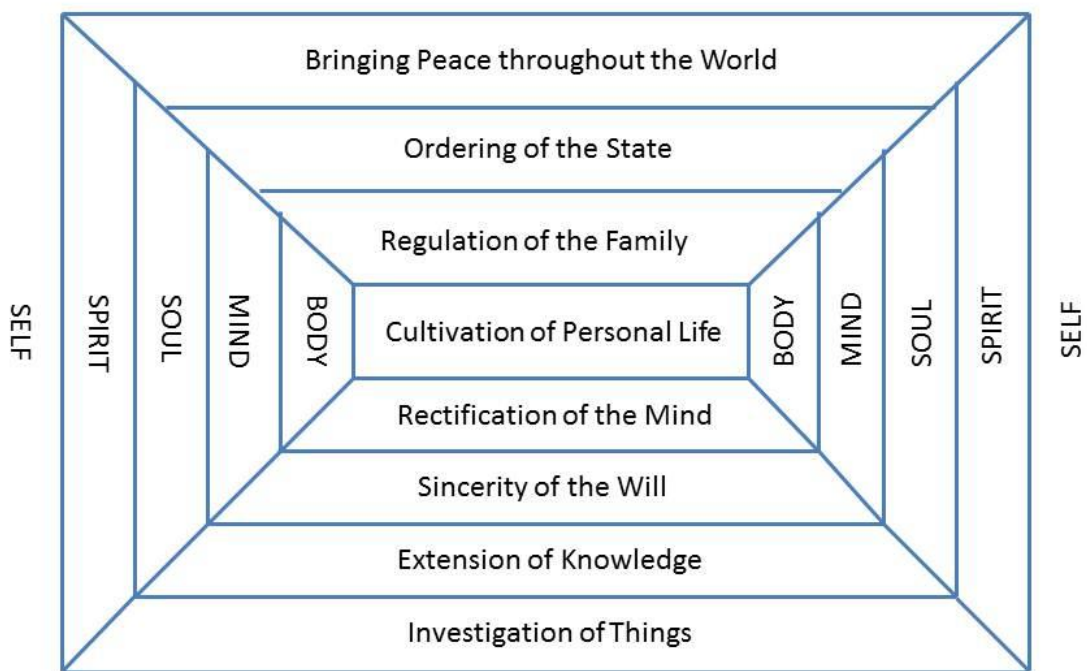


Figure 5: Deepening and Broadening Process of the Self after Tu Weiming

Tu's comprehensive and balanced definition of self-cultivation carefully avoids an overly moralistic framework and instead attempts to dynamically describe how moral growth occurs during the natural course of human development when conflicts and new situations present

³⁰³ Confucius, *The Analects*, 85.

themselves. He expands the concept of establishing oneself beyond simple obedience in the reciprocal relationship of Father and Son, for instance. Filial piety should be framed in such a way that it could be accepted as a universal moral value, one which enhances “personal dignity, independence of mind and the quest for autonomy.”³⁰⁴ In Tu’s system Confucianism is not so much a choice between personal autonomy versus surrendering to the group as a choice to engage in a dignified way of life where individuals move beyond self-centered living to consider the needs of those beyond themselves, starting with the family. Learning to be human involves overcoming the common doubts that plague us and pursuing the moral excellence that presents itself to us in common everyday living. The Confucian pays attention to the Will of Heaven as best he can through a deepening self-awareness, in this way he ‘does the best he can.’ Then while recognizing his own limitations, he attempts to live harmoniously in the orders or structures he encounters on earth.³⁰⁵ Thus, unlike some religions, there is not an impetus to withdraw from the world but to engage it more and more with an increased freedom and spontaneity.³⁰⁶

Tu’s presentation of Confucianism is notable in at least two ways. First, he always begins the processes of broadening and deepening from the perspective of the individual and not the welfare of the group. Second, he assiduously avoids laundry lists of ‘Confucian’ values that so frequently are mentioned in the discussion of East Asian states, values such as thrift, hard work,

³⁰⁴ Tu, *Confucian Ethics Today*, 227.

³⁰⁵ C. K. Yang, “The Functional Relationship between Confucian Thought and Chinese Religion,” in *Chinese Thought & Institutions*, ed. John K Fairbank (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 272–76. Here Yang notes that both Confucius and Mencius “started with tremendous confidence in the superiority of their own abilities.” This forced Confucius to develop a concept of Fate in order to explain his lack of success in accomplishing his ambitions in life. It must be noted that these attitudes of Confucius so construed are in tension with the Enlightenment humanism that Tu uses to inform his Confucian practice.

³⁰⁶ Tu, *Confucian Ethics Today*, 220.

self-discipline, respect for elders, esteem for learning, desire for stability, and sacrificial living. In so doing he avoids a moral legalism where the self is merely confronted with nature's demands from within and from relationships of submissiveness. Tu outlines a philosophical Confucianism where one's personal values are discovered through the investigation of things. These investigations subsequently define the moral values to be pursued. There is a certain subjectivity in this approach that is a sharp contrast to the negative forms of political Confucianism in East Asia. It is clear, for instance, that Tu's personal moral values include a healthy dose of personal autonomy and independence. It could be that Tu believes an honest and consistent delving inward will uncover an objective human nature in keeping with something like 'natural law.' There is no question, however, that his work moves beyond a simple rationalization of efficiency and economic prosperity at the sacrifice of personal liberties. He promotes a participatory form of ethics where teachers and students, leaders and citizens, together pursue common standards and norms of behavior so that "rampant materialism, aggressive individualism, hedonism, and narcissism" are held at bay.³⁰⁷ Tu envisions a society where a more sophisticated cultural life takes root around music, books, art galleries, museums and more. His is a hopeful and engaging vision, which, if nothing else, displays a concern for both the development of the individual and the harmony of the community. It is a generous and humane interpretation of Confucius' 'autobiography',

At fifteen my mind was set on learning.
At thirty my character had been formed.
At forty I had no perplexities.
At fifty I knew the Mandate of Heaven.
At sixty I was at ease with whatever I heard.
At seventy I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing moral principles.

³⁰⁷ Tu, *Confucian Ethics Today*, 228.

Concerning Confucian Lacunae

It is hard to imagine why anyone would deviate from the Way once put on its path in the picture that Tu and other Confucians present of life in this world. Self-cultivation is a process that inevitably leads to deeper understanding of what it means to be truly human while actively engaging a world of great complexity and beauty. Through self-discipline and effort, consistent, if not continual, progress is made toward a lofty but attainable goal of moral perfection. The shortcomings of individuals are dealt with by ingraining humility in thinking and attitude. Questions beyond the horizontal dimension of human life are bracketed with the well-known sayings of the Master, such as those given in response to Chi-lu's queries concerning the service of gods and the nature of death, "You are not able even to serve man. How can you serve the spirits?" and "You do not understand even life. How can you understand death?"³⁰⁹ If one is content to focus only on earthly existence, the good of one's neighbor, and living with the grain of the universe, the agnostic attitude of philosophical Confucianism has much to offer. Confucius claimed no revealed knowledge of God and did not dwell on what can be inferred, according to St. Paul, from creation.³¹⁰ Thus in the face of moral failure, there is only the admonishment to try harder. In the face of opposition from the world, aside from fleeing to another state,³¹¹ there seems only the Stoic's refuge of knowing that one is on the right path.³¹² The inner logic of

³⁰⁸ Tu, *Confucian Ethics Today*, 220.

³⁰⁹ Confucius, *The Analects*, 107.

³¹⁰ Rom. 1:18–20 (English Standard Version).

³¹¹ Lau, "Introduction," 10. Lau comments that Confucius left the kingdom of Lu, apparently because they did not observe the proper rites.

³¹² Lau, "Introduction," 12. Lau observes that benevolence is "something that has to be pursued for its own sake and with complete indifference to success or failure."

Confucianism, as any system based purely on natural law, creates a comprehensive sense of shortcoming in the individual, but in Confucius' personal life this seems to have been balanced by an appreciation of the gifts from Heaven.³¹³ Some scholars also note that as Confucius neared the end of life, he studied the *I-Ching* in order to understand why he, a superior man, failed to accomplish so much of his social program.³¹⁴ This is seen as a move toward mysticism on Confucius' part in order to understand why Heaven, understood as "the personified supreme governing force of the universe,"³¹⁵ did not favor him in a more significant way. Still, Confucianism as a system provides few means to move beyond the 'cause and effect' of ethics without lowering the standards on human behavior revealed in the biblical record. We still have the problems of human evil and sin.

The questions of human sin and human nature, which divide ethics and theology, take on larger dimensions when Confucian tenets are melded into a political system. Not unlike the centuries long political struggles surrounding monarchy and democracy in the West, East Asia has gone through an extended period where a ruling elite used political ideology developed from selective Confucian tenets to assert authoritarian rule. As mentioned above, modern Confucians are aware of the "negative side of the Confucianism",³¹⁶ a tradition that has been critiqued by formidable intellectuals in the West as varied as Fairbanks, Weber, and Parson-Talcott. In

³¹³ Lau, "Introduction," 54. There is a definite sense in the *Analects* that Confucius took a certain joy in life, despite whatever shortcomings he observed in himself as well as in those around him.

³¹⁴ C. K. Yang, "Confucian Thought and Chinese Religion," 274.

³¹⁵ C. K. Yang, "Confucian Thought and Chinese Religion," 272.

³¹⁶ In addition to Tu's remarks above one could refer to the work of Wm. Theodore de Barry, *Asian Values and Human Rights: A Confucian Communitarian Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) for a more nuanced evaluation of historical Confucianism. De Barry, 23, paints a picture of what he calls Confucian "personalism" that includes "a strong sense of moral conscience, shaped and formed in a social, cultural process that culminates, at its best, in a sense of self-fulfillment within society and the natural order." He eschews the simplistic poles of Western individualism and Eastern communitarianism that often dominate values debate.

Singapore the leadership readily admits that its citizens do not measure up to humanistic ideals of perfectibility. In fact Lee Kuan Yew associates utopian views of human nature with Western liberals, especially academics, not with Confucianism or Asian conservatives. He embraces the “old-fashioned ideas of guilt and responsibility.”³¹⁷ He also assesses his own people as “the children of immigrants from the lower rungs of societies in Asia,” who have yet “to cultivate the finer social graces” more common in some civil societies, like those he had witnessed as a student in the 1950s in England.³¹⁸ For this reason Lee and the PAP emphasized *order* above individual rights and liberties, especially during the first decades of independent rule in Singapore. “Order under the heavens” so that the average person could safely pursue the necessities of life such as food, shelter, education, and employment was paramount in the minds of Singaporean leaders during this period.³¹⁹ Thus harmony, on the island, connotes order established, if necessary, by political authority through coercive force and punishments according to local circumstances. The focus of the dissertation, however, is not on whether Asian authoritarianism is desirable, or whether ‘Asian’ democracy is a defensible concept from an economic, political, or even theological perspective. Rather it involves understanding civil religion as a social force to be reckoned with by the church in service of the gospel.

More to the focus of the dissertation are questions such as whether the reciprocal duties and obligations of Confucian social structure are projected into the vertical realm when Christian religion is introduced into a Confucian culture. For instance, in the father and son relationship, characterized in general by *shu* (reciprocity) and *chung* (doing one’s best), in the horizontal

³¹⁷ Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 194.

³¹⁸ Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 195.

³¹⁹ Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 194.

realm between an earthly father and son, there is a cause and effect at work. Because the son is ‘filial,’ i.e. obedient, respectful, and caring toward his father, he merits the father’s love or encourages the father to love and care for him. In other words, *the reciprocity of the relationship is stressed as a form of harmony that is desired to order social interaction*. If this reciprocity is projected into the human-divine relationship in either the doctrine of justification or sanctification, the passive righteousness of faith is lost. Thus, it is clear that harmony concerning the fundamental notions of *jen, shu, and chung* in the left-hand kingdom, or horizontal dimension, must be distinguished from harmony in the right-hand kingdom, or vertical dimension, so that Christian righteousness is maintained. Historically, this situation was further complicated in Confucian societies because the Will of Heaven was closely associated with the political earthly ruler, i.e. the vertical and horizontal dimensions were fused in a fallible, sinful human being.

Of a Man—the Singaporean Junzi³²⁰

According to Lau “the most basic principle in Confucianism” is the welfare of the common people³²¹. As mentioned above, Confucianism as a historical movement was preeminently concerned with developing a ruling class that would rule a state in accord with the Will of Heaven. The mandate to rule was heavenly approval conferred on the Son of Heaven because he

³²⁰ Shared Values White Paper, 8. In paragraph 41 it is stated, “Many Confucian ideals are relevant to Singapore. For example, the importance of human relationships and of placing society above self are key ideas in the Shared Values. The concept of government by honourable men “*junzi*,” who have a duty to do right for the people, and who have the trust and respect of the population, fits us better than the Western idea that a government should be given as limited powers as possible, and should always be treated with suspicion unless proven otherwise.”

³²¹ Lau, “Introduction,” 32.

was morally worthy.³²² One expression of this linkage between the self-cultivation of the leaders and the welfare of the people is given in the Second Book of the Analects,

Guide them by edicts, keep them in line with punishments, and the common people will stay out of trouble but will have no sense of shame.

Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves.³²³

In other words, while law and punishment may enforce an outward sense of order, they fail to form the people into a morally upright community. Only virtuous exemplars and the regular practice of traditional piety succeed in producing a community that is self-regulated and self-cultivated. Such thinking has been insinuated into Singaporean political discourse since 1965 largely through the influence of its first prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew. This attitude is reflected in Lee's statement in 1989 that, "Singapore had superimposed on its constitutional framework the ideal political leader as a Confucian gentleman, or *junzi*, one who was trustworthy, morally upright and beyond reproach."³²⁴ There is not much doubt that Lee aspired to that form of leadership for himself, his cabinet, and the cadre of PAP officials who to date have formed two successive administrations, under Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong, respectively.³²⁵ This

³²² Jiang, *Mandate of Heaven*, 27. Jiang describes how the founder of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang interpreted signs in the heavens as indications of the approval or disapproval of the supernatural world. Thus, for instance, if the weather suddenly changed, Zhu would leave the "main hall of the palace, a sign showing his modesty and humbleness." He would not return until he had corrected his mistakes in order to move the "heavenly heart."

³²³ Confucius, *The Analects*, 63.

³²⁴ "Democratic Confucianism," *The Straits Times*, 14 January 1989, 28, as quoted in Tamney, "Conservative Government," 201.

³²⁵ Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 60. It is of interest, at least, to note Lee's public religious position. He is agnostic about God, just as the official government position is strictly secular. So, in a manner of speaking, he embodies the secularity of the state. He muses, "I'm not sure whether there's a God or there's no God, I'm not sure whether the world was created by God or by an accident. But don't go around knocking other people's gods and other people's culture. Even if there is no God, this group of people have been held together and sustained through all their tragedies and all their sorrows by a belief, by a certain belief that they are all together under one God... therefore they share certain things in common. Why should you go and demolish that? I disagree with that profoundly."

section will examine some statements of prominent Singapore statesmen in order to fill out both their attitude toward the religions as well as their concept of the *Singaporean Junzi*. Simply put, this section defines what the terms ‘harmony’ and ‘self-cultivation’ stand for within Singaporean civil religion.

In historic Confucianism the primal narrative that informs political reflection comes from the Warring States period (500–221BC) in Chinese history when social anarchy descended on the land. Confucius desired to return to traditional feudal life through a program that ordered relations within society and promoted self-cultivation. Through the structure of society and the reciprocal duties inherent in different types of relationship men could fulfill the Way. Confucius also desired to test his ideas about government, society, and the individual through the practical day-to-day work of ruling a state. Although he did serve in some public capacities, Confucius in the end had to content himself with a life of scholarship and teaching, not governing. During the 2500 years since Confucius birth, many different interpretations and adaptations of his moral and political philosophies and religious sensibilities have appeared throughout Chinese-affiliated states, especially in East and Southeast Asia. In Singaporean civil religion the primal narrative is the birth and development of the nation of Singapore, especially as told by its founding father, Lee Kuan Yew in his biographical memoirs.³²⁶

Like Confucius, Lee Kuan Yew arrived on the historical scene at a critical period in his nation’s life. Born in 1923, World War II brought to Lee and Singapore anarchy, disarray and many hardships of life under Japanese occupation. British colonial rule was in disarray at the

³²⁶ These would include F. K. Han, W. Fernandez, and S. Tan, eds., *Lee Kuan Yew: The Man and His Ideas* (Singapore: Times Editions & The Straits Times, 1998), Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings & Times Editions, 1998), Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965–2000* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000). The following narrative is gleaned largely from

conclusion of hostilities. Troubling questions of colonial legitimacy and competency were raised in Lee's mind as he studied law at Cambridge. Mixing with men from throughout the Empire shortly after India's independence, he sensed the inevitable changes that would soon be played out across the globe in decolonization. There were unique challenges in the Malay world with the communist Chinese influence lurking close-by. Lee gathered with Malayan university students studying in Britain to discuss establishing Malayan independence and socialist ideals.³²⁷ Returning home he established himself as a skilled pro-union lawyer and busied himself with others in establishing the People's Action Party. The English-educated PAP leaders expanded their base forming a united front with communist leaning Chinese-educated activists. This new party wing opened a window to the Chinese world of Singapore, a world "teeming with vitality, dynamism, and revolution."³²⁸ Many communists, who had been operating in Singapore since 1922, were principled and idealistic leaders, convinced of their cause in establishing a perfect society and willing to die for it. Lee and moderate PAP leaders walked a tightrope of nonconfrontational coexistence as they argued their case for the heart and soul of the voters. In the communists the PAP moderates faced a "highly organised, tightly controlled, secretive" adversary,³²⁹ skilled in the use of rhetoric, chaos, and armed force. Lee and the 'old guard' PAP leaders made use of brawn and brains, counting on the British to control the communists while appealing to the electorate in a war of words. Without the lessons learned during this period Lee claims the PAP could never have successfully governed Singapore after independence. After two British-initiated purges of suspected communists, the moderates in the PAP were swept into

these works.

³²⁷ Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 31–35.

³²⁸ Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 45.

power in 1959 over the transitional Progressive Party. Lee became the first prime minister of Singapore.

Then, attention was quickly diverted to the Malayan Union. The British wanted to keep Malaya and the Borneo territories together in a confederation with the Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca, and Singapore. Economically this made sense as industry and commerce among the polities were highly interconnected, and Singapore, with little in the way of natural resources or developed manufacturing capacity, depended on robust trade with the Malay hinterland to survive. Racially, however, there was a problem as Malays were given preferential treatment in government hiring and school enrollment outside the Straits Settlements. Additionally, without Singapore the Malays constituted a majority over the ethnic Chinese, with it a minority. Malay leaders also harbored concerns that Chinese communists in Singapore might cause political problems for their vision of a unified Malay populace. By 1963 Singapore had joined the Malaysian Federation with hopes of working through financial and racial questions of governance in time. The vision of Malay political leaders for communalist rule based on race and religion soon emerged. Mosques were constructed instead of medical clinics, and the status quo of the “Malays as rice farmers, the Chinese as traders and the Sultans as rulers and the Indians as rubber tappers” was pursued.³³⁰ This sat ill with Lee and others within the PAP. Malay-Chinese race riots broke out in Singapore on July 21, 1964, a tactic adopted by Malay extremists to “cow” Lee and his followers.³³¹

³²⁹ Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 49.

³³⁰ Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 79.

³³¹ Lee, *From Third World to First*, 190. Here Lee states candidly, “The anti-Chinese riots on Prophet Mohammed’s birthday in July 1964 resulted from a sustained campaign by a Malay newspaper, falsely alleging day after day that the Malay minority were oppressed by the Chinese majority” in Singapore.

In May 1965 Lee pushed back and joined the Malaysian Solidarity Convention, an alliance of five parties scattered geographically across the Malay Federation committed to political, social, and economic ideals not racial bias. Lee and the MSC desired to fight for a ‘Malaysian’, i.e. multiracial, Malaysia. The PAP hoped a compromise solution would be accepted by the Malay hardliners. Lee argued with Tunku Abdul Rahman for the concept of a loose Malay confederation that would allow Singapore greater latitude in self-governance, but this was not to be. Singapore was ejected from the Malay Federation unilaterally on August 9, 1965. Lee formed many of his ideas about the power and interrelation of race, language, and religion during this period of Malay struggle. He summarizes the events in biblical terms saying,

I am absolutely convinced that without the experience, the two years in Malaysia, first fighting the communists ’61, ’63 and then fighting the communalists ’63, ’65—Singapore would not have made it. If you had given Singapore independence in ’61, we would have been ruined, it could not have been done. *That experience, it’s like Moses going out in the wilderness before he went to Judea. You have to go through that. Then the people became realistic, a sober appraisal of a difficult future and they made the effort. And no more quarrels about foolish things like, language, culture and so on. We just sat down and pushed the economy forward and live and let live. Without that, we would not have succeeded.*³³²

This theme of ‘live and let live,’ while managing race, language, and religion, so that important issues of economy, prosperity, and modernization can be addressed, only sharpened over time. Thus, Singapore’s birth narrative is fundamentally framed about political survival and economic viability, not religious freedom, or cultural norms or the basic rights of man. These are dismissed as foolish subjects of conflict and dissension. Lee stated this forthrightly saying, “The realities of the world of 1965 had to be faced. The sole objective was survival. How this was to be achieved, by socialism or free enterprise, was a secondary matter. The answer turned out to be free

³³² Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 83, (emphasis added).

enterprise, tempered with the socialist philosophy of equal opportunities for education, jobs, health, housing.”³³³

After independence Lee and the Old Guard faced the question of how they would govern the new nation. Initially, securing the island was a task complicated by the racial reality that Singapore’s police and two army battalions were made up of Malays, who in an armed conflict might find it difficult to oppose their motherland. On the economic side Indonesia was pursuing a policy of “confrontation” in protest of the newly formed Malaysian state. After the expulsion, the Malaysian Federation quickly moved to cut Singapore out of their trade loops. So, economically speaking, Singapore was quickly isolated. If the British withdrew their troops, the vestiges of colonial protection and a good chunk of economic activity would also be lost. Lee moved quickly to address these threats. A trusted lieutenant, Goh Keng Swee, was appointed as defense minister and immediately began working with Israeli military advisors to train the expanding armed force while taking steps to overcome Singaporean Chinese prejudice against military service. Singapore scrambled as all British forces evacuated from 1968 to 1971 and Indonesian covert military activity on the island threatened peace. But by 1971 Singapore had a fighting force of seventeen battalions and another fourteen battalions in reserve and was quickly gaining a reputation for military competence. This reputation was furthered by policies that offered career officers additional training at top institutions in Britain and America.

In 1968 Lee took a sabbatical at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government in order to recharge his intellectual capacities and glean ideas for the future.³³⁴ He picked up valuable

³³³ Lee Kuan Yew as cited in Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 109.

³³⁴ Lee, *From Third World to First*, 459–61. This brief passage highlights the three month sabbatical Lee took during 1968 at the University of British Columbia and Harvard.

understanding on American business practices and connected with the Economic Club of New York to court investment from American multinational corporations in an effort to overcome the boycott on economic trade by Indonesia and Malaysia. Singapore pursued a strategy to bring select MNC's to the island in order to boost the technical, engineering, and management skills of its workers. This strategy was designed to leapfrog its neighbors to create a First World oasis in Southeast Asia that could serve as a regional hub. The draw for companies and investors would be industrious workers and an efficient and corruption free government in a country with unparalleled political, economic, and financial stability. Land evacuated by the British was repurposed for industrial uses. An Economic Development Board formed with the best and brightest foreign trained Singapore scholars coordinated infrastructure development and set out to attract overseas investment. By the early 1970s a growing list of companies including Texas Instruments, National Semiconductor, Hewlett-Packard, and GE were committed because Singapore demonstrated competence and confidence and delivered on its promises. Economic success continued in the 1980s and beyond as Singapore made a push to establish itself as a regional financial hub, bridging the gap between San Francisco and Zurich in financial money markets.

Stepping back, a basic outline of the Singapore Story emerges, a schematized retelling of the formation of a new nation. The early modern period from 1819 to World War II is summarized mainly in the vision of Sir Stamford Raffles, the original founder, who is credited with recognizing the geopolitical importance of controlling India-China trade through the Malacca Straits and establishing an industrious multiracial port city. The successful entrepôt hummed along peacefully until the unexpected land assault from the north that brought Japanese Occupation in 1942. The rout of Fortress Singapore, the vaunted British military command, and

subsequent wartime brutalities shattered the *Pax Britannica* of order and harmony as it had been known on the island. Gone too was the dogma of colonial superiority in the minds of the average Singapore worker, especially the Chinese.³³⁵ In the perilous postwar period Chinese communists threatened the grassroots political parties that rose to champion anticolonial rule. The Chinese communist-chauvinists, tightly aligned with Communist China and operating in Singapore since the 1920s, held the hearts of the average Chinese man on the street. The People's Action Party, led by an English-educated elite including Lee Kuan Yew, skillfully maneuvered around and fought the latent communist threat. Part of the solution lay in allying Singapore with the Malays in greater Malaysia, who opposed Chinese communist influences in the Malay Federation through communalist policies of Malay dominance. Once the communist threat was neutralized, the PAP sought parity for Chinese and Indians within the Malay political world. This move was rejected by the increasingly communalist Malay elite and led to Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia.

New forces and challenges faced the ascendant city-state on independence. Malaysia and Indonesia cut off historic trade relationships in an effort to subjugate the upstart republic.³³⁶ Religious tensions and riots, especially between Malays and Chinese, threatened to undo the newly established postcolonial order. The ugly underbelly of Asian-style corruption in Singapore, ensconced in long established cultural habits, was exposed and expunged with policies based on objective achievement and the threat of prompt punishment. Order was established first, then law, through strong armed tactics when justified. The leaders sought the

³³⁵ Kenneth Paul Tan, "Singapore's National Day Rally Speech: A Site of Ideological Negotiation," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 37 (August 2007), 295.

³³⁶ Thus seemingly innocuous contemporary talks and discussions over Malaysian agreements to pipe treated water onto the island take on great political significance.

answers to long pondered questions about human nature and the reasons for material success; they found them in a hodge-podge of neo-Confucian values, wisdom gleaned from local political realities, and the latest research by Western academics. The watchwords in the republic became hard work, equal opportunity not equal rewards, betterment through education, and sacrifice for the survival of the nation. “No one owes Singapore a living”³³⁷ was a phrase school educators used to instill the realities of life in young Singaporeans. Financial and political stability were seen as paramount to national success; racial and religious harmony constituted the key to this stability. Consensus style approaches toward living were touted as the Singaporean-way over and against those who believed argument and conflict the superior methods in finding truth and direction.

Above all, personal self-cultivation was emphasized. Rewards and success in Singapore were argued to be the direct result of inborn talent and effort. The leaders themselves embraced this model and molded the system to their vision. They chose the next generation of leaders based purely on merit as understood in the sense of key attributes of strong political leadership, leaving few decisions to the whims of the ballot box. By the turn of the millennia it could certainly be said that the “Singaporean” had arrived. It was a title earned after a rigorous educational formation, strong on academic competition and streaming, where success was possible only for those with a strong desire to achieve and the discipline, organization, stamina, and grit to pursue a difficult goal to its end. For the men of Singapore, the ultimate rite of passage was two years of National Service, where the races and social classes intermixed in order to defend the island nation. The strongest argument for the government and the policies it

³³⁷ “No one owes Singapore a living” is point four on the list of National Education Messages promoted by the Ministry of Education, http://vs.moe.edu.sg/national_symbol.htm (accessed November 2, 2012).

pursued was the stunning material success and rapid improvement in educational performance compared with the community of first world countries. Largely gone, too, was government corruption and crime. But, as K. P. Tan observes, “This straightforward tale of survival and success is complicated by a cautionary note insisting that Singapore, although it has come a long way, continues to be dogged by old and new vulnerabilities that threaten to destroy all that it has achieved. The moral of this Singapore Story, then, is: whatever Singapore has been doing right, it must continue to do, or else face the possibility of losing everything.”³³⁸

Contextual Definitions from the Singapore Story

The stated purpose in narrating this brief account of the Singapore Story was to paint a picture of the *Singaporean Junzi* as well as to present contextual definitions for ‘harmony’ and ‘self-cultivation.’ It should be made clear that the definitions that are derived from this narrative do not necessarily mesh with statements and quotations from political or church leaders. In other words, the Singapore Story has a life of its own and those who live in this story as it is told and reinforced within communities there experience the pulls and tugs from the story itself, not from carefully considered statements or white papers. Thus “narrative criticism” in the diverse world of hermeneutical theory has a place in finding contextual meaning for the above terms in Singapore.³³⁹ The world of the Singapore Story becomes normative for the citizens of

³³⁸ Tan, “Singapore’s National Day Rally Speech,” 296.

³³⁹ David M. Gunn, “Narrative Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, rev. ed., ed. Stephen L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 201. Gunn comments, “The term ‘narrative criticism’ in biblical studies is a loose one, more found in New Testament than in Hebrew Bible studies. Since the late 1970s, it has sometimes been used broadly of literary-critical, as opposed to historical-critical, analysis of biblical narrative, from a variety of methodological standpoints. Often that has meant interpreting the existing text (in its ‘final form’) in terms primarily of its own story world, seen as replete with meaning, rather than understanding the text by attempting to reconstruct its sources and editorial history, its original setting and audience, and its author’s or editor’s intention in writing.” So, too, one born into a story experiences it in ways different than many of the actors intend in the case of the context of a national narrative.

Singapore.³⁴⁰ They do not all study sociology, politics, and religion in order to make sense of their world. They hear the urban legends that maintain all their phone calls are monitored by the national telecom company. They hear the sound bites from local political leaders who oft times defer to the political elders without challenging their utilitarian presuppositions. They experience the social forces at work through rhetoric and the carefully crafted media messages.

Certainly a picture of the Confucian gentleman emerges from the national narrative, quintessentially it is found in the person of Lee Kuan Yew. This *junzi* is no academic scholar and his administration was no rule of scholars; he is action-oriented, practical, forthright in expressing his considered opinions and a man driven to combine the best from Eastern and Western tradition in order to secure a well ordered and prosperous nation. Lee is no stranger to the use of force, and “puts on his knuckle-dusters” if he senses the press is overstepping its bounds to foment trouble.³⁴¹ As the ruler of a multiracial, multireligious state, Lee is a student of culture, language, and religion as they apply to running a newly formed, secular, modernizing country. He won’t brook any *religious foolishness* that would upset the economic apple cart.

Lee’s hopes for the nation-state have stayed remarkably consistent since his first National Day Speech in 1966 where appealing to the masses he stated, “It has been a year of great and

In fact, it is what is emphasized in the popular mind that comes to define the meaning of the narrative in the largest sense.

³⁴⁰ Han, “History Education and ‘Asian’ Values,” 394. After reviewing in detail the tone and content of history textbooks used in Singapore primary and lower secondary education Han concludes, “Overall, therefore, there is an overriding sense that a single, approved narrative, and a set of the values and messages that are deemed important by the political leaders to the survival of Singapore, are being put across in the history texts. This is intentional and unapologetic, but it raises concerns about the degree of political socialization that is taking place. While the form of values and democracy taught are described as ‘Asian’, it is argued that *children are in fact being socialized into accepting a rather passive conception of citizenship* and a notion of democracy that are distinctive to Singapore” (emphasis added).

³⁴¹ Lee Kuan Yew as cited in Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 212. Here Lee states in a speech to the Singapore Press Club on November 15, 1972, “Every morning, my task begins with reading five, four now, newspapers. It can be tiresome. I note the scurrilous, the scandalous. I can live with that. But when any newspaper pours a daily dose of

sudden change. Very few countries in the world go through the kind of climacteric we have gone through.”³⁴² This was a revolutionary breaking with the past and with the neighborhood of Malay states, and it was thrust upon Singapore, not desired. In the new postcolonial order the challenges were “more than just making material progress, like other groups of human beings whenever they are found in the world, *we seek permanent salvation, security to time immemorial, to eternity.*”³⁴³ For Lee, and those who followed him, the basic problem for Singapore is national survival, and this is not a problem that is solved once and for all. It requires constant vigilance and dedication from a disparate people, inclined naturally to go their own way. The survival of the nation takes on dimensions of religious salvation, especially as it provides for the welfare of the family members who follow. The Singaporean *junzi* will not let those who jeopardize political stability continue in their ways. If necessary, personal liberties will be circumscribed so that evil doers are brought to justice. Harsh punishments, which serve as a deterrence, are favored to keep the unruly in line. The *junzi* have a moral, almost religious, obligation to undertake this task for the good of the collective society, and the ballot box proves that the electorate in Singapore approves of this approach.

In this circumstance harmony is understood as the situation where citizen and state are unified in their struggle to establish the nation and bring about continued economic development. Sometimes harmony is maintained by giving up parts of fundamental freedoms constitutionally guaranteed. Sometimes harmony is maintained by pursuing an educational path in keeping with

language, cultural or religious poison, I put my knuckle-dusters on. Do not believe you can beat the state.”

³⁴² Lee Kuan Yew, “Speech at the National Day Rally,” Singapore, August 8, 1966 as quoted in Tan, “National Day Rally Speech,” 298.

³⁴³ Lee Kuan Yew, “Speech at the National Day Rally,” Singapore, August 8, 1966 as quoted in Tan, “National Day Rally Speech,” 298, (emphasis added).

the nation's workforce requirements.³⁴⁴ At other times harmony is maintained by having more babies so that there will be a young workforce to support the elderly.³⁴⁵ Harmony oftentimes is political shorthand for accepting the ground rules that have been laid down by the elected officials that reflect the realities of modern economic life and the threats to political stability. In short, harmony is construed as a particular form of Singaporean civil righteousness or patriotism that places the collective interest in tension with the individual. This is a different definition for harmony than contained in the statement of Shared Values, which emphasizes racial and religious harmony, understood primarily in the sense of civil peace.³⁴⁶

Self-cultivation, on the other hand, is understood in this national narrative as the action the individual must take in order to bring about a unified and prosperous state. It is simply the actions the individual must take in order for the harmonious society to grow and develop, where harmony is understood as serving the national interest. In the narrative there is no recognition of transcendent principles to which all are accountable or liberties to which all are entitled. Instead, from infancy the individual begins the process of conforming himself to the needs of the

³⁴⁴ Government of Singapore, "Yearbook of Statistics Singapore 2012," www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/themes/people/edun.html (accessed November 29, 2012). For instance, the university enrollment in Singapore is heavily weighted toward engineering and technology. The Yearbook of Statistics Singapore 2012 lists that 29.7 percent of University enrolment was in engineering sciences. For comparison in 2010 United States institutions granted 5.4 percent of bachelor's degrees in engineering and engineering technology. U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 2011* (NCES 2012-001), Chapter 3, or see <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts> (accessed November 29, 2012).

³⁴⁵ National birth rate is a recurring theme in Singapore politics. The latest installment has Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong calling for schemes to encourage women to have more kids because the birth rate has fallen to 1.2, barely above the threshold needed to replace one parent. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-11-27/lee-rues-singapore-as-retirement-home-without-boosting-birthrate.html> (accessed November 30, 2012).

³⁴⁶ Shared Values White Paper, 5. Paragraph 23 states, "Individual abstract virtues, such as honesty, justice, or compassion, are universal. But each society develops a unique value system which fits its particular needs and circumstances. The nature and temperament of the people, their historical experience, and their country's position in the international order invariably differ. Each society has its own unique ethos. Each one expresses the same or similar virtues in ways different from other societies, placing more emphasis on one value or another. For example, while racial tolerance and harmony are virtues in any society, they assume an exceptional importance in Singapore, *where many races and religion must coexist peacefully together*," (emphasis added).

community and nation. The process begins as he acquires the mother tongue, which is critical for his incorporation into a particular racial community. Then he enters the school system where it is his duty to “do his best”, not so much in order that he find fulfillment in his calling or serving others, but so that the nation can develop the right balance of talent to survive and thrive. If he succeeds and qualifies for a university spot, or better yet a scholarship at a foreign university, he takes on new duties and responsibilities within the social context. With the meritocracy system in place, he can trust that the system will reward him appropriately. After all, he is at the top of the bell curve.³⁴⁷ The self-cultivation of the less successful involves learning to take on lesser tasks and challenges that still support the community as a whole without *being a burden* on society. At the same time their rewards will be lesser, as should be expected, in keeping with their contributions to the material good of the nation.

The Competing Poles of Civil Religion

By now the three poles of Singaporean civil religion, Judeo-Christian values and practices that enter through the inheritance of British colonial law, utilitarian pragmatist values and practices that enter through the evolving legal framework and the economic and social engineering policies of the ruling class, and Confucian values and practices that are laid over much of social life including the legal constitution and civil religion and championed by the *Singaporean junzi*, have been outlined in some detail. All three are strong social forces at work

³⁴⁷ Lee Kuan Yew as cited in Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 153–54. Lee was enamored of the research by Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein that argued intellectual ability is passed on genetically and favors certain racial groups. Their book was entitled, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. In conversation Lee recalls that by the 1970s, “when we looked at the old examination results and the present, and we saw the pattern in the housing estates—one room, two-rooms, three-rooms, four-rooms, five-rooms—it fits exactly with educational attainments. That the more intelligent and hardworking you are, the higher your educational levels, the higher your income.”

in the public life and discourse of this small multicultural island nation. The fact that Singapore is a newly developing country, recently thrust into the community of nations, finding its own way and actively engaged in the process of nation building, lends a vitality and dynamism to the manner in which these poles compete in the minds and hearts of the people there. This is no academic exercise sequestered at the halls of the National University of Singapore or Singapore Management University or the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies. It includes the day to day public debate, the unseen but almost irresistible tugs to approach life and its problems from a certain perspective, and the raw political power that is sometimes exercised on behalf of the collective good by the state. In other words, it is a populist religion.

Civil religion as understood in the Singaporean context is an evolving entity especially as new leaders come to the political forefront. This is demonstrated in K. P. Tan's analysis of the inaugural National Rally Day speeches of the first three prime ministers. Tan notes a liberalization in content and rhetoric that signals the "open-endedness" of dialectical politics and the constant battles that are waged even in a state, such as Singapore, that has been ideologically successful.³⁴⁸ In Tan's political analysis of the Singapore Story, which is told as part of the National Day Celebration on August 9th each year, it is not surprising that the pragmatic utilitarianism of the PAP is emphasized. He notes,

its format is predictable, beginning with an assertion of national vulnerability, achievements and challenges, followed by the call to Singaporeans to unite in spite of their differences as a determined, industrious and self-sacrificing people led by a far-sighted and incorrupt government mounted since independence by the People's Action Party, an aristocracy of talent in whose hands Singaporeans are taught to believe, lie the nation's best hope of continued survival and success.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ Tan, "Singapore's National Day Rally Speech," 292.

³⁴⁹ Tan, "Singapore's National Day Rally Speech," 293.

Tan traces how the celebrations have developed since 1965. Observance ceremonies in both the public and private sector are held along with political dinners in many constituencies. The prime minister delivers a short televised message to the nation. But most importantly, an elaborate parade is held that wends through the metropolis ending at the National Day Stadium where the throng is treated to reenactments of the Singapore Story as well as ceremonies and a spectacular fireworks display. Tan terms the overall celebration “an annual injection of patriotism”; however, he moves beyond any neutral or positive assessment of the role of patriotism when he insists the story, as told by the PAP, which hammers home the precarious national position, “has sustained a culture of fear and arrested the people’s development toward social and political maturity.” In fact, Tan goes as far as to suggest the PAP leaders appeal to the various racial communities and promise them in some sense “salvation.”³⁵⁰ It is salvation decidedly understood as continued material prosperity and national security. Again, it must be stated the claim is not that the schematized telling of the national narrative constitutes the fully nuanced and considered opinion of political leaders or their fully implemented policies. It is a story which in some degree lives in the popular consciousness of Singaporeans, and it influences civil religion there.

The changing complexion of the political leaders and how they tell the story over the long haul will change the nature of civil religion. In this regard, preeminence must be granted to the first prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, who ruled there from 1959–1990 and then served as the Senior Minister, or trusted advisor, from 1990–2004, and finally as the Minister Mentor from 2004–2011. It is stunning that he was able to materially affect political thought and policy for over 50 years, a time during which Singapore traveled from third world to first. His

³⁵⁰ Tan, “Singapore’s National Day Rally Speech,” 295.

first national day speech in 1966 was “distinctly authoritarian” in rhetoric and tenor; yet he still needed to persuade the electorate to follow his policies and decisions. He argued forcefully that the heat of the moment made consultation with the electorate impossible around the decision to separate from Malaysia. Further, the young Cambridge-educated solicitor “demonstrated a powerful command of the coloniser’s language.”³⁵¹ There is little question that Lee pulls civil religion, including both the Judeo-Christian legal and Confucian religio-philosophical poles, toward authoritarian constructions of public life in a pragmatic utilitarian mode as detailed above.

Lee’s successors, Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong, on the other hand present different public personas in their first National Day speeches. Tan notes that Goh tried to distance himself from the former prime minister by adopting a different style, a consultative stance. Goh attempted successfully to connect with younger Singaporeans who had achieved educational and financial success and longed for greater democratic ideals of representation. These voters could easily choose to emigrate to other countries, such as Australia and the United States, if dissatisfied with their treatment. Goh had to convince them of the benefits of meritocracy based on “technical and educational qualifications.”³⁵² While Lee had appealed and construed the electorate almost exclusively along racial lines, Goh acknowledged divisions between old and young as well as conservative and liberal Singaporeans. There was no question that Goh substantially continued the policies of Lee, but increasingly during his time at the helm he did so shoulder to shoulder with a mix of plain folks, his feet planted solidly on the ground next to a diverse constituency with whom he comfortably connected at a personal level. There

³⁵¹ Tan, “Singapore’s National Day Rally Speech,” 298.

was a greater civility to public discussion during Goh's government and his administration pushed forward the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, the Shared Values, and the Family Values, sensitive cultural subjects that demanded greater public, especially religious, involvement.

As the second Lee, Lee Hsien Loong, neared the prime minister's spot, many feared a return to the authoritarian politics of his father. This has not in fact occurred. The younger Lee has projected "a kinder, gentler and more compassionate" public image and it seems his character has been formed by personal trials such as suffering from lymphoma during his political apprenticeships. Unlike his father, he maintains politics was not his first career choice. In speeches leading up to National Day in 2004 Lee Hsien Loong spoke of "the less educated, the elderly and the disabled ...in terms of human dignity and gratitude for their own form of contribution to the nation."³⁵³ Significantly, Lee seemed to moderate the national obsession with economic success and tried to open space for a wider discussion around personal and national aspirations. Tan guardedly states that Lee's words were "spectacularly progressive" by PAP standards, but that most Singaporeans are cautiously optimistic because of a deep seated cynicism that has grown up around PAP politics over the years. All the prime ministers have exerted a pull in civil life toward economic prosperity and political stability, but one senses a lessening of the "emergency" authoritarian policies initially instituted by the PAP during the turbulence of independence. In fact, in Lee Hsien Loong's 2004 National Day speech he liberalized laws concerning civil society organizations, so that they no longer need a license "to hold indoor talks, provided they are not about issues the government deemed sensitive, like race

³⁵² Tan, "Singapore's National Day Rally Speech," 299.

and religion.”³⁵⁴ Liberalization in the area of religious speech may be a long time in coming with worldwide tensions seeming to ratchet up with each passing year.

In contrast to the political leadership, which pulls toward pragmatic utilitarianism, the English-educated legal class regularly exerts a pull toward Judeo-Christian values. This can most easily be seen in the institutions and processes of law inherited from Britain but also in the published works of academic lawyers such as Thio Li-ann, Tan Seow Hon, Debbie Ong, and William Wan.³⁵⁵ These lawyers engage a variety of issues such as social ethics, social justice, criminal punishment, abortion laws in Singapore, marriage and divorce law, religious discourse in the public square, and the religious basis for constitutional law from a Christian perspective.³⁵⁶ This Judeo-Christian pole in Singaporean civil religion can also be discerned in the writing of Mathew Mathews, who conceives of a more cooperative relationship between religion and state in the republic.³⁵⁷ Specifically, Mathews maintains that Christian beliefs, values and groups are intricately linked and involved in the production and policing of morality in Singapore. Mathews argues that conservative evangelical Christians in Singapore have taken on the role of a “voice of conscience to the nation,”³⁵⁸ despite the existing church-state relation where religious leaders are explicitly prohibited from preaching on political and social issues.

³⁵³ Tan, “Singapore’s National Day Rally Speech,” 300.

³⁵⁴ Tan, “Singapore’s National Day Rally Speech,” 303.

³⁵⁵ These four lawyers are co-contributors to Daniel K. S. Koh and Kiem Kiok Kwa, eds., *Issues of Law and Justice in Singapore: Some Christian Reflections* (Singapore: Genesis Books & Trinity Theological College, 2009).

³⁵⁶ Thio Li-ann and Kevin Y. L. Tan, eds., *Evolution of a Revolution: Forty years of the Singapore Constitution* (London: Routledge-Cavendish, 2009). This collection of legal essays includes titles such as “Constitutional jurisprudence: Beyond supreme law—a law higher still?” by Tan Seow Hon and “Protecting Rights” by Li-ann Thio.

³⁵⁷ Mathew Mathews, “Christianity in Singapore: The Voice of Moral Conscience to the State,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 24 (January 2009): 53–65.

³⁵⁸ Mathews, “Christianity in Singapore,” 55.

Mathews sees Singaporean Christianity as molded by the conservative American evangelical model and cites social stances on the permissibility of divorce, traditional beliefs about the family, and disapproval of homosexual behavior.³⁵⁹ Mathews contends “the overwhelmingly conservative Singaporean Christian church has become intricately involved in the production and policing of morality in Singapore.”³⁶⁰ In fact, this effort enjoys “state patronage.” One piece of evidence he offers consists of government attitudes toward and support of voluntary welfare organizations, such as Focus on the Family Singapore. These religious organizations receive funding and preferred tax treatment in Singapore and work harmoniously to promote family and sexual values consonant with the state’s own goals.³⁶¹ In addition Mathews sees increased participation and mobilization of the Christian community to voice objections to state policies such as liberalizing homosexuality and gambling law. Even more dramatically Mathews see conservative evangelical church leaders confronting and engaging the state over matters of moral concern.³⁶² Most importantly Mathews sees conservative Singaporean Christianity pursuing a role as “the voice of moral conscience to the State”³⁶³ in the public discussion of moral life. Mathews observes the careful position of the churches, which “present themselves neither as authoritative” nor “power competing” nor “undermining the states authority.”³⁶⁴ He sees the churches pursuing a path of witness as concerned citizens informed by

³⁵⁹ Mathews, “Christianity in Singapore,” 54. Mathews offers Jerry Falwell as a prototypical American conservative evangelical Christian.

³⁶⁰ Mathews, “Christianity in Singapore,” 55.

³⁶¹ Mathews, “Christianity in Singapore,” 56.

³⁶² Mathews, “Christianity in Singapore,” 60.

³⁶³ Mathews, “Christianity in Singapore,” 59. Mathews quotes a prayer by Cathy J. Severson, “Pastors: The Voice of Conscience to Our Nation,” which was published through a U. S. based Christian on-line newspaper, *The Christian Examiner*, and calls on pastors to be ‘the voice of conscience’ to the nation.

³⁶⁴ Mathews, “Christianity in Singapore,” 61.

the Word of God. Here he quotes favorably Singaporean theologian Roland Chia who elsewhere writes of the relationship of church and state, “the Church has been entrusted with a privileged mission as ambassadors of reconciliation, which she must strive to fulfill authentically and openly, without concealment. In the words of the Barmen Declaration, the Church undertakes this task by reminding ‘the world of God’s Kingdom, God’s commandment and righteousness and thereby of the responsibility of governments and the governed’ (Thesis No. 5).” Although the evidence for Christian state conscience cited by Mathews in 2009 is somewhat limited, a reasonable argument could be made for the manner in which Judeo-Christian mores have shaped the legal system in Singapore, and this system has historically been critical in informing public life on the island.³⁶⁵ The legal system of any state, in maintaining order and enforcing a shared morality, can be said to act as a conscience of sorts. One critical question for Singapore is whether the legal system will import new values and sensibilities that move counter to traditional Christian morality. There are already some critics of the legal system, but their objections are grounded in commonly held concepts of justice, especially as they relate to opposition politics and human rights, rather than in specific religious arguments.³⁶⁶ Already, however, in the

³⁶⁵ Terence Chong, “Filling the Moral Void: The Christian Right in Singapore,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 41:4 (November 2011): 566. Writing in 2011 Chong makes an argument in much the same vein as Mathews and forwards the March 2009 confrontation of a group of Anglican Pentecostal women who “took over” the Association of Women for Action and Research, a secular women’s rights group in Singapore. Chong discusses how Pentecostal Christians, who he calls the “Christian Right,” have increasingly filled the moral vacuum in public discourse on “sex education and tolerance for gay communities” as the secular government has backed away from its historically conservative moral stands.

³⁶⁶ See Francis T. Seow, *Beyond Suspicion? The Singapore Judiciary* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 2006). Seow documents what he considers to be unjust treatment of opposition politicians in Singapore by leaders of the ruling party, namely Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong. Seow, xv, maintains “Justice in Singapore is Janus-faced.” He means that “The Singapore courts—when adjudicating commercial cases between two contending parties where neither the authorities nor the political elite are involved or interested—may be relied upon to administer justice according to the law.” However, when government leaders and the elite are involved “these very same judges...have repeatedly demonstrated a singular facility at bending over backwards to render decisions favourable to the Singapore government and its leaders.”

positivist constructions of law in Singapore, there is an impetus toward the pragmatic utilitarian pole of civil religion as certain fundamental freedoms have been circumscribed in favor of stability and material prosperity.

Finally, the Confucian pole of civil religion must be considered. An attempt was made above to portray Confucianism as a complex and meaningful moral system with roots in traditional Chinese religion. More traditional Confucians might tightly link this moral tradition with ceremonies such as ancestor worship and a highly structured and hierarchical social order based on the relationships between father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, ruler and minister, and the older and younger. Harmony in more traditional Confucianism can be understood on several levels. In *Maintaining Perfect Balance* it is described in this way,

Before pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy have arisen—this we call perfect balance. After they have arisen and attained due proportion—this we call harmony. Perfect balance is the great foundation of the universe; harmony is the Way that unfolds throughout the universe.³⁶⁷

Here human nature is understood as that internal state before conflicting emotions arise. Because Confucianism considers human nature to be morally good, it is in perfect balance. When emotions arise in correct proportion, in keeping with what is required for right action, then harmony is achieved. It is harmony that allows the Way to be followed. So, in this passage harmony is a kind of emotional “golden mean.”

The concept of harmony does not stop there, however. There is also the idea in the initial chapter of *Maintaining Perfect Balance* that when perfect balance and harmony are attained by a superior man, “heaven and earth will find their proper places therein; and, the ten thousand

³⁶⁷ Gardner, *The Four Books*, 111.

creatures will be nourished therein.”³⁶⁸ According to the widely accepted interpretation of Zhu Xi, the passage indicates the influence a man can have on the state of affairs in both heaven and earth. Through moral righteousness the man, the society, and heaven itself are rightly ordered in a cosmic harmony. From this notion comes the further idea that “the sage, in his perfection” brings order and fulfillment to the entire universe.³⁶⁹ This conceptual system is in direct conflict with Lutheran teaching that the vertical and horizontal dimensions in life are not related through cause and effect. So, traditional Confucianism has this idea which directly conflicts with a proper understanding of passive righteousness being separate from active righteousness.

But more importantly to the task at hand, in Singaporean civil religion the nature of harmony takes on a decidedly utilitarian flavor when compared to traditional Confucian interpretations. Just as when Christian concepts are brought into the realm of civil religion and emptied of their deeper religious significance, so too Confucian concepts brought into the realm of a secular civil religion are emptied of their greater religious or philosophical significance. Harmony, a term loaded with deep implications concerning human nature, objective moral values, and a reality that transcends earthly pragmatic considerations, becomes the shorthand either for peaceful civil coexistence, or worse yet, simply blindly accepting the ground rules that have been laid down by government officials that reflect the realities of modern economic life and the threats to political stability. As mentioned above, in the latter situation harmony degenerates into a particular form of Singaporean civil righteousness that places the collective interest over individual aspirations and realization.

In a similar vein, the term self-cultivation (*xiushen*) in traditional Confucianism has a rich

³⁶⁸ Gardner, *The Four Books*, 111.

and varied meaning. Self-cultivation includes investigating the nature of things (*gewu*) in order to discover what principle lies behind them; this is the pursuit of truth in moral terms.³⁷⁰ From this pursuit of truth grows the extension of knowledge about things and how they should be done. In the Confucian mind this requires discipline and effort, but it leads to a refinement of the psychophysical stuff (*qi*) that clouds the goodness in all men. The centrality of self-cultivation to human life is seen in that all men are called to pursue it. As is said in *The Great Learning*, “From the Son of Heaven on down to commoners, all without exception should regard self-cultivation as the root.” This is because self-cultivation offers a solution, albeit an arduous one, to the problem of why men do not live up to their moral potential. According to the Confucianist, it is obvious to all that they have a good human nature within, but all find that they fall short of moral perfection. All people, regardless of status or class are offered a way to reach a state of body, mind, soul, and spirit such that they effortlessly choose and do what is right in any situation,³⁷¹ thus the Master’s statement that “at seventy I could follow my heart’s desire without transgressing moral principles.” Of course, only the superior man or sage in reality attains such a level of perfection. It should also be noted that the ultimate end in self-cultivation is not found in knowledge or understanding, but using such knowledge in order to do what is right.

Viewing human perfection as something that is attainable through self-discipline and the exertion of the will is at odds with Christian doctrine teaching the depth of original sin within each man and the nature of justification before God. It is true that we can progress in the sense of

³⁶⁹ Gardner, *The Four Books*, 112.

³⁷⁰ Gardner, *The Four Books*, 5.

³⁷¹ Gardner, *The Four Books*, 131–35. Gardner comments on how *The Great Learning* is the central text in Confucianism for teaching self-cultivation, and how of the four books this one has historically been read first so that the others may be properly understood.

treating our fellow man better with the proper discipline and effort. The same cannot be maintained with respect to our standing before our Creator. More to the point here, however, is how the term self-cultivation is hollowed out as it moves from the religio-philosophical realm of Confucian tradition into the realm of civil religion. In Singaporean civil religion self-cultivation merely means conforming oneself to the economic realities that confront the state. This is reflected in the observation of C. M. Turnbull who comments, in summarizing everyday life at the turn of the millennium, “Singaporeans were held on a firm rein from their school days through to adult life, with *the drive for excellence and perfection* in education, in living environment, in workers’ skills, and even in culture and manners.”³⁷² The investigation of things is reduced to trying to understand what must be done based on a civil order that is increasingly influenced by economic and political concerns of survival and prosperity instead of transcendent concepts of human nature or even natural law. Increasingly, in Singapore civil religion holds out the material rewards of modern society and the promise of material progress from third world to first as the greatest good for society and individuals as religious reason and sensibility is sequestered into the cage of “religious harmony.” Harmony and self-cultivation in this situation become terms and practices domesticated by a narrative of civil religion, the Singapore Story, that is intentionally focused on a secular utilitarian theme.

³⁷² C. M. Turnbull, *Modern Singapore*, 371.

CHAPTER FIVE

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ITS KINDS

The predominant poles of civil religion have been laid out and a case has been made that civil religion is promulgated by a strong interventionist government. In chapter five the dissertation moves on to discuss *how* civil religion and civil law in Singapore put at risk a proper understanding of Christian righteousness. First, the political situation will be taken up in greater detail in order to capture the comprehensive nature of civil religion in the one party situation. In this situation certain positivist notions concerning civil righteousness have become favored in Singaporean thought. These notions drive the pervasive, mono-vocal character of civil discourse and threaten to silence religious discussion and debate. Second, the concept that church theology must be a public endeavor that engages and speaks to political realities is developed. For Lutheran theology in particular the public nature of confession and the historic confessional documents offer guidance. Third, whereas in the first four chapters of the dissertation the framework for analysis has consisted of the triad of civil religion, civil law, and civil righteousness, in the fifth chapter a Lutheran framework of the two kinds of righteousness will be invoked in order to explore the Singaporean situation in greater theological depth. This framework also serves public theology because it allows Christian righteousness to be clearly distinguished from the righteousness of civil religion. Finally, a brief consideration of how the righteousness of faith is bestowed in the public exercise of Christian religion is discussed. Thus, this chapter not only explores the risks for misunderstanding Christian righteousness but also offers some guidance to the church for clearly and persistently proclaiming the passive righteousness of faith.

Civil Religion Under One Party Rule

On the one hand, it must be acknowledged that no political entity constitutes a perfect society in the sense that there are uniform beliefs and practices held by all. Thus, one possibility in discussing the political situation is to conceive of several smaller societies existing within the political entity each with unique beliefs and practices. Here the distinctiveness of the subcultures comes to the fore within the larger context. In Singapore this would correspond to the “community,” conceived of as a religious-racial group that exists within the nation. The Chinese, Indian, Malay, and Eurasian “communities” operate in an independent fashion, maintaining their own narratives and boundaries. On the other hand, the political entity can be primarily conceived as a multicultural ‘society’ where some set of beliefs and practices is held in common by all or nearly all of the members. Thus, diversity within “society” as opposed to “societies” within a unity is conceived to exist and flourish. In either case, the political entity or state is not normally conceived as being identical with society or community except in the case of totalitarianism. In non-totalitarian cases there are mediating structures in civil society that bridge the gap between private and public life. This dissertation applies the second view to Singaporean society: it is a multicultural or pluralistic society where there exist common beliefs and values which constitute a civil religion. Here, the “Shared Values” held in common by many citizens of Singapore take on special significance.

Within western civil society a variety of mediating structures such as neighborhood, family, church, and voluntary associations coexist, more or less independent of the state.³⁷³

³⁷³ Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael Novak (Washington, DC: AEI, 1996), 159. Berger and Neuhaus analyze the western “welfare” states, particularly America, from this perspective, but the same kind of structures also coexist in Singapore in some measure.

These structures work against totalitarianism in theory and in practice because they offer the people a means by which to inject private sphere values into public sphere discussions.³⁷⁴

Mediating structures result from “people-sized institutions” that are attuned to the real needs and values of many segments of society.³⁷⁵ One point for consideration is whether these mediating structures in Singapore are strongly influenced by the state. In fact, there is some concern that in Singapore the state encroaches into many mediating structures. If this intensifies, then Singapore would move more nearly towards a kind of totalitarian rule. This risk is compounded in the situation of extended one party rule where government ideology and public discourse take on a mono-vocal character backed by powerful authority. In Singapore, for example, those who live in Housing Development Board Estates have much of their day-to-day lives touched by government run community organizations. These “heartlanders” are intentionally integrated into community clubs and subject to state directives such as the Ethnic Integration Policy, which “is aimed to promote racial integration and harmony and to prevent the formation of racial enclaves.”³⁷⁶ On the other hand, “cosmopolitans,” who generally are more upwardly mobile and not necessarily tied to public housing estates, have a less invasive experience with respect to the state. They have greater latitude in their personal lives and fewer regulations with respect to their private behavior. More importantly, they could choose to leave Singapore without great personal hardship.

³⁷⁴ Berger, *To Empower People*, 163.

³⁷⁵ Berger, *To Empower People*, 164.

³⁷⁶ One can get some understanding for life in an HDB estate by browsing the Housing Development Board’s website. The Ethnic Integration Policy is described in the “Glossary” page. It also has a page entitled “Heartland Beat.” <http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10200p.nsf/GlossaryList?OpenForm> (accessed December 6, 2012).

These terms, heartlander and cosmopolitan, have taken hold after Goh Chok Tong's National Day Rally Speech in 1999. In it he stated,

We also need to maintain cohesion between cosmopolitans and heartlanders. As Singapore becomes more international, two broad categories of people will emerge. One group I call the "cosmopolitans", because their outlook is international. They speak English but are bilingual. They have skills that command good incomes—banking, IT, engineering, science and technology. They produce goods and services for the global market. Many cosmopolitans use Singapore as a base to operate in the region. They can work and be comfortable anywhere in the world.

The other group, the heartlanders, makes their living within the country. Their orientation and interests are local rather than international. Their skills are not marketable beyond Singapore. They speak Singlish. They include taxi-drivers, stallholders, provision shop owners, production workers and contractors. Phua Chu Kang is a typical heartlander. Another one is Tan Ah Teck. If they emigrate to America, they will probably settle in a Chinatown, open a Chinese restaurant and call it an "eating house".

Both heartlanders and cosmopolitans are important to Singapore's well-being. Heartlanders play a major role in maintaining our core values and our social stability. They are the core of our society. Without them, there will be no safe and stable Singapore, no Singapore system, no Singapore brand name. Cosmopolitans, on the other hand, are indispensable in generating wealth for Singapore. They extend our economic reach. The world is their market. Without them, Singapore cannot run as an efficient, high performance society.

The challenge for us is to get the heartlanders to understand what the cosmopolitans contribute to Singapore's and their own well-being, and to get the cosmopolitans to feel an obligation and sense of duty to the heartlanders. If cosmopolitans and heartlanders cease to identify with each other, our society will fall apart.³⁷⁷

Heartlanders and cosmopolitans experience the civil religion in quite different ways.

Heartlanders feel especially the pressure to conform in all facets of day-to-day life in order to maintain their social standing and livelihood. This conformity logically includes their attitudes about the importance and relevance of religious belief. According to Goh they maintain the core

³⁷⁷ Goh Chok Tong, "First World Economy, World Class Home", National Day Rally Speech 1999, speech given 22 August 1999, National Archives of Singapore, <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/public/> (accessed December 4, 2012).

values and identity of Singapore and promote social stability. Thus they feel the pressure of civil religion most directly. They also have fewer places to flee if seeking shelter from it.³⁷⁸ The discussion of the effects of civil religion in Singapore should not be dismissed by adopting a cosmopolitan perspective.

As the separate racial-religious communities in Singapore recede in importance and a national identity grows, especially among heartlanders, the civil religion grows in centrality and importance. During the colonial period the cultural and legal aspects of the ethnic communities were largely kept separate. These communities were independent and merely co-occupants of the island, pursuing their own ends.³⁷⁹ Some might even say that most colonial residents of Singapore lived as “foreigners”, expatriates in a manner of speaking, for even the English common law treated them with this understanding, in the words of the esteemed Singaporean justice Benson Maxwell.³⁸⁰ This situation continued, for the most part, until the close of World War II, when a transition from British to local government began. From 1965 to the present, “nation-building” has continued apace with many and various initiatives and campaigns undertaken by the government to increase social cohesion. Efforts were made to house different ethnic communities in mixed neighborhoods. New educational policies, which supported the speaking of each of the four “mother tongues,” Malay, Tamil, Mandarin, and English, had the

³⁷⁸ Berger, *To Empower People*, 164. Here Berger and Neuhaus make the observation that in America upper-income people “always have ways to resist the encroachment of megastructures” of the modern welfare state. This is analogous to escape from civil religion in many respects.

³⁷⁹ Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 133. Here Lee Kuan Yew recounts, “Remember, when we started, we were not even one society, never mind a nation. We were several different separate societies brought together under the British, an accident of history. Our loyalties and roots were in different parts of China, India and the Malay archipelago.”

³⁸⁰ In chapter three Chief Justice Benson Maxwell was quoted as saying in 1869, the bulk of the population, comprised of Chinese, Indian, and Malay ethnic backgrounds, are in fact living as “foreigners” in Singapore and may be regarded as “persons having foreign domicils (*sic*) and governed for many purposes by this law (that is, ‘native’ laws and usages), and as if they were residing among us temporarily.”

side effect of establishing English as the shared common language.³⁸¹ A sense of a national narrative that detailed Singaporean life from colonial times through independence until today gained greater traction. During this period civil religion was growing in the Republic of Singapore. But what kind of civil religion is it?

From the beginning the political leadership in Singapore has encouraged a civil religion that dominates public life and thought even though the government is decidedly secular. The cohesion required in thought and action comes from the need for the nation to survive as a relatively small player on the world stage. This civil religion has grown up around three different poles. The first and most dominant of these is the pragmatic utilitarianism that is characteristic of the ruling party in general and the first prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, in particular. The reason for the *dominance* of pragmatic utilitarianism is directly related to the “reach” the state exerts in Singaporean society. As detailed in chapters three and four, as well as in the work of Ronald Ch’ng and K. P. Tan among others, the style of government practiced in Singapore results in a long arm for the state that reaches into many areas of life. One educator, Charlene Tan, puts it this way: “no sector of social life” is so private that it cannot be harnessed to serve government goals.³⁸² It is simply a fact that ultimately most government goals serve economic ends. Thus a kind of materialist survivalism is foremost in the national narrative and politics. This aspect of civil religion runs consistently throughout, from the 1966 National Day speech where Lee Kuan Yew uses the metaphor of “eternal salvation” for economic prosperity

³⁸¹ Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First*, 145–56. This chapter, “Many Tongues, One Language,” describes the rather complex and intricate politics of language in the early days of the republic and how English became the “working language.”

³⁸² Charlene Tan, “Creating ‘Good Citizens’ and Maintaining Religious Harmony in Singapore,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 30 (March 2008): 135, quoting Chua Beng Huat, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* (London: Routledge, 1995), 68.

and political stability to the assessment in 2000 that Singapore had “arrived” because it had moved from third world to first. Another aspect of this pragmatic utilitarianism entails government policies that attempt to maintain a strict division between religion and politics. Moreover, in public life religious talk may be ruled out of bounds at the discretion of the state, preemptively. This is justified due to the sensitive mixture of race and religion on the island. The volatility of race and religion has been compounded by worldwide fundamentalist movements in Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity.

In this situation harmony is understood to be primarily the political stability that allows economic progress. Self-cultivation is understood as conforming one’s life to the needs of the society and state. This seems exactly the kind of politicization of Confucian values that some have warned against. A concept as variegated as “good citizenship” is reduced to the principle of *harmony*, a harmony characterized by collectivism and the following of a strong interventionist government.³⁸³ At the same time Christian values³⁸⁴ embodied in the civil law are increasingly coming under pressure. This is not so much an outright attack as the result of the kind of utilitarianism ascendant in Singapore. This philosophical outlook moves law and society toward positivist assumptions that discount religious reason in public discussion.³⁸⁵ Thus all religion comes under pressure as it is managed in an arrangement not unlike colonial days, except that now the overarching framework is the economic rationalization of pragmatic utilitarianism.

³⁸³ Tan, “Creating ‘Good Citizens,’” 139.

³⁸⁴ It is not the purpose of this dissertation to debate whether some values are accessible to all people by nature and natural law. This is the traditional Lutheran understanding. The term “Christian values” is not used here to maintain that such values are, in the main, inaccessible to adherents of other faiths. It merely indicates that some values in Singapore were particularly reinforced through English law in the Christian tradition as has been argued above.

³⁸⁵ Tan, “Creating ‘Good Citizens,’” 135. Tan observes that in this situation “religious values are seen mainly as of instrumental worth to promote national unity and maintain national identity.”

Some aspects of civil religion in Singapore bear a strong resemblance to secularism as it sometimes appears in the west in terms of utility and pragmatism, but in Singapore civil religion comes up against a different balance between individual and group duties and responsibilities—the so-called Asian values.³⁸⁶ For purposes of review, these codified values in Singapore are:

1. Nation before community and society above self
2. Family as the basic unit of society
3. Community support and respect for the individual
4. Consensus not conflict
5. Racial and religious harmony

In this Asian-style single-party-democracy harmony is favored over a search for truth, because in this multicultural, multireligious setting no single truth, at least religious truth, can be asserted. This leads logically to a secularized public truth, or public reason. This truth in practice still has its basis in some assumptions or values. In Singapore some of these assumptions are a mix of Christian belief and legal tradition. Other truths derive from faith in tenets of pragmatic utilitarianism such as the primacy of material ends, the bell curve hypothesis and emphasis on genetic predisposition as being determinative for level of achievement. Lee Kuan Yew approaches utilitarianism from the basic question of why some succeed and others not so much. Why are some hardworking and others laid-back and unambitious? Since Lee believes some factors are genetic, in his mind part of the job of good governance is to critique cultural practices that from a scientific or genetic standpoint weaken a society.³⁸⁷ The final values in the secular

³⁸⁶ Tan, “Creating ‘Good Citizens,’” 135. Tan construes these values largely as an instrumental and pragmatic form of social control wielded by the state for economic purposes where the religions are sequestered from the public sphere.

³⁸⁷ Han, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 169. Here Lee Kuan Yew is cited with respect to genetics, “breeding”, intelligence, and achievement, “Now, we are into a stage of dysgenics—not eugenics—where the smarter you are, the more successful you are, the more you calculate. And you say, look, yes, for the good of society, I should have five children, but what’s the benefit to me? And the wife says, What? Five Children? We can’t go on holidays. So one is enough, or at the most two. The people at the lower end—in our three-room flats, two-rooms—some of them have 10, 12 to 14 children. So what happens? There will be less bright people to support more dumb people in the next

truth of Singapore come from Confucian understandings about harmony, self-cultivation and social structure that have been to a certain degree politicized. The *Junzi* have not been able to avoid this politicization of Confucian values in the modern pluralist world of capitalism, free trade, and globalization. Cultural and religious reason, aside from practical social action, are both kept out of public discussion as much as possible. In this political situation the distinction between public and private spheres is maintained so strictly that religious views and institutions are “perceived as having no legitimate role in political debate and activity.”³⁸⁸ Thus, government forays into the private sphere are widely tolerated, but religious forays into the public sphere are not. The challenge in Singapore consists in keeping Singaporean civil religion out of the hearts of believers, keeping it separate from Christian notions of righteousness. The pervasive nature of one-party rule in Singapore, with its overt control of public religious discussion, makes public proclamation of the Christian narrative critical for the society at large.

While this Singaporean form of civil religion is unique and particular to a small island, the challenge of civil religion is not. The challenges of civil religion come especially with modern pluralist societies where competing cultural traditions put forward various beliefs and practices. Ironically, the problem is made worse where leaders of society bracket ultimate claims made by religious groups as out of bounds. In this situation religious discourse is discouraged in the public sphere. This is the kind of environment where positivist notions of right and law tend to prevail exclusively. In these situations Werner Elert has observed shortly after the world wars in Europe, in his work concerning Christian ethics, that,

generation. That’s a problem. And we are unable to take firmer measures because the prevailing sentiment is against it. But these are the realities.”

³⁸⁸ Tan, “Creating ‘Good Citizens’”, 135.

strong, weak, beautiful, homely, valuable, or useless—these [are] all categories under which modern man attempts to comprehend the meaning of human life. In this great variety only one concept is missing: the alternatives of good and evil. These modern evaluations are exclusively drawn from biological, economic, or aesthetic premises but not from ethical considerations. Professional philosophers have no more been able to stem this process than theologians, but it has become clear that philosophical ethics can only be cultivated where the church has prepared the soil. The categories of good and evil presuppose a sense of obligation which is meaningful only in relation to a God who cannot be impressed by beauty or economic laws or mechanical necessity or claims of racial superiority.³⁸⁹

In a religiously plural situation one might expand Elert's thought to: philosophical ethics can only be cultivated where *the religions have prepared the soil*. From a Christian perspective part of this preparation is for the church to recognize the forces of civil religion, to name them for its members and for the members of society at large, and then to bear witness to a very different vision of human life. In Singapore certain categories for evaluating life have come to the fore as a result of civil religion: harmonious, discordant, cultivated, nonconformist, prosperous, drain on society, top of the bell curve, on the tails. These categories reflect ways to evaluate Singaporean life and Singaporean civil righteousness as defined by civil religion. The church has a responsibility to distinguish this kind of righteousness from the passive righteousness of faith.

Public Theology as a Response to Civil Religion

Within Lutheranism it has been suggested by Robert Benne that any religious tradition maintains a "practical engagement with its public environment" that "entails both knowledge and action."³⁹⁰ In the case of the engagement around knowledge it may be said that both outward and inward movements take place. In the former there is an *interpretation* of the environment in a

³⁸⁹ Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos* trans. Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 9.

³⁹⁰ Robert Benne, "The Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-first Century," (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 7–9.

prophetic sense. The intellectual tradition considers and pronounces a prophetic word concerning the *historical situation* to the world. This word logically includes persuasion and apology. It is an attempt to convince the world of the validity of the tradition's vision for how things are rightly understood, especially concerning the spheres of public life. Additionally, the intellectual tradition attempts to interpret the world to its own members. According to Benne, a good example of how both the outward and inward motions are combined may be found in statements of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod concerning theological matters that could have a bearing on civil life by its Committee on Theology and Church Relations. This committee interprets biblical boundaries and doctrines on issues of contemporary life such as sexual ethics, euthanasia, or scientific research. In these statements the church articulates a picture of human life as best it understands it, together with biblically informed arguments concerning practical everyday living. These statements have a thrust toward public witness and apology concerning the proper attitudes and actions of civil life; they also have a thrust toward internal reflection within the church where tensions or ambiguities of church teaching are delineated. The statements may even, in rarer situations, call the church to overturn some particular aspect of its teaching as when the Copernican system replaced the Ptolemaic system in conceiving of the heavens. Just as a religious tradition engages in practical *reflection* concerning the society around it, so too, it engages in practical *interaction* with that society. The church as an institution and as a collection of individual agents acts upon the civil world. Thus, Christian churches support orphanages and food shelters because the Bible teaches them to do so. So too, church members design new low cost water pumps to address African potable water demands or engage in arguments to overturn unjust laws because they are convinced that God desires them to serve their neighbor in daily work.

Both the *intellectual reflection* and the *everyday interaction* are termed by Robert Benne to be “public theology” because they are a practical consequence of a religious tradition on public life. In his treatment of American public theology Benne notes that there are “powerful currents driven by both intentional and unintentional forces to move religious notions and spokes-persons to the margins of public discourse.”³⁹¹ He is not speaking of Asian or authoritarian regimes but more particularly of American and Western thinkers, most noticeably those affected by the rationality of the Enlightenment. If public theology purports to bring a word from the church into the public square, it seems logical that this word should address the thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs of civil religion. Thus this dissertation is an attempt at public theology in a Singaporean cultural context. Of course, it is of the “intellectual reflection” variety, though hopefully it will spark pastors and Christians in Singapore to take practical steps of everyday interaction.

Within the Lutheran theological tradition the historic confessions found in the *Book of Concord* constitute well accepted documents of public testimony.³⁹² Robert Kolb characterizes the nature of these exhibits of public testimony as *evangelical*, “for they were committed to proclaim Christ’s name to peoples far and wide,” “*ecumenical*, for ... [they] represented the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church,” and “*eschatological*, for ... [they] were acutely aware that on judgment day they would stand before the throne of the God whom they were confessing.”³⁹³ Confession, in the sense of these historic statements of Lutheran faith, involves both the *intellectual reflection* and the *everyday interaction* alluded to above. It involves

³⁹¹ Benne, *Paradoxical Vision*, 11.

³⁹² Kolb, Robert and Timothy J. Wengert, ed. *The Book of Concord* trans. Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

³⁹³ Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church 1530–1580* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1991), 10.

intellectual reflection because the confessional documents are a summary and exploration of biblical teaching on the primary questions of faith such as the nature of God, the consequences of Adam's sin, the nature of the Son of God, how man may be put into a right relationship with God, what purpose the church serves in this present life, what stance Christians should take toward the state, how we are to properly understand good works done by Christians, and so on.³⁹⁴ In a macroscopic sense these confessions have the purpose of ensuring that within the church and among Christians "the light of [Almighty God's] ... holy gospel and his Word that alone grants salvation [shall] ... appear and shine forth purely, unalloyed, and unadulterated."³⁹⁵

Confession also involves everyday interaction because it was and is done publicly. *The* historic confession of Lutheranism, the Augsburg Confession, was first made by the princes and theologians of the German nation before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1530. Later, a collection of writings known as the *Book of Concord* came to be the legal documents that defined what it meant to be Lutheran within central Europe. Although the confessions do not necessarily serve as legal documents in democratic, pluralistic political entities, they still define in a material sense what it means to be a Lutheran Christian.³⁹⁶ Today pastors and teachers in the Lutheran church confess their faith by subscribing to the documents collected in the *Book of Concord*.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ *Book of Concord*, 37–59. The first twenty-one articles of the Augsburg Confession present what Melancthon termed the *articuli fidei praecipui* in Latin or the *Artikel des Glaubens und der Lehre* in German.

³⁹⁵ *Book of Concord*, 5.

³⁹⁶ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1995), 14–15. Arand's study explores both the historical and normative aspects of the *Book of Concord*, especially as it was received into American culture. He argues for a hermeneutical approach that balances these two aspects.

³⁹⁷ F. Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1965), 7–8. Bente includes a discussion of the manner of subscription to the symbols of the Lutheran Church. He argues that in keeping with the original subscriptions made by princes, pastors and theologians of the sixteenth century, pastors today subscribe to the confessions *not insofar or to whatever extent* they reflect God's Word *but because* they are derived from and truly summarize God's Word. These two positions with regard to subscription are termed *quatenus* and *quia* in Latin, respectively.

The documents serve as a public testimony to the teaching of the church and serve as a secondary rule by which the primary rule of faith, Scripture itself, is read and interpreted. “They are not judges as is the Holy Scripture, but they are only witnesses and explanations of the faith, which show how Holy Scripture has at various times been understood and interpreted in the church of God.”³⁹⁸ These confessional documents include the three ancient Ecumenical Creeds; the Augsburg Confession (1530), the Apology to the Augsburg Confession (1531), and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (1537), authored by Philip Melanchthon; the Smalcald Articles (1537), the Small Catechism (1529), and the Large Catechism (1529), authored by Martin Luther; and the Formula of Concord (1577), authored by several Lutheran theologians.

The strategy for this section, in keeping with a faithful Lutheran confessional stance, will be to use the Holy Scripture and the Lutheran confessional documents, augmented by some of Luther’s writings, as sources of theological reflection (and norms for gospel proclamation) to be applied to the historical situation in Singapore with regard to civil religion. Since the confessional documents define, in a real and fairly comprehensive sense, a Lutheran perspective and framework, they are useful for any public theology. Also, they directly address the nature of Christian life and faith that is lived out in the world. Civil society was moving toward social circumstances where more than a single faith was tolerated. Lutheran theologians were attempting to create a space for Lutheranism within a society where Roman Catholicism was the civil religion. Thus, they are helpful in speaking to Christian concerns about maintaining a safe space for Christian reflection and practice within any competing civil religion. As with the

³⁹⁸ FC EP Epitome 7; *Book of Concord*, 487.

confessional documents themselves, the goal will be to preserve and present the true gospel, which offers to all people the forgiveness of sins, as a free gift. Some Lutheran theology attempts a reflection on public theology with the aim of guiding the church's relationship with the state.³⁹⁹ This dissertation attempts a reflection on public theology with the aim of guiding the church's word to the individual, particularly the individual within the church. So, in a sense, the dissertation hopes to inform the "viva vox" or the "living word" spoken by the church.⁴⁰⁰ Of necessity, this considers the interaction of the state and the individual, who is a part of the church. The emphasis, though, is not on how the church and state interact but on how their current configuration in Singapore may be understood, assessed, and critically engaged by individual Christian believers. The framework adopted for this reflection is in keeping with the Lutheran Confessional documents as found in the *Book of Concord*. The method will be to start from the anthropological point of human existence as created by God, moving outward to the context of life in community.

Framing Righteousness

Up to this point the dissertation has made use of terms and concepts drawn more from sociology, the sociology of religion, and politics than from Lutheran theological reflection. The purpose for this was to gain a wider understanding of culture in Singapore with the aim of fleshing out the concepts of civil religion, civil law, and civil righteousness using references from within Singaporean culture. Discussions have been engaged only incidentally around Christian theology and Lutheran approaches. Admittedly, some Judeo-Christian notions were

³⁹⁹ Haemig, "The Confessional Basis of Lutheran Thinking on Church State Issues," 3.

⁴⁰⁰ Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law* trans. Ross MacKenzie (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1961), 161.

engaged around English common law, but more from the consideration of how these notions influenced civil law. It must be emphasized that the connections and relationships between the terms civil religion, civil law, and civil righteousness have been taken from sociology, politics, and law apart from Scripture or Lutheran theology. Because they have been used in a certain sense, as defined in chapter two, these terms will be used more sparingly in the theological discussion that follows. Instead the terms Christian religion, natural and divine law, and secular and divine righteousness will be used. This is because a different framework, which distinguishes true religion, divine law, and divine righteousness from other forms of religion, law and righteousness, is being invoked with the help of scriptural teaching. As will become clear, this theological framework has several important distinctions from the civil framework used above.

Timothy Wengert comments that “as early as 1522, Melanchthon’s thought was dominated by a distinction between two spheres of human existence: activity in this world and encounter with God in matters of salvation.”⁴⁰¹ Wengert argues that this distinction is critical for understanding the theological difference between Erasmus of Rotterdam and Melanchthon, especially as concerns the freedom of the will and the nature of Christian righteousness. Put differently, this distinction illustrates the divergence between one stream of Renaissance humanism and Lutheran Reformation theology as regards the capabilities and the standing of man before God. For that matter, this distinction illustrates the divergence between many man-

⁴⁰¹ Timothy J. Wengert, *Human Freedom, Christian Righteousness: Philip Melanchthon’s Exegetical Dispute with Erasmus of Rotterdam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 110. It has been noted three theological distinctions are related to these spheres, namely law and gospel, the two realms, and the two kinds of righteousness. Strictly speaking these distinctions are independent of each other and different in character. Law and gospel involve how God speaks two different words to fallen humankind. The two realms describe how God rules in the heart by faith and over the world by power. The two kinds of righteousness delineate the active righteousness of works from the passive righteousness of faith.

centered conceptual frameworks, including Singaporean civil religion, and scriptural theology. When describing these two spheres of human existence, one could begin with any of the three distinctions that Wengert alludes to—the two governments or the two kinds of righteousness or law and gospel—and develop a comprehensive framework that included the other distinctions. If one were primarily interested with questions of church and state, it would be logical to begin with the two governments.⁴⁰² If one were primarily interested with questions of interpreting—or being interpreted by—the Word of God⁴⁰³, it would be logical to begin with the distinction of law and gospel.⁴⁰⁴ Another way, which reserves room to speak positively about creation as well as God’s intentions and directions for human living, is to begin with the two kinds of righteousness.⁴⁰⁵ This way begins by distinguishing righteousness before man from righteousness before God. Because it begins by distinguishing the nature of being “good” within Singaporean society, i.e. civil righteousness, from our right relation with God, i.e. divine righteousness, this last way is attractive for the task at hand.

Although it is not part of the confessional literature, Martin Luther’s introduction to his 1535 Galatians commentary offers an excellent entry point for thinking about righteousness. This commentary reflects Luther’s mature theological position, being written well after his

⁴⁰² Haemig, “The Confessional Basis of Lutheran Thinking on Church-State Issues,” 3.

⁴⁰³ Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 71–72.

⁴⁰⁴ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel: 39 Evening Lectures*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1929), 6–20. This section contains Walther’s discussion of the first thesis that “the doctrinal contents of the entire Holy Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testament, are made up of two doctrines differing fundamentally from each other, viz., the Law and the Gospel.”

⁴⁰⁵ Charles P. Arand, “Two Kinds of Righteousness as a Framework for Law and Gospel in the Apology,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 15 (2001), 417–18. Arand comments that if a law and gospel distinction is used exclusively for the gospel, “then whatever does not fit under the category of gospel is regarded as part of the law. Even the doctrine of creation becomes law for no other reason than it is not gospel. This does not allow the theological space needed to speak positively about the Christian life within a world where the Judeo-Christian ethic—that could once be taken

Reformation insight, some initial reflection on political authority, and his well-considered catechetical works.⁴⁰⁶ The Galatians Commentary is also explicitly endorsed for its teaching on righteousness and justification in the confessional writings.⁴⁰⁷ Pointedly, Luther states in its opening pages,

For righteousness is of many kinds. There is a political righteousness, which the emperor, the princes of the world, philosophers, and lawyers consider. There is also a ceremonial righteousness, which human traditions teach, as, for example, the traditions of the pope and other traditions. Parents and teachers may teach this righteousness without danger, because they do not attribute to it any power to make satisfaction for sin, to placate God, and to earn grace; but they teach that these ceremonies are necessary only for moral discipline and for certain observances. There is, in addition to these, yet another righteousness, the righteousness of the Law or of the Decalog, which Moses teaches. We, too, teach this, but after the doctrine of faith.⁴⁰⁸

Righteousness is of many kinds according to Luther. In other words, there is a web of many different types of relations within which we live. Any of these relationships entails certain proper behavior, and so there are diverse forms of righteousness. Luther singles out political, ceremonial and moral righteousness in this passage. He defines political righteousness in terms of the medieval social world of kings, princes, magistrates, and jurists; in this unified *populus christianus* it is they who keep and order community and national life. He goes on to mention ceremonial righteousness, which is interwoven with the “traditions of men.” This form of righteousness should be taught in such a way that it is not thought to “satisfy for sin” or “please God” or “deserve grace.” In other words righteousness of this type is by human arrangement; it

for granted—is crumbling.”

⁴⁰⁶ The reformation insight is dated to either 1514/15 or 1518; see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* trans. and ed. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 85–95. Luther wrote *On Temporal Authority* (WA 11:245–80; LW 45: 75–129) in 1523 and *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved* (WA 19:623–62; LW 46:87–137) in 1526. His catechisms were completed in 1529.

⁴⁰⁷ FC SD III 67; *Book of Concord*, 573.

is subject to changing circumstances. It, like political righteousness, is a product of human reasoning and thinking about how the world and society might best function. Luther links the laws of kings and rulers with political righteousness, the traditions of the pope with ceremonial righteousness, and the commandments of God with the righteousness of the moral law. In this passage Luther treats three types of righteousness. He is concerned with distinguishing all three from the righteousness of faith, which he later equates with Christian or divine righteousness. It would be consistent with this line of thought to say, however, that there are *many*, not just three, kinds of righteousness in human life. One could speak of righteousness with regard to any human relationship. So for instance, if an individual joins a scholarly society for the study and promotion of religion, by acquiring the requisite education, by paying the membership dues, by participating in the meetings, and by adhering to the professional guidelines one maintains a certain kind of righteousness. One is justified to be a member of the society. Luther's purpose in this discourse is to establish that righteousness in the horizontal dimension of life is primarily a righteousness of works.

Luther's categorization of righteousness *does not* follow from the functional description of the three *usus legis*, which is traditionally taught among Lutherans. There it is taught that *the moral law*, the unchangeable will of God, is used in three different ways. First, it is used "to maintain external discipline and respectability against dissolute, disobedient people,"⁴⁰⁹ the so-called political use of the law as a curb.⁴¹⁰ Second, it is used "to bring ... [disobedient] people to

⁴⁰⁸ LW 26: 4.

⁴⁰⁹ FC SD VI 1; *Book of Concord*, 587.

⁴¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1986), 94.

a recognition of their sins,⁴¹¹ the so-called theological use of the law as a mirror.⁴¹² And third, it is used “to teach ... [those who have been born anew through God’s Spirit] ... according to ... [God’s] written law and Word, which is a certain rule and principle for directing the godly life,”⁴¹³ the so-called didactic use of the law as a rule of life.⁴¹⁴ In this passage from the Galatians commentary, on the other hand, Luther is speaking about different *types of law* which include political law, ceremonial law, and the moral law. Actually, Luther is speaking of *the righteousness* that attends keeping these different types of law, custom, and tradition.

Not all law, custom and tradition reflect the divine will. For instance, political ordinances regulate community life but not all reflect directly the moral law. The side of the road on which we drive is not engraved in stone but the result of a human decision. The requirement to wear a motorcycle helmet when cruising on a Sunday afternoon reflects human wisdom about the cost to the community if the motorcyclist is injured in an accident. Prohibitions on littering reflect a community’s desire to appear neat and clean as well as concern about public health issues associated with refuse piling up on the streets. In a similar way ceremonial customs widely accepted in a culture reflect human decisions. Some may think it respectful to lay flowers on the grave of a beloved relative. Others may consider burning an incense stick, similarly respectful. Whereas in one culture wearing white clothes to a funeral may be widely accepted, in another it may be taken as an affront. Keeping righteous within *all* these different types of law, tradition,

⁴¹¹ FC SD VI 1; *Book of Concord*, 587.

⁴¹² Luther, *Small Catechism with Explanation*, 95.

⁴¹³ FC SD VI 1; *Book of Concord*, 587.

⁴¹⁴ Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, rev. 3rd ed., trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (1899; repr., Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 516. Originally translated into English in 1875, here Schmid is quoting from David Hollaz’s work *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (1707). Hollaz includes a fourth use of the law, the pedagogic use that “consists in indirectly compelling the sinner to go to Christ” as is stated in Gal. 3:24.

and custom (within these various jurisdictions) is, however, based on human works. Our righteousness depends on what we do. If we park in a handicapped spot but are not handicapped, we pay a fine. If we steal from our employer, we are subject to pay restitution and serve jail time. If we fail to show proper respect to our teacher, there may be a consequence in the classroom. Our righteousness before others in the horizontal realm is not a direct result of what we believe but of our actions.

A more common way of speaking of the different kinds of righteousness, especially in the Lutheran confessional literature, is to speak not of *many* but of *two* types. There is righteousness before man (*coram hominibus*) in the horizontal dimension of life as well as righteousness before God (*coram Deo*) in the vertical dimension. The term civil righteousness, *iustitia civilis*, in the confessions designates in general terms all types of horizontal righteousness that correspond to external obedience to laws, traditions, and custom. The term spiritual righteousness, *iustitia spiritualis*, on the other hand, designates vertical righteousness before our Creator. Fagerberg comments that these two kinds of righteousness are the human response to the way that God works by his two kinds of words, the Law and the Gospel.⁴¹⁵ The gospel establishes a passive righteousness before God as a gift and it also motivates, due to gratitude, an active righteousness or obedience to the law. On the other hand, God's law, or divine law, calls all people to repentance as the first step toward receiving the gift of passive righteousness. Divine law prescribes our thoughts, words, and deeds in relationship to both God and his creatures, in both the horizontal and vertical realms of life. The confessions presuppose that all people have access

⁴¹⁵ Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, 102–11. Fagerberg, 102, states, “There are two kinds of righteousness, the civil, *iustitia civilis*, and the spiritual, *iustitia spiritualis*, which correspond to the distinction between Law and Gospel (Promise) ... If Law and Gospel are the forms through which God works among men, righteousness, *iustitia*, is an expression of man's reaction to this divine activity.”

to natural law, which reflects in a meaningful way divine law. Through the use of reason people have the ability to judge, choose, and carry out actions consonant with natural law. In this sense, people can follow the external commands of the second table of the Decalog, even without the Scripture. Civil righteousness in the confessions corresponds to the limited and qualified ability to act, despite the weakness of the flesh, the wiles of the world, and temptations of Satan, in accord with the light of reason and natural law. Thus the natural law elicits the response of good works that in a qualified way serve our fellow creatures. A key shortcoming of civil righteousness is that the natural person believes that God is pleased, is even satisfied fully with us, when we maintain it according to the best of our ability. Unenlightened by the Scripture and the gospel, unregenerate through the work of the Holy Spirit, we believe that a righteousness of natural works is good enough for God, ignoring the demands of perfect fear, love, and trust that are reflected in the first table of the Decalog.

Spiritual righteousness, on the other hand, can only be established from without by the gospel of Christ. The gospel is a mystery hidden from natural people. It cannot be grasped through consideration of human nature or the natural world. It is only the gospel Word that elicits proper fear, love, and trust in God. The Spirit convinces us that we are in desperate need of a savior and that in Christ God has provided one.⁴¹⁶ In the gospel God reveals that He wants to establish righteousness before Him in a way hidden from human reason. He wants to reserve *for Himself* all glory and honor and freely give this righteousness secured through the work of His Son to all who listen. God does not want a relationship of reciprocity where we perform a good work and then He rewards it. Instead paradoxically He wants to create righteousness and a new

⁴¹⁶ FC SD II 54.

creature from nothing.⁴¹⁷ There is no requirement that those who listen must prepare themselves. They need not be in a balanced and harmonious inner emotional state. Sincerity is not a prerequisite, nor is a track record that demonstrates hard work and achievement. This righteousness is prepared for people who acknowledge they do not deserve it. Spiritual righteousness descends from heaven and finds its place on earth, just as the Son took on human flesh and lived among unbelieving people. Moreover, the passive righteousness of faith connects all Christians to the body of Christ, the church. Thus a vertical word of acceptance and justification before God brings about a horizontal reality between all believers in Christ.⁴¹⁸ This horizontal connection between believers calls for certain Spirit motivated activities in Christ involving the open and unfettered preaching and teaching of Christ within and without the church so that all believers might attain to the fullness of Christ.⁴¹⁹ Lives that were once centered on the flesh and the world have been remade and recast around the entire Christian family. Within this new social structure, where all believers experience the acceptance and love of their Creator, the people of God are energized and equipped to live holy lives. Thus the word of spiritual righteousness calls out the active righteousness of works in relation to the church and the world.

Because we have reserved the term civil righteousness for the framework created by civil religion and civil law within a sociological-political framework, we will use the term “secular righteousness” to designate horizontal righteousness within our theological framework. Thus, the various forms of human behavior in the horizontal realm, including external obedience to the

⁴¹⁷ Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 123.

⁴¹⁸ Kolb, *The Christian Faith*, 258.

⁴¹⁹ Eph. 4:13.

second table of the commandments, constitute secular righteousness. Secular righteousness is works righteousness in the most general sense. God created man as his beloved creature and assigned to him certain earthly tasks and activities.⁴²⁰ God called upon Adam to work and care for the garden He had created.⁴²¹ He still calls on each person to work and care for the creation and for those who inhabit it. Man was given dominion over creation as the one creature made in the image of God. Thus works righteousness is in this general sense prelapsarian, a part of what God pronounced as “very good.” Admittedly, prelapsarian righteousness included not just works righteousness but the gifts of “knowledge of God, fear of God, and confidence in God.”⁴²² Thus the prelapsarian or original righteousness included both secular and spiritual righteousness. In the 16th-century confessional literature, focused as it was on the dispute with Rome, works righteousness takes on a decidedly negative connotation because it is associated with “an erroneous estimate of man’s ability as well as the depth of original sin.”⁴²³ Some theologians erred in that they believed man could, with the help of God’s grace, keep the moral law and thus merit further grace and eternal life from God as their just due.⁴²⁴ Other theologians erred in that they believed ceremonies and works, which were not commanded by God, were necessary for righteousness before him.⁴²⁵ Thus in the confessional literature both of these assertions, that man

⁴²⁰ Kolb, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 54. Kolb notes that Luther does distinguish between the works righteousness of a Christian, which “flows from faith,” and the works righteousness of the non-Christian, which may be done from the fear of punishment or promise of reward. Thus, sometimes Luther speaks of three, not two, kinds of righteousness.

⁴²¹ Gen. 2:15.

⁴²² AP II 15–18; *Book of Concord*, 114.

⁴²³ Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, 106.

⁴²⁴ Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 233–34. Ozment helpfully outlines late Scholastic and Ockhamist positions including that of Gabriel Biel.

⁴²⁵ AP VII 34; *Book of Concord*, 180.

could keep the law as God intends and merit the *favor Dei* and that human customs and traditions were additional works necessary for good standing before him, are consistently challenged.

Our discussion of righteousness, like the confessional documents, attempts to hew out a balanced treatment of secular righteousness or the righteousness of works. We desire to acknowledge that it reflects human reason *and* God's will about how to live together in particular historical circumstances—and this is good. Secular righteousness thus “mediates” the moral law into these circumstances.⁴²⁶ At the same time, the righteousness of works or secular righteousness has certain limits placed on it in terms of scope, purpose, and conscience. The scope of secular righteousness is temporal and earthly. Works only justify us before our fellow humans. The purpose of these works is to benefit our neighbor in the fullest sense and to facilitate family, economic, community and national life. Our conscience is involved in judging which works are best done given the competing demands from neighbors, our talents and abilities, and the positions which we hold within our particular context of life. Our will is thus intimately involved in choosing what we actually do on a day-to-day basis given our talents and unique callings, subject in an ultimate sense to the will of our Creator.⁴²⁷ Secular righteousness can justify us before our neighbor in the horizontal realm when we keep laws, customs, and traditions well enough to satisfy our friends, colleagues, and community members. Yet we must always admit

⁴²⁶ Kolb, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, 28.

⁴²⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* trans. and ed. E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 143. In keeping with the distinction between the two kinds of righteousness, Luther maintains that strictly speaking “*free choice is allowed to man only with respect to what is beneath him and not what is above him*. That is to say, a man should know that with regard to his faculties and possessions he has the right to use, to do, or to leave undone, according to his own free choice, though even this is controlled by the free choice of God alone, who acts in whatever way he pleases. On the other hand, in relation to God or in matters pertaining to salvation or damnation, a man has no free choice, but is a captive, subject and slave either of the will of God or the will of Satan” (emphasis added).

that the perfection the moral law requires in its fullest sense, even in the horizontal realm, as our Lord stated, is possessed by no one—including forgiven Christians.⁴²⁸

In order to preserve the gospel, the central biblical teaching of the justification of the sinner before God by grace through faith in the work of Jesus Christ alone, Lutherans have always endeavored to distinguish secular righteousness from spiritual righteousness. This is to prevent any misplaced trust in works that Christians or non-Christians perform in their day-to-day lives, no matter how praiseworthy these works may be from a human perspective. Spiritual righteousness is an altogether different matter from secular righteousness; it is a righteousness of faith not works. As Luther states in the Galatians commentary

this most excellent righteousness, the righteousness of faith, which God imputes to us through Christ without works, is neither political nor ceremonial nor legal nor work-righteousness but is quite the opposite; it is a merely passive righteousness, while all the others, listed above, are active. For here we work nothing, render nothing to God; we only receive and permit someone else to work in us, namely, God.⁴²⁹

Spiritual righteousness is given purely as a gift to those who do not merit it. The confessions frequently speak of it as the forgiveness of our “sins by sheer grace, without any works, merit, or worthiness of our own.”⁴³⁰ It is a righteousness that is obtained by accepting a promise by faith,⁴³¹ a promise that God makes to us on account of what Christ has already done, once and for all

⁴²⁸ John 8:7; Matt. 7: 3–5. Both Jesus and the apostles interpreted the Decalog in ways that made it clear the requirements of the moral law are beyond the efforts of all people. Jesus’ most comprehensive assessment is found in the Sermon on the Mount. For St. Paul’s view of human capabilities, refer to the first three chapters of his letter to the Romans, especially Rom. 3:9–20. This point is argued concerning Luther’s theology, especially in reference to his *Treatise on Good Works*, by Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 272.

⁴²⁹ LW 26: 4–5.

⁴³⁰ FC EP III 4; *Book of Concord*, 495.

⁴³¹ Gal. 3:6, 18.

time, unconnected and independent of our thoughts and works.⁴³² Just as faith is not the foundation for justification,⁴³³ so too, secular righteousness is not the foundation for spiritual righteousness. Instead, spiritual righteousness hinges on God's pronouncement that we are righteous before him on account of Christ, not due to an inner transformation on our part or due to anything we have done.⁴³⁴ Justified before God, as his beloved children we are at peace and may relax in his presence.⁴³⁵ Whereas all types of secular righteousness depend on works and thus are active, spiritual righteousness depends only on the promise and pronouncement of God and so is passive. The only way to receive spiritual righteousness is by faith in Jesus Christ.⁴³⁶ To believe in Jesus or on his name or in what He has done for us is to have faith. In many places Jesus makes this clear.⁴³⁷

Civil righteousness, as defined for this dissertation as flowing from civil religion, is thus analogous to secular righteousness in Lutheran theological reflection. Singaporean civil righteousness, though, differs from the positive account of secular righteousness given above in several important aspects. First, in concept and in practice Singaporean civil righteousness is not aligned or understood to be in relation to any sort of spiritual righteousness in public debate. The

⁴³² Eph. 2:8–10.

⁴³³ AP IV 71–72; *Book of Concord*, 132.

⁴³⁴ AP IV 252; *Book of Concord*, 159.

⁴³⁵ Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1993), 169–70.

⁴³⁶ AP IV 84–85; *Book of Concord*, 134–35.

⁴³⁷ See, for instance, John 3:16; 17:20; 21:29–31. In the words of the explanation to the second article of the Creed as found in Luther's Small Catechism, "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true." All these things Jesus did for us aside from our own sinful attitude and condition, and before we existed.

scope of religion is limited to “educational, social and charitable work” that builds the material solidarity and strength of society.⁴³⁸ In other words, the narrative of Singaporean civil religion leaves little room for an alien, passive righteousness that is purely dependent on a gracious, loving, transcendent God from whom, through whom, and to whom all things receive their ultimate significance.⁴³⁹ Two poles in the civil religion of Singapore, pragmatic utilitarianism and a politicized Confucianism, define the shape of civil righteousness while sequestering God from public consciousness. Thus civil righteousness in Singapore “stands alone” or perhaps “speaks alone” in the public square. The manner in which it speaks tends to marginalize and domesticate religion.

Second, since civil righteousness stands and speaks alone, its scope tends to grow.⁴⁴⁰ As mentioned above, “no sector of social life” is so private that it cannot be harnessed to serve government goals, and as a result civil righteousness takes on an increased importance in daily life. Civil righteousness moves toward ultimate significance in the minds of leaders there. This is in contrast to secular righteousness in Lutheran theology, which is strictly limited to earthly significance *within* an eternal universal framework. So, Christian reflection affirms that natural logic and reason is well suited to debate and decision-making in public, yet this debate and the actions and themes that result are always seen as serving a larger purpose: the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ in all its fullness. Within Christian reflection individual life is not

⁴³⁸ Maintenance of Religious Harmony White Paper, 1.

⁴³⁹ Rom. 11:36.

⁴⁴⁰ Berger, *To Empower People*, 186–7. Berger and Neuhaus discuss two Enlightenment presuppositions which tend to drive religious debate out of public discourse: (1) a conviction that education and modernization make certain the decline of allegiance to institutional religion and (2) an assumption that religion deals purely with the private sphere of life and is therefore irrelevant to public policy.

limited to career, cash, car, club, and condo; national success is not strictly defined by economic prosperity and stability.

Third, Singaporean civil righteousness is distinguished from the secular righteousness of Lutheran reflection in that it serves a different purpose: the state. In Lutheran reflection, there are two independent sources of secular authority in society. First, there is the government, which has been given the sword in order to control evil and bring order to the society. Luther and Melancthon both cite Genesis 9:6 favorably to demonstrate that government is a divine ordinance put in place for the benefit of all.⁴⁴¹ St. Paul's remarks in Romans 13 and Jesus' willingness to "give to Caesar what is Caesar's"⁴⁴² can also be understood from this perspective. We owe obedience and honor to those in authority because legitimate government and law protect all people and allow life to flourish. This way of thinking dominates the logic in article sixteen of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession where it states "legitimate civil ordinances are good creations of God and divine ordinances in which a Christian may safely take part" and "the gospel does not destroy the state or the household but rather approves them, and it orders us to obey them as divine ordinances not only on account of the punishment but also 'because of conscience' [Rom. 13:5]."⁴⁴³ Ultimately the order and peace that government establishes allow the gospel to be preached, establishing a new spiritual reign in those who believe.

⁴⁴¹ Wengert, *Human Freedom, Christian Righteousness*, 117.

⁴⁴² Matt. 22:21.

⁴⁴³ AP XVI 2, 5; *Book of Concord*, 231. Melancthon was arguing against the Roman position, which discounted both state and family authority in order to elevate monasticism and its superior way of life according to the 'evangelical counsels' of the Sermon on the Mount, which were not thought to apply to regular Christians. At the same time he wished to make clear, contrary to the Enthusiasts, that government is a divine ordinance and serves God's purposes and will.

At the same time, Luther located significant authority in the family. Kolb comments that “after identifying the family as the foundational and first order of human life, Luther placed the other orders, especially government and the church, in the service of the family” but with distinct purposes, assignments from God, and a different sphere of authority.⁴⁴⁴ This prioritization of family and the individual’s life within family as above government and the church is especially significant in comparing Singaporean civil righteousness with secular righteousness.⁴⁴⁵ There is a fundamental *direction of service* within secular righteousness; just as the law serves the gospel so too the government and church serve the family. Also the orders of family, church, and nation all serve not just temporal but also spiritual life. In Singaporean civil righteousness, on the other hand, the explicit ordering of the direction of service is “nation before community and society above self” within a temporal horizon. There are qualifications of this direction in the Shared Values: the family is the basic unit of society and there is a respect for the individual. Additionally, there are individual fundamental liberties that are constitutionally guaranteed. As has been noted previously, though, these liberties have been circumscribed in significant ways. The primary argument is that the direction of service in Singaporean civil righteousness is opposite that of secular righteousness within the Lutheran tradition. Thus the tension inherent in both frameworks between these centers of authority, the nation and the family, tends to be resolved differently. To put this matter in a slightly different context, the American military

⁴⁴⁴ Kolb, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 60.

⁴⁴⁵ Compare, Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 126. Bayer schematizes the relation between church, household, and state differently than Kolb and quotes Luther as saying of Gen. 2:16–17 “in his 1535 Genesis lecture: “This is the establishment of the church, before the household and the state existed.” Bayer is emphasizing that God establishes conversation and relation with humans as his first order. Thus, the church as an order in its most general sense receives priority above household and state. Kolb, on the other hand, conceives of worship and divine relation as beginning within the family. He seems to conceive of church in a more institutional sense and therefore it does not take precedence over the household or family. Kolb’s perspective guards against abuses of Luther’s day when priests and nuns were regarded as holier than ordinary folk living in ordinary family relationships.

slogan of “God, family, country” creates a civil righteousness that is closer to a Lutheran understanding than the “nation, family, self” ordering in Singapore. In American civil religion, however, there is a danger of construing God as always supporting only America in some popular reflection. Contrariwise, in Singapore there is a danger of leaving out God altogether as well as placing country before family and self.

Finally, it is important to observe that not just Singaporean civil religion, but also other religious traditions in Singapore have decidedly different understandings of righteousness than the righteousness of faith (spiritual righteousness) of Lutheran theology. When we compare understandings of righteousness, we must be careful not to fall into a trap of divergent definitions. We are interested in comparison and equivalence between religious traditions more at a conceptual than at an atomistic level. For instance, in the case of the righteousness of faith we are enquiring into the basis on which we enter into a right relationship with the Creator. This is what the righteousness of faith purports to establish—a right relationship with God. In Christianity the righteousness of faith is something that is given by God to the sinner, not something that the sinner achieves through any effort of will or action. Put more bluntly, in Christianity the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is imputed by God to the sinner. God considers us righteous because Jesus has interceded for us as a priest and offered his own body and blood as a sacrifice for our sins.⁴⁴⁶ Jesus is a mediator who meets two critical conditions in order to act on our behalf. First, God promises to hear and do anything that Jesus asks,⁴⁴⁷ and second, Christ has merits that have been authorized to satisfy God on our behalf.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ Heb. 9:11–15.

⁴⁴⁷ John 16:23.

⁴⁴⁸ AP XXI 17–20; *Book of Concord*, 239–40. See also for example, FC SD III 30; *Book of Concord*, 567.

Though the sinner is still a sinner, God declares through His Word, that he is justified and that is the primary reality. A new status in relationship with the Almighty is spoken into existence. In baptism God declares to us, “You have been crucified with Christ. You no longer live [that is the old sinful nature]. Christ now lives in you.”⁴⁴⁹ God’s declaration calls forth a new creature in faith, alive to God, through the washing of water and the working of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵⁰ When God speaks to us in baptism, He justifies us by forgiving our sins and cancelling any debt He holds against us because we have not kept the moral law.⁴⁵¹ Forgiveness of sins brings forth new life and salvation: a new creation in Christ.⁴⁵² Furthermore, in Christianity spiritual righteousness is the beginning and animation for a new way of life, life in the Spirit.⁴⁵³ In this new life the gift of the Spirit animates and motivates the new person, who is alive in Christ. A new creation undertakes works of love thankfully out of gratefulness for the favor God has shown in sending his Son. Not only that, but the new creature is able to see and understand that God richly provides for his needs each and every day. In complete freedom this new creature engages in works of love in service of those around him. Thought about in this way the concept of spiritual righteousness constitutes the beginning and continuance of a different “way of life.” It is a life which includes good works but is motivated by the objective fact that we have been declared righteous; God loves us in Christ. This way of life naturally produces the fruits of good works but is not governed by law nor is it concerned with justifying the human creature via secular righteousness, although horizontal righteousness must and does follow.

⁴⁴⁹ Gal. 2:20.

⁴⁵⁰ Titus 3:5–8.

⁴⁵¹ Col. 2:14.

⁴⁵² 2 Cor. 5:17.

⁴⁵³ Rom. 8:1-17.

So, comparing spiritual righteousness as a concept with other religious traditions requires briefly sketching the “way of life” these other religious traditions require in a comprehensive sense, not just atomistically comparing word definitions. Some religions do not have a clear conception of a personal God. Thus there cannot be a direct analogy in these religions to the conception of spiritual righteousness where a man or woman is declared to be on good terms, friendly terms, with God. These religions, in their game of blind-man’s bluff, have some idea that god is and provides, but they have missed the mark with respect to God’s personal nature and *who* He is.⁴⁵⁴ Although outwardly the righteousness of works, which governs human relationships, is similar in many religions including Christianity, spiritual righteousness is not. In fact, for many religions the righteousness of works constitutes spiritual righteousness. For instance, in Confucianism spiritual righteousness, if one can use such a term, is more analogous to the harmony and heavenly order that is established through self-cultivation. From *The Great Learning* we read,

The Way of Great Learning lies in letting one’s inborn luminous virtue shine forth, in renewing the people, and in coming to rest in perfect goodness.⁴⁵⁵

Because perfect virtue is given by heaven to every person, the primary task throughout life is *to work* to let this virtue shine forth through the unique constitution with which each individual has been endowed. In his commentary Zhu Xi contends that this constitution “can be more or less balanced, more or less refined, or more or less clear,” however, all people possess perfect virtue. So the righteousness of Confucianism involves working to balance, refine, and clarify one’s

⁴⁵⁴ Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 132–34. Bayer comments on Luther’s understanding of the natural knowledge of God according to Jonah 1:5, which reads, “All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god.”

⁴⁵⁵ Gardner, *The Four Books*, 3.

constitution. In the words of D. C. Lau, rightness or *yi*, “is a character of acts and its application to agents is derivative. A man is righteous only in so far as he consistently does what is right.”⁴⁵⁶ Mencius holds to a slightly different view than Zhu Xi when he contends that the reward for following the moral law, which he understands as following the dictates of nature found within each person, is simply “happiness or [a] guilty conscience,” not a right standing before spiritual beings or Heaven.⁴⁵⁷ This Mencian humanism, though it is rooted in Heaven through the recognition that a supra human fate influences worldly affairs, still conceives solely of a righteousness of works.

It is not possible to describe in detail here the “way of life” that is prescribed by the many different religious traditions in Singapore. The dissertation only attempts to deal with Singaporean civil religion. In order to simplify this task civil religion is construed as including significant elements from Christian and Confucian religious traditions whereas Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam are largely ignored. Each of these traditions has different conceptions of righteous behavior and whether or not this behavior is significant in terms of a greater power or spirit. In general, though, these traditions emphasize human effort and works in attaining harmonious relations with a deity or human effort (or non-effort) to escape the limitations of earthly life. Christians, on the other hand, understand that spiritual righteousness is something that is given to a sinner, who is neither balanced, refined, nor clear in terms of attitudes, desires, and actions. Christian spiritual righteousness comes to an individual who is

⁴⁵⁶ Lau, “Introduction,” 27.

⁴⁵⁷ Wing-tsit Chan, “Chapter Two: Religions of China” in *The Great Asian Religions: An Anthology*, ed. Wing-tsit Chan, Isma‘il Rāgī al Fārūqī, Joseph M. Kitagawa, and P. T. Raju (London: Macmillan, 1969), 111.

engaged in actions that bring about spiritual death.⁴⁵⁸ Furthermore, Christians look forward to “a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness,”⁴⁵⁹ but not until the return of our Lord in glory will it be established. The Confucian mindset sees greater and more perfect possibilities for this life resulting from the harmony brought about by human works that follow the Way. In the Confucian understanding such right behavior establishes “a kingdom of man ... [based] on the principle of righteousness” or in other words “an ideal society in this world.”⁴⁶⁰

Bestowing Spiritual Righteousness

The revelation that spiritual righteousness is something given by God, not earned by humans, is a theme that the confessions take up again and again. Because spiritual righteousness is something that has been earned by Christ and indeed consists of *his* righteousness, it lies beyond the bounds of human effort.⁴⁶¹ It is not as if, believing that Jesus has come to save us, we can be inspired to follow in his footsteps and undertake to live a life that is worthy of God’s praise.⁴⁶² We cannot substitute for civil righteousness another righteousness of Christian works that will merit the forgiveness of sins as if Christ has come as a lawgiver in the style of Moses.⁴⁶³ As Luther comments on Gal. 1:3–4, the forgiveness of sins and the peaceful conscience that Christ establishes in those who believe, comes because he “*gave himself* for our sins,” not

⁴⁵⁸ Eph. 2:4–5.

⁴⁵⁹ 2 Peter 3:13.

⁴⁶⁰ Yang, *China’s Religious Heritage*, 79.

⁴⁶¹ AP II 27; *Book of Concord*, 116. In the Apology Melancthon argues that original sin, that is loss of fear, love, and trust in God (original righteousness) and inclination toward evil (concupiscence), make it impossible for natural man to please God.

⁴⁶² Rom. 7:21–25.

⁴⁶³ John 1:17.

because he “*has received our works*”⁴⁶⁴ or is pleased by our “inner luminous virtue”⁴⁶⁵ or anything else. But if we can in no way earn or merit the forgiveness of our sin and the new life of the Spirit, how does it come about in actual practice?

One of the most succinct explanations of how spiritual righteousness comes about is contained in the Augsburg Confession where it states simply, “to obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel.”⁴⁶⁶ So, the righteousness of faith, or spiritual righteousness, is produced by the Holy Spirit when the Word of God is proclaimed publicly among those who are willing to listen. God draws us into a holy conversation. When a person believes and trusts in God’s Word, which is proclaimed, faith is produced. This faith brings spiritual righteousness into a particular human being. He or she believes the promise that God forgives them for Christ’s sake and considers them, reckons them, to be pure, holy, and blameless.⁴⁶⁷ The administration of the sacraments too, like preaching itself, involves declaring God’s gracious intention toward those who do not deserve it. The sacraments, though, include a physical element, something we can feel or touch as a sign of God’s good intention and token of the forgiveness that we receive.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁴ LW 26: 32.

⁴⁶⁵ Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, 146. Here Fagerberg notes that the confessions “deliberately oppose the nominalists” who believed that man “could prepare himself for the reception of grace through certain ‘dispositions’” so that man in cooperation with God could regain his original righteousness. The nominalist position seems, in a manner of speaking, parallel to the Confucian ideal of working to let virtue shine forth in harmony with the order heaven desires.

⁴⁶⁶ AC V 1–3; German text; *Book of Concord*, 40.

⁴⁶⁷ Eph. 5:27.

⁴⁶⁸ AC XIII 1–2; German text; *Book of Concord*, 46.

When Melanchthon equates preaching with “giving the gospel”, he is using the term gospel in a broad sense, as encompassing the entire counsel of God. As Luther, Melanchthon, and the confessions state, the entire counsel of God attested to in the scripture includes both commands and promises, both law and gospel.⁴⁶⁹ So preaching or giving the gospel involves declaring both the commands and promises of God. The commands of God involve both the first and the second tables of the Ten Commandments. When these commands are declared, they accuse those who listen before God (especially, the first table) and before humans (especially, the second table).⁴⁷⁰ As sinners, we ruin relationships in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of our lives. In our own way, we already sense and feel the commands and demands of God. When we fail to keep the Ten Commandments, our conscience is burdened with a sense of guilt. The Holy Spirit works through the Word preached to allow us to see this and to repent of our sins.⁴⁷¹ Repentance signals a change in our heart and our mind, an intention to do better. Most importantly when we believe the promise that God forgives our sins, we stand in a new status before him—spiritually righteous on account of Christ.

Whereas we may sense that we are guilty before our Creator and before our fellow humans without anyone telling us, without the law being preached, it is truly impossible to know the extent of our fall into sin, as well as what God has accomplished for us in sending His Son, without the gospel. In other words, we need someone to proclaim the entire counsel of God

⁴⁶⁹ See for instance, Martin Luther, *Three Treatises from the American Edition of Luther's Works*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 282; Philip Melanchthon, *Loci communes theologici* of 1521 in *Melanchthon and Bucer* ed. William Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 70–71; AP IV 5; *Book of Concord*, 121.

⁴⁷⁰ Psalm 51:4. Here David emphasizes that in a real sense all of our failings in both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of life are an affront to God, and an evil in His sight. Still our failure in keeping the external commands of the second Table are also sins against our neighbor.

⁴⁷¹ FC SD II 5; *Book of Concord*, 544.

contained in scripture so that we can realize the depth of our sin *but more importantly the extent of God's love for us*. Still, even when the gospel is preached, without the work of the Holy Spirit, no one can believe.⁴⁷² It is true that in creation or nature we may sense at times the grace of God. Like Confucius we may sense that the creator of all bestows untold blessings on us through family, community, nation, and even nature. However, when our circumstances take a turn for the worse—such as when a family falls apart, or a community is scandalized by a rapist, or a nation is unjustly attacked and even defeated—, we are apt to believe that God has no interest or concern for us in these circumstances. We doubt that God cares. Our anger and fear that God is against us may rise up. Ultimately each of us will experience these doubts as we face death, because in death, without the promises of forgiveness and life that the gospel makes, there seems only judgment or at best uncertainty and a meaningless expanse.

The thought that in these circumstances God is still *for us*, still *with us*, can only be gleaned from the clear and consistent testimony of scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit, who calls, gathers, and enlightens those whom he wills.⁴⁷³ Jesus came to seek and to save the lost,⁴⁷⁴ those who were dead and unable to respond. This is true of all who are born of woman, born under the law. For immediately after the fall God pronounced a penalty, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers.”⁴⁷⁵ This penalty included spiritual death. As Lutherans are fond of recalling though, God immediately made a promise to his people saying that he would send a savior to crush the power of the devil.⁴⁷⁶ This promise was faithfully

⁴⁷² FC SD II 9; *Book of Concord*, 545.

⁴⁷³ SC Creed 6; *Book of Concord*, 355.

⁴⁷⁴ Luke 19:10.

⁴⁷⁵ Gen. 3:15; see also, AP II 46; *Book of Concord*, 119.

⁴⁷⁶ Gen. 3:15; see also, FC SD V 23; *Book of Concord*, 585.

repeated to Abraham, to David, and to the prophets. It was revealed that this savior would be for all people and that in order to accomplish his mission he would be despised and rejected by men.⁴⁷⁷ Indeed as John relates, even the people to whom the promised savior was sent would not receive him.⁴⁷⁸ Yet in Jesus God was sending into the world a sacrifice to pay for the world's sins. He was the very lamb of God, prefigured in the Passover meal, whose shed blood cleanses us from our sin and makes us righteous before the Father.⁴⁷⁹

The unpleasant reality that even after baptism Christian believers remain both sinner and saint (*simul iustus et peccator*) results in consciences burdened by guilt in this present life on earth. Our Lord has made provision for this, however, by making the forgiveness of our ongoing sins a regular part of the Christian way of life. Because we are baptized into Christ and hold onto the promise that we are regarded as holy and blameless for His sake, our status before God is certain. We are spiritually righteous. On the other hand, we know that we continue to sin because of the flesh that clings to us in this life. As children of God, we long to hear that even when we stumble our Father still accepts us. Our Lord graciously comes to us when our pastor or another believer speaks God's promise of forgiveness to us. In a similar way our Lord comes to us and offers forgiveness through his body and blood, given and shed for our sins in the Holy Supper. These means of grace free our conscience and assure us that though we sin God remains faithful to his promise of forgiveness and will not disown us in our weakness.

⁴⁷⁷ Is. 53:3.

⁴⁷⁸ John 1:11.

⁴⁷⁹ 1 Peter 1:18–19.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter Singaporean civil righteousness has been contrasted with both kinds of righteousness of traditional Lutheran theology—secular righteousness and spiritual righteousness. Singaporean civil righteousness is a particular kind of secular righteousness. Secular righteousness is righteousness that justifies before other humans. It is a righteousness of works. Singaporean civil righteousness does not reflect the entire divine will. So, negatively, for instance, certain thoughts and acts outside the divine will are allowed. Abortion is lawful; some forms of prostitution are lawful; living together outside of a marriage commitment is lawful; divorce is lawful; coveting, selfish ambition, and other attitudes of the heart are not unlawful. Just as, according to Jesus, the Mosaic law made accommodation for sinful humans,⁴⁸⁰ so too, the Singaporean law makes accommodation for sinful humans. It is no different in this regard than American, British, or any other system of law. In other words, the divine law is mediated into everyday life in an imperfect way. Second, positively, Singaporean civil righteousness includes human tradition or customs in addition to the divine will. Most clearly in view would be various customs that regulate daily life according to respect or honor based on social status, especially within the family. These “adiaphora” fill out another dimension of Singaporean civil righteousness.⁴⁸¹ Finally, the direction of service in Singaporean civil righteousness is opposite of that found in the concept of secular righteousness, which puts the state, community, and other individuals with authority in service of the family and individual, not the other way round.

⁴⁸⁰ Matt. 19:8.

⁴⁸¹ FC EP X; *Book of Concord*, 515–16. FC SD X; *Book of Concord*, 635–40. Just as in the Reformation church indifferent practices were sometimes confused with the faith that justifies before God, so too, in Singapore there is a temptation to make certain cultural attitudes or practices necessary for justification before God.

The major effort in this chapter, however, has not been to compare and contrast Singaporean civil righteousness with other imperfect instances of the mediation of natural or divine law into sinful human society. Instead, the main point has been to argue that all secular righteousness, Singaporean civil righteousness included, is entirely different and distinct from the divine righteousness of faith that God reckons to those who trust in the promise of forgiveness and grace as a result of the obedient life and innocent sufferings and death of His Son, Jesus Christ. Just as the perfect law of life, written down by Moses as the Decalog, is not able to justify and put humans in a right relationship with their Creator due to the fall into sin, so too, Singaporean civil law and civil righteousness cannot justify anyone before God. Obedience to civil law and its attendant righteousness also are not a preparation or foundation for accepting God's promise made in the gospel. In fact, just the opposite is true. The proper preparation for receiving the righteousness of faith promised in the gospel is to be convinced that one is a sinner who on his own has no hope of attaining righteousness before God.⁴⁸² This preparation is not something one can undertake as a human work but is the divine work of the law by which the Holy Spirit illuminates our sin and convicts our conscience that we are guilty before God.

Christian righteousness or the righteousness of faith comes about through the two words of God that the church declares publicly to all who will listen, the law and the gospel. From the law comes knowledge of sin. This word puts to death the sinful nature. Thus, being justified involves dying, in many senses of the word. Justification entails dying to hope that we can ever earn God's favor on our own, dying to our own and to society's ideas of what it means to be

⁴⁸² LW 26: 6. "As much as the dry earth of itself is able to accomplish in obtaining the right and blessed rain, that much can we men accomplish by our own strength and works to obtain that divine, heavenly, and eternal righteousness. Thus we can obtain it only through the free imputation and indescribable gift of God. Therefore the highest art and wisdom of Christians is not to know the Law, to ignore works and all active righteousness, just as

righteous. It means dying to the sinful passions inside of us and dying to the temptations that the world and Satan place before us. But justification and Christian righteousness ultimately rest upon the gospel word that follows. Our sins have been forgiven, despite the fact that we trust in civil works and righteousness. God loves us in Christ while we still are clinging overmuch to customs or traditions that He does not command.⁴⁸³ We need only take hold of the promise that Jesus was sent as a sacrifice for our sins. In our baptisms God has declared this to be so for us. We are dead to sin and all the demands of secular righteousness and alive to Christ Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸⁴ Through water and the Word, God works faith in us to believe and accept the merciful and gracious promise that we are forgiven and stand clothed in the righteousness of Christ.⁴⁸⁵ That is the gospel good news that *must* be declared and distinguished from all other kinds of righteousness.

outside the people of God the highest wisdom is to know and study the Law, works, and active righteousness.”

⁴⁸³ 1 John 4:10.

⁴⁸⁴ Rom. 6:1–14.

⁴⁸⁵ Gal. 3:27.

CHAPTER SIX

ORDERS AND LIMITS

The spiritual righteousness of Christian faith consists in the Father speaking a verdict of not guilty over unrighteous people who, through the work of the Holy Spirit, believe that Jesus lived an obedient life and made an atoning sacrifice for their sins. In place of trust and confidence in ourselves, our works, or any other human contrivance, Christians trust that in Christ God was bringing about a new state of affairs in a fallen world, reconciling the world to himself, not counting people's sins against them.⁴⁸⁶ The manner in which God justifies us through faith in Christ puts to death any pretensions we have that our best works count for anything before Him. God reserves for Himself all the glory and praise insofar as salvation and human redemption are concerned. There is nothing that we can do to please Him *without His first making us acceptable* through the righteousness of faith in Christ.⁴⁸⁷ Amazingly, He wants to do this *for us* (and does this *to us*) despite the sorry state of our rebellion and sin.⁴⁸⁸ Even after we have been justified and believe our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, we still remain both sinner and saint (*simul iustus et peccator*), engaged in a struggle that will only end with the death of our sinful flesh. Yet we are confident, even now, in the continuing forgiveness of our Father.⁴⁸⁹ Death will not have the

⁴⁸⁶ 2 Cor. 5:19.

⁴⁸⁷ John 15:5. AC XX 35–39; *Book of Concord*, 56–57. AP IV 252; *Book of Concord*, 159–60. AP XII 85; *Book of Concord*, 201.

⁴⁸⁸ Rom. 5:6–8.

⁴⁸⁹ LC 85–89. Concerning the fifth petition of the Lord's prayer, "And remit our debt, as we remit what our debtors owe," Luther comments, "Therefore, this sign [i.e. the second half of the petition, as we forgive our debtors] is attached to the petition so that when we pray we may recall the promise and think, "Dear Father, I come to you and pray that you will forgive me for this reason: not because I can make satisfaction or deserve anything by my works, but because you have promised and have set this seal on it, making it as certain as if I had received an absolution pronounced by you yourself." For whatever baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are appointed to us as outward signs, can effect, this sign can as well, in order to strengthen and gladden our conscience. Moreover, above

last word for believers because on the Last Day a new creation, now only begun inwardly in the Spirit, will rise, body and soul, to live with the Lord forever.⁴⁹⁰ This is the hope Christians maintain in the present evil age.

As the Lutheran confessions argue, righteousness before God depends on faith alone.⁴⁹¹ This does not mean that those who have no contrition are justified. On the contrary contrition and repentance for sin precede justification and the righteousness of faith.⁴⁹² To someone who does not see himself as a sinner, the gospel is nonsense. There is no need to be saved from anything. On the other hand, an individual who believes himself guilty, but is confident in his own powers, concludes that works should be done in order to merit forgiveness. He does not cling to the promise the Holy Spirit extends in the gospel, and instead prefers to go along on his own. Just as contrition and repentance necessarily precede justification and spiritual righteousness, so too, good works necessarily follow. In fact they proceed from the righteousness of faith; it makes good works possible.⁴⁹³ These works are not good of themselves, i.e. because they are done perfectly with the right attitude of heart and mind, but because God views them differently. They are performed by someone who has been called good and righteous by virtue of Christ, even though in this life the old sinful nature remains with him. In an anticipatory, proleptic manner, then, Christians exemplify the adage that “only a good tree bears good fruit.” Paradoxically, though, our goodness consists of Christ’s righteousness.

and beyond the other signs, it has been instituted precisely so that we can use and practice it every hour, keeping it with us at all times.”

⁴⁹⁰ 1 Thess. 4:15–17.

⁴⁹¹ FC SD III 4.

⁴⁹² FC SD III 23.

⁴⁹³ FC SD III 27.

The dissertation thus far has demonstrated that a clear and persistent proclamation of this understanding of righteousness before God, which is the central teaching of the Christian faith and must always be protected and kept in mind, is necessary so that faith in Christ flourishes in the hearts of those who believe. The dissertation has also discussed the means by which God bestows this righteousness, distinguishing it from all kinds of human righteousness, in order that these horizontal sources of righteousness based on the civil order are in no way trusted to establish, prepare for, or maintain spiritual righteousness before God. Chapter 6 will move on to consider three teachings from the Bible in the context of Singaporean civil religion with the goal of assessing whether it is advisable that the church and individual believers work to Christianize law and society. The teachings to be examined are first, the distinction between the two realms, second, the concept of orders of creation, and third, the explanation given by Peter and the apostles in Acts 5:29 to the authorities in Jerusalem that they must obey God rather than men.

In brief, this penultimate chapter will argue that just as spiritual righteousness can be lost when it is not properly distinguished from secular righteousness in the church's proclamation and the individual's conscience, so too, the reign of God through the gospel in the heart can be confused with the reign of God through law in civil society if undue effort is made to Christianize civil law. Advancing demands that all aspects of civil law and society be Christianized can bring about misunderstandings of the gospel and misplaced trust in the civil order. In this respect God may allow even alarming discontinuities between divine and civil laws in order to show just how different are the ways of man and the ways of God.⁴⁹⁴ This should not

⁴⁹⁴ AP XII 155–160; *Book of Concord*, 215. In this passage Melancthon argues that terrors of conscience and other troubles are forms of punishment in the Christian life, but that they in no way pay for past sins. They instead mortify the flesh and more importantly they “are works of God intended for our benefit, that the power of God might be made more manifest in our weakness.” So, too, the sufferings a Christian endures in the civil realm can make

overly concern and trouble Christians, as far as eternal salvation is concerned, for Christ has made many promises that in the midst of the trouble and perplexity of this life He is with his people.⁴⁹⁵ In a society that externalizes divine law in a civil law code to the exclusion of attitudes of the heart and mind, there is a danger for gross hypocrisy and mere external obedience. In a society that abandons the moral compass of natural law and the notion of right and wrong, i.e. it denies accountability to any higher order or power, there is a danger for lawlessness and disrespect for all authority. In either situation, though, God is still ultimately in control and will accomplish His purposes.

In any situation the Bible teaches that true repentance “brings about a lessening of public and private punishments and calamities,”⁴⁹⁶ but repentance does not eliminate them. In their discussion of the practice of confession, absolution, and church discipline the Lutheran confessors make clear that God still punishes, in a sense, through historical circumstances and events, though these punishments and afflictions do not pay for our sins. Instead for Christians these hardships serve as an “exercise and preparation for renewal.”⁴⁹⁷ Thus it is proper for Christians to encourage reflection on the divine source for death and common human afflictions while maintaining that discernment of these matters and establishing a one-to-one correspondence between particular sins and punishments is not necessary. In fact, distinguishing law from gospel in historical events is fraught with difficulties. Assessing the historical situation

clear the fallen nature of human society and more importantly the surpassing mercy and grace of God in Christ Jesus. This attitude need not result in passive acceptance of injustice but instead begs for a public confession of God’s call for just laws and mercy, especially when such a confession is made on behalf of the poor, the oppressed, and the helpless.

⁴⁹⁵ John 16:33.

⁴⁹⁶ AP XII 164–66; *Book of Concord*, 216. Melancthon cites Is. 1:16–19 and Jonah 3:10.

⁴⁹⁷ AP XII 151; *Book of Concord*, 214. Melancthon cites 1 Peter 4:17.

in order to hear a word from God that is either an accusation or a promise is the proper, prayerful work of every Christian and takes place through the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the individual's conscience—guided by the proclamation of the Scripture. Without the gospel word of forgiveness found in Scripture all historical events ultimately become a word of law because they lack a connection to the work of Christ and the freedom found in a Spirit driven life. Finally, since civil law at times conflicts with God's will, understood in a strict sense as the moral law of the Decalog, there are limits to the obedience that Christians should show within the civil order.

The Dual Rule of God

As has been briefly mentioned, Scripture asserts that God rules human life in two ways. First, God rules through spiritual authority, in the spiritual kingdom or kingdom of Christ. This rule takes place in the hearts of all who believe and trust in the promise of Jesus Christ.⁴⁹⁸ The faith that springs up in the hearts and minds of Christians is worked by the Holy Spirit and rules this kingdom. This faith holds on to the promised savior, who has conquered sin, death, and the powers of evil arrayed against all people.⁴⁹⁹ This rule of God brings the gracious forgiveness of sin and a peaceful conscience into the life of all who believe the mystery of the gospel, which is now openly declared to all who will listen. Primarily, this mystery consists in the surprising fact that from eternity God planned to accomplish the eternal salvation of all people regardless of their human achievements or capabilities.⁵⁰⁰ Hard work, intellectual ability, self-cultivation, sincerity, and respect for those in positions of honor and authority, all these avail no one in this

⁴⁹⁸ AP XVI 2; *Book of Concord*, 231. Melancthon states, "Christ's kingdom is spiritual, that is, it is the heart's knowledge of God, fear of God, faith in God, and the beginning of eternal righteousness and eternal life."

⁴⁹⁹ Rom. 8:37–39.

⁵⁰⁰ God has planned and accomplished this; however, humans can reject this offered salvation when they

kingdom.⁵⁰¹ Trust in and pursuit of these forms of human righteousness,⁵⁰² in fact, can crowd out or choke off faith if the good news of the gospel is not clearly proclaimed and distinguished. Thus Jesus admonishes his followers to seek first the kingdom of God and all else that they need will be added and given to them, without undue concern or care, that is concern or care that takes the place of the ultimate priority of faith in Christ.⁵⁰³ Paradoxically, God uses lowly, earthly means in order to bring about the righteousness that He desires in His people. He uses fallible human instruments to proclaim the gospel, not a voice from heaven.⁵⁰⁴ He justifies and renews His children through the waters of baptism, drowning the old sinful nature and calling forth a new creation. He offers the continued forgiveness of sins through the visible means of bread and wine. Graciously and persistently God offers to all who desire it peace that transcends all human understanding, peace grounded in the perfect righteousness of His Son Jesus.⁵⁰⁵ Because of this one could say that the gospel is the means by which God rules the spiritual kingdom.

Second, God rules through temporal authority in the temporal kingdoms or social-political structures that exist in many different forms. In Genesis 1 and 2 God gave responsibility and authority over creation to Adam and Eve.⁵⁰⁶ Humans order and structure life on earth using their

choose to go their own way, spurning the promise of forgiveness of the gospel.

⁵⁰¹ Matt. 23. Jesus launches a withering attack on the Pharisees and teachers of the law who pursue an external form of righteousness, which glosses over and covers up their spiritual poverty. Philippians 3:4–9. St Paul describes how he considers all the forms of righteousness that he pursued before his conversion as “rubbish” in comparison with the spiritual righteousness of faith in Jesus Christ.

⁵⁰² Matt. 6:33.

⁵⁰³ Matt. 13:3–9. Jesus describes how concern over earthly life and especially wealth can choke off faith in the gospel. Matt. 13:44. Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a pearl of great price, for which, someone may sell all that they have in order to possess it.

⁵⁰⁴ 2 Cor. 4:7. Paul was speaking of himself, but, even more so, those who follow him in the public ministry are unworthy of the call to preach Christ.

⁵⁰⁵ Phil. 4:7.

⁵⁰⁶ Gen. 1:28–30; 2:15–17.

gifts and reason, as God's representatives. Within human structures and society an external righteousness is worked by God in all people through those who wield earthly authority in the form of local law, custom and tradition. Human dominion in the temporal realm also includes the exercise of goodness, mercy, and love.⁵⁰⁷ For those who do not see that God is behind this temporal authority and dominion, this righteousness consists of only external obedience brought about by human reason and the fear of punishment or desire for reward. Thus the external righteousness that results from following temporal law is at times described as mere hypocrisy in Lutheran theological reflection and the confessions.⁵⁰⁸ This does not mean that such hypocrisy does not bring substantial temporal good. In fact, it does bring rewards and is even approved by God in a manner of speaking.⁵⁰⁹ External righteousness brings about order and at times an outward peace to society. The confessions frequently call this external obedience to civil authority the righteousness of reason, because its justification is evident even to those who live without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. So the major point to be taken from this discussion is that in the temporal realm God rules through created structures and law in the lives of all people. For Christians the law is evident in the moral law of the Scripture, most obviously in the Decalog. For others the law is evident through reason or common sense or even the moral teaching of another religious tradition. In any case Paul locates an imperfect knowledge of the natural law written on the heart in all people.⁵¹⁰ In its simplest form this natural law can be conceived as love of God above all else and love of the neighbor as the self.⁵¹¹ The confessions

⁵⁰⁷ Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 54.

⁵⁰⁸ SA III 2 3; *Book of Concord*, 312.

⁵⁰⁹ AP IV 24; *Book of Concord*, 124.

⁵¹⁰ Rom. 1:19–20; 2:15.

⁵¹¹ Matt. 22:37–40.

maintain that when these forms of law are kept many benefits accrue to society and creation. However, properly understood, the demands of the divine law, which apply to all people, are not and cannot be kept by anyone without the Holy Spirit. While Christians' works are counted as good and satisfy God, this is solely because Christians enjoy the gift of an alien or passive righteousness. All other works are judged correctly to be so much stubble and hay, works of hypocrisy.

One might surmise, based on this construal of the two ways in which God rules, that God uses both law and gospel to rule in the lives of believers. That would be true. One might also surmise, based on the distinction between God's spiritual and temporal rule and kingdoms, that there is *no connection* between a believer's life in one kingdom and life in the other. That would be false. In fact, the whole person lives simultaneously in both kingdoms and most importantly true good works can be done in the temporal kingdom by believers because the Holy Spirit can change the attitude of heart and mind so that love of neighbor, and not fear of punishment or hope of reward, are the driving motive for action. For the new man, love, created and motivated by the gospel, and not law serves as the motive force for good works. An even better way of describing these good works is to say they arise spontaneously and flow into a form of life that is described by the Ten Commandments and particularized to local conditions. These works are not invented holy actions but acts of love that meet the real needs of real people in a real place. The concept of the dual rule of God or the two realms or the two governments is helpful in practice because it keeps secular righteousness, which is generally a response to the law, separate from spiritual righteousness, which is uniquely a response to the gospel. One way in which Luther connected Christian life to the dual reign was through the concept that God calls Christians to particular stations or offices in the secular realm. For Christians, proper service and worship of

God occurs in the world, serving the neighbor. Thus, although good works arise spontaneously in the new creature through the guidance of the Holy Spirit in conformity to the law, more definitively good works arise when Christians respond to the call of vocation to be husband or wife, farmer or factory worker, coach or campaign co-chair in service to others. It is in the secular kingdom that God calls Christians to good works according to their abilities and skills within a specific community and nation.

With regard to the dual reign of God and the Singaporean religious climate two points may be observed. First, in a situation where the Christian religion is in the minority, the concept of the dual reign embraces the perspective that non-believers and believers alike serve to bring about order and peace in human society. Christians can pray for and thank God for non-believers who faithfully carry out duties to protect individuals, communities, and the nation through secular government. Christians can be confident that God is pleased when they obey those in authority because they are, in a sense, carrying out God's reign in this situation. The distinction between secular and spiritual reigns of God also acknowledges that much good can come about through the proper exercise of human reason. Second, the concept clarifies that secular rulers legitimately pursue peace, order, and prosperity. This is in no way in conflict with the spiritual kingdom of Christ. God intends that in this fallen world an authority of the sword be wielded on behalf of private individuals who do not have redress of themselves to coercion or force in order to maintain justice and harmony. In order to prevent the excess of revenge so common in private relations the secular government provides a moderating influence and promotes equity within horizontal relations throughout society. These goals of society are right and good and provide for the common welfare of people.

Orders of Creation in Lutheran Theology

In order to further explore the nature of civil life and civil order, i.e. the particular historical situation in which Christians find themselves wherever they live, we will engage the concept of the orders of creation. The goal of doing this is to recognize the Creator's hand in the widely divergent political situations across the globe. This is not to say that God promotes a particular politics or that God promotes no politics. As Christ says, "*my kingdom is not of this world,*"⁵¹² and so in a manner of speaking we understand that God has allowed many different earthly kingdoms to flourish. These secular or temporal kingdoms care for and are concerned with earthly matters. At the penultimate level, these kingdoms are ruled by man and his laws. They are ruled by the law of God at an ultimate level. The Christian is called to participate in the earthly kingdom as all creatures are. On the other hand, the kingdom of Christ, the reign of God in the heart of every believer, is a product of the promise of righteousness that is made to each one of us in the gospel. The trust this promise produces is all that is needed to establish and maintain Christ's kingdom. Thus the rule of Christ in his spiritual kingdom is by the gospel, not the law. Because this is the case, Christians can take up the challenges of injustice and inequity in whatever social structures they find themselves. They know that Christ still reigns in his kingdom and that ultimately this reign will be manifest to all people at the end of the age.

As recently as 1990 Carl Braaten, a well-known American Lutheran theologian, has called for the "rehabilitation" of the orders of creation in the theological life of the church. This is a tall order that he likens to "raising the Titanic," an effort fraught with dangers and the potential for

⁵¹² John 18:36.

misunderstanding.⁵¹³ This is because the concept was abused in early twentieth century Germany by the National Socialists who conflated it with their racist ideology of *Blut und Boden*, “blood and soil.” Some Lutheran theologians were slow in recognizing the Nazi threat and cooperated with the state in ways they later regretted. One of them was Werner Elert, who was quoted above in his later work, *The Christian Ethos*, which was first published in 1949. Braaten traces the concept of orders of creation to Luther and his use of a number of terms such as “*ordo, ordo divina, ordo naturalis, ordination, ordination divina, creatura dei, weltliches Regiment, potestas ordinata*, and others.”⁵¹⁴ According to Braaten the thrust of this teaching is to “affirm that Christians, like all other human beings, exist in a framework of universal orders that exist prior to and apart from belief in Christ or membership in the church.”⁵¹⁵ These orders, originally delineated by Luther in terms of “medieval social theory,” include structures such as family, national identity, work, and religious community, and may be termed “creaturely walks of life.”⁵¹⁶

The reason this concept needs rehabilitation is that after Lutheran failures in maintaining a critical stance toward the German state, Karl Barth attacked the traditional distinctions of Lutheran theology between the hidden and revealed God, creation and redemption, law and gospel, the two kingdoms, and the orders of creation. In contrast to the dualities or paradoxes in Lutheran reflection, Barth chose to focus on the “one Word of God from which all structures,

⁵¹³ Carl E. Braaten, “God in Public Life: Rehabilitating the “Orders of Creation,” *First Things* 8 (December 1990), 32.

⁵¹⁴ Braaten, “God in Public Life,” 32.

⁵¹⁵ Braaten, “God in Public Life,” 32.

⁵¹⁶ Kolb, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, 58.

orders, commandments, and ethical norms for Christian living in the world must be derived.”⁵¹⁷ Thus Barth emphasized redemption or the second article of the Apostles Creed to the exclusion of the first article and creation. Braaten is not alone in this assessment of Barth’s theology. Gustaf Wingren, who himself taught at Basel after the war in Barth’s absence, comments that “the modern negation of the belief in creation has Karl Barth as its spiritual father.”⁵¹⁸ The major point to be taken from all this is that much of Lutheran theological reflection fled from first article understanding as a result of the shame of Lutheran failures and the attack of the Barthians. This flight meant that increasingly, public discourse and public life were seen as devoid of divine revelation and natural law, traditionally understood to be grounded in the first article and accessible to all humanity.

Against this tendency to flee creation traditional Lutheran theology confesses, along with Luther, the fact that the goodness and givenness of everyday life reflects the generosity of the Triune God. In the words of the Small Catechism,

I believe that God has created me and all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties. In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property—along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all! For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.⁵¹⁹

This explanation of the first article of the creed is, in a sense, a confession of the “orders of creation” spoken into being by God in the beginning; these fundamentals are the very nature of

⁵¹⁷ Braaten, “God in Public Life,” 33.

⁵¹⁸ Gustaf Wingren, *The Flight from Creation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1971), 21.

⁵¹⁹ SC Creed 2; *Book of Concord*, 354–55.

creaturely life. God brings forth children through the means of a life-long union of a man and a woman. God provides and cares for us through parents who clothe, feed, and shelter us. Parents by necessity have authority over and structure the lives of their children for a period of time until the children can provide and care for themselves. God sustains life within community and requires that property rights be respected, that truth be told, that life not be taken or restricted without cause. In other words, God has structured and sustains His creation in a certain manner. These orders and patterns are presupposed in the Decalog, and thus the Decalog serves as a critical point of departure for reflecting and tracing the structures that God the Father has put into creation.

In his treatment of Luther's teaching with regards to the three estates, the medieval social structure of his time, Werner Elert has highlighted the immediate givenness of social structure. Luther, he states, conceived of a God given concrete social situation that inevitably made demands on the human creature according to the place a person occupied within that structure.⁵²⁰ Elert claims that although Luther classified people's places according to social group (e.g. young women, young men) and social classes (peasants, landowners, etc.) and social constructs (cloister life, merchant life, etc.), he was not concerned with establishing fixed and determined social structures and roles per se.⁵²¹ Instead he was emphasizing the fact that all people are placed into particular circumstances and that there are definite and unique demands placed on each of us because of this. The demands have an inexhaustible diversity. This is in contrast to Melancthon

⁵²⁰ Werner Elert, *Morphologie des luthertums* (München: Beck, 1931), 49–52.

⁵²¹ Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, 38. Althaus, in a chapter entitled *Station and Vocations (The Orders)*, also maintains that Luther did not adopt an "uncritically conservative attitude" toward medieval society but endorsed a "thorough criticism" of stations and callings according to whether they are "against God" and "sinful."

whose “utopian” view of an ideal society drove him to actively use philosophical concepts such as natural law in order to delineate and define more fixed ethical demands in human social life.⁵²²

These “situations” of living or “natural orders” are to a degree historical in nature. They are not static and inflexible to changing circumstances. The orders *are*, in a sense, these circumstances. Elert comments, “We are not concerned with what God creates, preserves, and rules *should* be, but with what it *is*. The order of creation is not a product of the creative but the regulative activity of God, it is existential situation.”⁵²³ There are aspects of these relations that are constant but others that depend on circumstance. Thielicke acknowledged this by calling them “orders of history” and “orders of divine patience.”⁵²⁴ The changing circumstances of the orders are apparent especially when speaking of the economic or political structures, shaped by society, that include people from a variety of religious backgrounds or philosophical presuppositions. No doubt the economic orders of society have changed greatly as countries have moved from agrarian to industrial to postindustrial economies. In the same vein the political orders have changed in the shift from feudalism to constitutional monarchies to representative forms of government. There is no “Lutheran” political or economic order. Rather any political or economic order ought to fulfill certain requirements for justice, order, equity, and peace.⁵²⁵ To say that the economic and political orders are subject to historical conditions amounts to the

⁵²² Paul W. Robinson, ““The Most Learned Discourses of the Philosophers and Lawyers””: Roman Law, Natural Law, and Property in Melanchthon’s *Loci Communes*,” *Concordia Journal* 28 (January 2002), 45, 47, 50. Robinson demonstrates that Melanchthon’s 1521 *Loci* drew on Plato and Roman law in defining a natural law that included the holding of property in common. Melanchthon’s view on this point of natural law seems to have shifted over time, and this point is not held so strongly in either the 1535 or the 1543 editions.

⁵²³ Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, 78.

⁵²⁴ Braaten, “God in Public Life,” 33.

⁵²⁵ Mark A. Noll, “The Lutheran Difference,” *First Things* 20 (February 1992), 37. Noll comments that American Lutherans have much to offer in the way of reflection on Christian political movements. He notes how the two kingdoms doctrine allows them to maintain a distinction between public and private life that restrains the

same thing as saying that they are first article matters, subject to human judgment and reason. One could express the cooperation between God and man that characterizes first article matters by saying: God gave man dominion over the earth but this dominion is subject to certain conditions.⁵²⁶ The conditions on human activity could be conceived as *protecting individual rights* or *observing the duties and obligations consonant with harmonious life together* or *properly recognizing the image of God that exists in all humanity* or *following the natural law*.

So too certain aspects of the family are open to the changing historical situation. Engagement and courtship practices vary from culture to culture. As long as biblical injunctions toward heterosexual monogamy are maintained within the traditional understanding of a life-long, one-flesh union,⁵²⁷ the variations in civil practice are of no great concern. They represent, to a degree, the realities of life in a particular environment and reasonable expectations of duties and rights in changing historical circumstances. The reality and tragedy of divorce in civil society may motivate property law that seems to minimize the ideal of the two becoming one. There is nothing wrong with this, and it may be construed as the just and merciful path given the financial hardships that come from the breakup of marriage. In the same manner expectations of the specific duties of children in caring for aging parents logically follow and interact with society's social provisions for the elderly. In some cultures extended families live together so that the elderly are more naturally incorporated into a social network. In other communities children may be expected to contribute to their elderly parents through regular cash remissions. In still other situations the state provides benefits and individuals are able to accumulate assets

crusading zeal characteristic of religious and secular movements in America.

⁵²⁶ Gen. 1:26–28; Gen. 2:15; Psalm 8:3–8.

⁵²⁷ Matt. 19:4–6.

over their working life that support them in old age. Regardless of these provisions, just as at the beginning of life when children by necessity need the care of their parents, so too at the end of life there are logical duties and obligations that children owe to their parents, even if this means coordinating and overseeing that others care for them. This is the natural order of life.

In any community a fundamental natural order is government, the exercise of temporal authority through law, the courts, and other institutions in order to bring order and promote the common welfare of the people. The thirteenth chapter of Romans clearly grounds the authority of those who govern in the will of God. The proper function and use of this authority is assumed so that human life is protected and both the family and the individual prosper. Rom. 13:3 asserts that rulers hold no terror for those who do right. Thus it is presupposed in this passage that the governing authorities are on the “right” side of the law. They reward those who do what is right. It is not the authorities who define what is right but God, the ruler of all. Insofar as the authorities maintain order and punish evildoers according to standards consonant with the justice and mercy enjoined in scripture, there can be no position but willing obedience for the Christian.⁵²⁸ Governmental authority in traditional Lutheran theology serves the purposes of protecting bodily welfare as well as providing a means of public redress of private injustice.⁵²⁹ The Lutheran confessions take this position against those who taught that Christians should not make use of the court systems and civil law. Luther also reasoned that soldiers, hangmen, and others could kill in order to carry out the public redress of injustice through their vocations. They were in these instances protecting and providing for the well-being of their “neighbors”. On the

⁵²⁸ Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “Render unto Caesar...and unto God: A Lutheran View of Church and State,” 87. Footnote 159 provides a succinct summary of the theological position that “Scriptures assign to [... government] the twofold task of rewarding the good citizen and punishing the evildoer. (Rom. 13:3–5; 1 Peter 2:15)”

other hand, private individuals could not seek redress without enjoining the temporal authority.⁵³⁰ This was to prevent private vendettas and the all too common excesses that accompany them. "Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord, according to Romans 12:19, and the Lord has put temporal retribution in the hands of the judge according to Romans 13. Governmental authority also orders life in such a way that food, clothing, shelter and other goods may be pursued for the welfare of individual, family, and community. Without the proper exercise of political authority society would fall into a state of disorder where good behavior and good ends would not be distinguished from evil behavior and evil ends. Thus political authority is not neutral or value free. It reflects the shared beliefs about right and wrong of a people.

The orders of life in Singapore fit into the categories of ecclesiastical, economic, and political as in every society. Singapore is a religiously plural society and so the ecclesiastical orders of life are more complex than in a Constantinian synthesis of church and state. In Reformation times Christianity was presupposed as the true religion and received preferred status as far as how religion was reflected throughout western society. This was also the case to a degree in colonial Singapore, but the current post-colonial political order is secular in the sense that it attempts a neutral posture toward religion. The problem with this, though, as has been previously noted, is that political life requires some reference to higher authority in order to maintain legitimacy and to limit temporal power.⁵³¹ At least part of the problem in Singapore is that political legitimacy is not grounded with explicit reference to a higher power. Legitimacy comes through Enlightenment arguments grounded in the rights of man; yet, in the Singapore

⁵²⁹ AP XVI 7–8; *Book of Concord*, 232.

⁵³⁰ AP XVI 7; *Book of Concord*, 232.

⁵³¹ Schumacher, "Civic Participation by Churches and Pastors," 174.

political order—as reflected in the Shared Values—these very rights are subordinated to state and community. Thus governmental legitimacy rests more clearly on the exercise of power than on support from the governed or a notion of a higher accountability. Confucian notions regarding the mandate of Heaven temper this somewhat. Policies that separate religion and politics rigorously create an environment where religious communities potentially operate in sequestration from public life. This situation creates a natural competition between religious politics and the polity of the state and tends toward elevating civic values and life above religious teaching. It is curious to note that in a situation where the Singapore government did promote religious moral education in the 1980s “for the sake of public decency and order” and the “building and maintenance of strong communities,” it ended up discontinuing the effort because too many religious conversions were taking place.⁵³² More than anything this demonstrates that a deep human need for ultimate religious grounds for life was felt within Singapore youth during this time. This need extends into every human heart.

Limits on Obedience to Political Authority

The demands of secular righteousness, and so by extension the demands of Singaporean civil righteousness, are for the most part good things and even divine ordinances.⁵³³ Put even more forcefully by Luther, again in his Lectures on Galatians,

in short, whoever knows for sure that Christ is his righteousness not only cheerfully and gladly works in his calling but also submits himself for the sake of love to

⁵³² Schumacher, “Civic Participation by Churches and Pastors,” 174. Not only does Schumacher identify references to God in public life as important to limiting governmental power, he also mentions that “accepting a religious dimension in the realm of active righteousness” may be beneficial for the sake of “public decency and order.”

⁵³³ AP XVI 6–7; *Book of Concord*, 231–32. Here Melancthon asserts “[the gospel] not only approves secular government but also subjects us to them [Rom. 13:1], just as we have been necessarily placed under the laws of the seasons (changes of winter and summer) as divine ordinances.”

magistrates, also to their wicked laws, and to everything else in this present life—even, if need be, to burden and danger. For he knows that God wants this and that this obedience pleases Him.⁵³⁴

Given this positive assessment of civil law and the strong exhortation to accept the demands of those in civil authority, what limits might there be on such demands? Here, again, civil law is understood as law, tradition, and custom that reflects a society's beliefs, values, and practices. In chapter 5 *misplaced trust* in civil righteousness was condemned, but are there any limits to the demands civil law places on Christian believers, provided they do not trust that civil righteousness will justify them before God? In interpreting Luther's position it is necessary to take into account that he lived in a *christianus populus* situation, a synthesis where Christianity was intimately involved in shaping public morals and law. So, when he enjoins obedience to rulers and their laws, he has in view "legitimate civil ordinances"⁵³⁵ that do not go against clear commands of Scripture. This interpretation is consonant with Lohse's comments on Luther's declaration at the Diet of Worms that "unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason, I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God."⁵³⁶ Here Lohse points out that Luther's assessment of reason and conscience includes revelation from the Scripture. In the same way when the confessions construe "all political authority, orderly government, laws, and good order in the world" as "created and instituted by God,"⁵³⁷ they presuppose moral standards consonant with the Decalog as it is taught throughout Scripture.

⁵³⁴ LW 26, 12; *Lectures on Galatians* (1535).

⁵³⁵ AP XVI 1; *Book of Concord*, 231.

⁵³⁶ Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 200.

⁵³⁷ AC XVI 1–2; German text; *Book of Concord*, 48.

In keeping with the thesis of this dissertation, the question of limits on Christian obedience to civil religion and civil law will be explored from the perspective of arguing that, in general, there is neither scriptural command nor comprehensive reason to Christianize law and society. Rather it will be asserted that the horizontal realm of human relations is largely governed by law and reason that is universally accessible to all people. Since horizontal life is governed by this natural reason, outright appeals to biblical warrants for moral positions are not necessary for a healthy public debate. Instead of insisting on the public acceptance of religious warrants for ordering and regulating social life, the church and individual Christians are better served by persistently proclaiming that Christian righteousness is altogether distinct from any type of secular righteousness. God structures and rules human life through law that regulates and governs both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of life. This law is to a degree accessible to all people through scriptural revelation, natural reason, or both. Since we live in a fallen creation, though, neither divine nor human law is kept perfectly. It is not kept everywhere and at every time by anyone, in terms of our thoughts, words, and deeds. This is why God has freely and generously, without necessity or compulsion, spoken a recreating and justifying word of gospel.⁵³⁸ This word cannot be found in the structure or order of human life or civil religion. It comes only via the proclamation of the church. Therefore the church and Christians should focus on the unique righteousness of faith in their public witness. The miracle of the gospel word is that it brings forth a life that takes the shape of divine law through the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of those who believe.

⁵³⁸ Rom. 4:25, 6:3–11.

At the same time, because human nature is fallen, and human reason is employed at times against clear biblical norms, Christians should not keep silent about moral questions. Indeed, they can and should frame ethical questions in terms of good and evil as attested to in Scripture. They should also testify boldly to the hope and faith that they have in Jesus Christ and to the biblical presupposition that all people are created in the image of God. Respecting and protecting the image of God found in our fellow men may require challenging human tradition and law. In this regard, Christians may be called to confess their faith in our risen and living Lord in opposition to civil authorities as well as exercising their energies and efforts to protect and care for all people.

In the sixteenth articles of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology the singular caveat offered to limit political authority in “secular government, public order, and marriage” is that one *may not sin* in obeying the authorities’ laws and commands. In cases of competing demands “one must obey God rather than any human beings (Acts 5:[29]).”⁵³⁹ The confessions consistently maintain that the Scripture alone, not immediate revelation that comes through inspiration or prayer, is the source of God’s will and commandments.⁵⁴⁰ Thus the Scripture and not personal inclination or human traditions are the source from which God’s ordinances must be taken.⁵⁴¹ Even more specifically the Decalog, found throughout the Old and New Testaments,⁵⁴² is the clearest expression of God’s will.⁵⁴³ It would be wrong to limit the ordinances of God in a strict

⁵³⁹ AC XVI 5–7, German text; *Book of Concord*, 48,50.

⁵⁴⁰ AP XV 17; *Book of Concord*, 225.

⁵⁴¹ FC EP 1. *Book of Concord*, 486.

⁵⁴² SC Ten Commandments; *Book of Concord*, 351–54. Luther expands and explicates the ten commandments informed by their use throughout Scripture and does not dwell on only the bare words written down by Moses.

⁵⁴³ AP IV 6; *Book of Concord*, 121.

sense to the Decalog, however. Clearly the confessions consider ordinances outside the Decalog as binding on Christians. Those most clearly taught in scripture and the confessions would be the commands to preach and teach the gospel, to baptize,⁵⁴⁴ to observe the Lord's Supper,⁵⁴⁵ and to forgive and retain sins.⁵⁴⁶ These additional commands could logically be subsumed under the first table of the law since they clearly pertain to faith and the true worship of God. Thus, the injunction found in Acts 5:29 would involve both the observance of the Ten Commandments in an expansive sense, as well as carrying out the mission given by Christ to his people, the church. Acts 5:29 is of special interest when discussing Singaporean civil religion and righteousness because the statement of Peter and the other apostles to obey God rather than men clearly addresses the necessity to speak the gospel openly without restraint. This is especially true of those called to the public office of the ministry.⁵⁴⁷

In this regard, the question to be answered is whether Singaporean civil religion and law make any demands on citizens which transgress the moral teaching of Scripture. Does civil law in Singapore demand that citizens there transgress the Ten Commandments? As far as the second table of the commandments and its external demands, the answer is a quite firm “no”. Singaporean civil righteousness does not *require* the transgression of the second table. It also does not *require* the transgression of the first table of the law, in the sense that no one is

⁵⁴⁴ Matt. 28:18–20.

⁵⁴⁵ Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:23–24.

⁵⁴⁶ Matt. 18:18; John 20:22–23.

⁵⁴⁷ Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 183. Forde makes the argument that from early times “the ordained minister was to make public proclamation of and public argument for the Word of God, to care for the public witness and theology of the church, to administer the sacraments as public acts, and to call the public and its magistrates to public account before divine law.” (emphasis added)

obligated to fear, love, and trust in a particular god. There is freedom of religion, even if it has historically been qualified by some restriction of civil liberties.

Another way to approach the question of limitations is to ask whether civil religion in Singapore makes indifferent matters into ultimate matters. In the language of the confessions this would involve making belief in a particular human teaching or the practice of a particular human tradition into a requirement for salvation. Discussing Gal. 2:6 Luther memorably comments on Paul's rhetorical argument against the false teachers in Galatia who, claiming apostolic authority in succession from the three pillars of the Jerusalem church, James, Cephas, and John, preached that circumcision and other works of the Mosaic law were necessary for salvation. To counter these claims of apostolic authority Paul contends "whatever they were at one time makes no difference to me; God does not take into account human credentials."⁵⁴⁸ New Testament exegetes see in these words of Paul an appeal to Epictetus and other moral philosophers who use the term *adiaphora* to describe things that are ethically neither good nor bad but indifferent. "Reputation, offices and honors are all matters of indifference, because they cannot compel one to change one's opinion about what really matters."⁵⁴⁹ Epictetus further categorized morally indifferent things as including health and wealth. Whereas *adiaphora* themselves are neither good nor bad, our use of them can be good or bad and lies within our control.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, vol. 41 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Ralph P. Martin (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 43–54. This phrase is taken from Longenecker's translation, 43, and dovetails nicely with Luther's understanding.

⁵⁴⁹ James L. Jaquette, "Paul, Epictetus, and Others on Indifference to Status," *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 56 (1994): 74.

⁵⁵⁰ Jaquette, "Paul, Epictetus, and Others on Indifference to Status," 75.

In Galatians Paul is not concerned about moral purpose, like the philosophers, but the “truth of the gospel.”⁵⁵¹ Luther extends this line of thought in his analysis of Paul’s argument in chapter two but appeals to the Word of God, not Greek philosophy.⁵⁵² Luther drives home the point that God uses stations, offices, i.e. social constructs and positions, in order to rule and order human life. Only Christians, taught by the Holy Spirit through the Word, truly perceive that it is God who lies behind “the prince, the magistrate, the preacher, the schoolmaster, the scholar, the father, the mother” and so forth.⁵⁵³ Most importantly, in so recognizing these masks that God uses to accomplish his will in temporal matters, the Christian can give them the proper honor and respect while not forgetting that ultimately it is God who deserves our trust and praise in all things. For Paul the truth of the gospel, that we are justified freely without following the Mosaic or any other law, was at stake in Galatia. What had previously been an indifferent matter in the churches with regards to circumcision had been elevated to the nonnegotiable. Indeed, previously Paul himself had encouraged Timothy to be circumcised in order to facilitate his ministry among the Jews, even after the Jerusalem council had made public the judgment that circumcision was not necessary for Gentile converts.⁵⁵⁴ But in the Galatian situation Paul condemned the same act of circumcision because something indifferent was being made ultimate.

Does Singaporean civil religion make indifferent matters ultimate? This is another way to address the question of whether God places limits on obedience to the authorities in the current historical situation. From a Christian perspective, as has been maintained above, there is a certain

⁵⁵¹ Jaquette, “Paul, Epictetus, and Others on Indifference to Status,” 76.

⁵⁵² LW 26, 94; *Lectures on Galatians (1535)*. Luther cites Lev. 19:15, 2 Chron. 19:7, Acts 10:34, Rom. 2:11, Eph. 6:9, and Col. 3:25 to establish that God is no respecter of person. “God does not care about such things.”

⁵⁵³ LW 26, 95; *Lectures on Galatians (1535)*.

⁵⁵⁴ Acts 15; Acts 16:3.

danger that civil righteousness may take the place of the secular and spiritual righteousness of the confessions. In other words, a civil righteousness of reason will be forwarded as an alternative to a biblically informed understanding of the two kinds of righteousness. Some reasonable narrative of human life will take the place of the biblical narrative and so, a competing location for human fear, trust, and solace will be offered, especially when civil society attempts to maintain a completely neutral stance with respect to any religious referents. The gap in political legitimacy or the need for human identity will require filling with something or someone. That seems to be one of the universal problems for religion in a political entity that aims for religious neutrality and the complete separation of religion from the state. But as to the question of whether Singaporean civil religion and civil righteousness requires one to regard indifferent matters as ultimate, it seems that no, it does not. There is still space for individual religious practice and belief.

A final way to consider the question of limits is to ask—is one able to pursue love of God and love of neighbor according to the dictates of conscience as biblically (and confessionally) informed? Before considering this question in more detail it is also helpful to summarize some aspects of society and government relative to the practice of true religion. First, the confessions and Scripture endorse a role for government in that it establishes an ordered and peaceful society.⁵⁵⁵ Second, as a result of this laudable purpose, civil authority and those who govern should expect Christian citizens to honor and respect them, insofar as matters of earthly life are concerned. Third, the command to love one's neighbor includes not only the negative

⁵⁵⁵ LC LP 74; *Book of Concord*, 450. Luther states, “Indeed, the greatest need of all is to pray for the civil authorities and the government, for it is chiefly through them that God provides us daily bread and all the comforts of this life... Although we have received from God all good things in abundance, we cannot retain any of them or enjoy them in security and happiness were he not to give us a stable, peaceful government. For where dissension,

constructions found in the Decalog, but also the more expansive and positive understanding that is considerably fleshed out in Luther's small and large catechisms. Thus, willingness to care for the poor, the disadvantaged, and the oppressed is clearly included in loving one's neighbor. Fourth, the New Testament portrays a church that concerns itself with doing good in society while at the same time peacefully pursuing what it considers to be the practice of the truth or true religion. Fifth, the apostles demonstrate in their lives a concern for dialog and interaction with people of different faiths, so that the truth and good news of the gospel can be shared with all people. And sixth, public witness and testimony to Jesus and the work that He accomplished on our behalf is a necessary part of Christian life. Does Singaporean civil righteousness prevent the pursuit of any of the six points above? In reality only point number six seems to be in any way threatened, primarily through the continuing emphasis on harmony and the limits on speech that can be implemented through the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, which has been discussed extensively above.

strife, and war prevail, there daily bread is already taken away or at least reduced.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER WORK

Conclusions

The first four chapters of the dissertation demonstrate the nature of Singaporean civil religion and law, showing in particular how its values of harmony and self-cultivation put at risk a proper understanding of Christian righteousness. The three poles of Singaporean civil religion and its narrative story create three significant problems for Christian faith in the Republic, namely, curtailed freedom of religious expression, a civil righteousness and way-of-life that competes with the Christian narrative, and a tendency to harmonize all religious perspectives as the same. Chapter 5 argued that a public theology is needed to counter the claims and tendencies in civil religion. Logically, for Lutheran Christians this public theology is based on the historic Lutheran confessional documents. The need for such a public theology is especially great for the “heartlanders” of Singapore whose lives are more directly controlled by government programs and policies as opposed to the “cosmopolitans” whose lives are characterized by greater economic and personal freedom. The crux of this public theology lies in maintaining the distinction between the passive righteousness of Christian faith with all other types of righteousness within the particular orders of life in Singapore.

As to the first problem of curtailed religious expression, there is a great tension built into Singaporean civil religion because religious reason is ruled out-of-bounds in public discussion, yet civil leaders desire an ultimate foundation for public morality and legitimate rule. Political leaders cultivate religious support for public morality, but frankly argue that public morality can be grounded in non-religious or cultural Asian values. But the more significant challenge to religious expression stems from the argument that public religious speech is inherently

dangerous from the perspective of political stability. Essentially, an argument is being made that in modern, pluralist society religious talk needs to be scrutinized much as treasonous talk is scrutinized during periods of war. Christian leaders and pastors need not formulate a political action plan to respond to this situation, but should clearly offer an alternative construction of society that acknowledges the hand of God throughout all areas of life while at the same time questioning this divisive characterization of religious discourse.

Christians in Singapore should point out that public theology and public religious expression is not dangerous to social well-being. There is value in approaching life holistically, acknowledging the connection between religion and social life. Christians offer grounds for public morality and order within religious reason, but do not demand that all members of society confess the Triune God. Instead, Lutheran theology offers a construction of life that distinguishes between secular and divine righteousness. This theological perspective encourages those from other religious traditions to join together in developing and negotiating standards for public morality and behavior that support many goals within society. At the same time, this framework for understanding life offers differing religious traditions the freedom to openly confess their particular faith. Christian pastors and leaders should take every opportunity to confidently confess their faith publicly in order to dispel the notion that religion is somehow divisive, while distinguishing the unique perspective that in Christ, out of love and mercy, God has supplied for his people a perfect righteousness, distinct from the civil order and law.

The second problem, the nature of Singaporean civil righteousness and the way-of-life that it promotes, creates its own complex of issues. Lutheran theology conceives of the Christian life as a rich and multi-faceted engagement in the life of this world, not as a reclusive withdrawal into an inner spirituality. Detachment and escape from suffering or civil society in no way

characterizes the movement of baptismal life in Christ, which puts to death the old sinful nature in order that a new creature, alive in the Spirit may rise to live, bound freely to the will of Christ and intimately engaged in the structures of society. In everyday life the sacramental signs through which God has promised forgiveness of sins and the blessing of new life are extended into the “profane” work-a-day world. The poor or disadvantaged are taken as Christs among us, to be treated with dignity and served in ways that tend toward restoration, not problems to be solved. Thus a political viewpoint that encourages citizens to conceive of religion and religious life as separate and distinct from civil society is at odds with a robust Lutheran theology of vocation. The doctrine of the two kinds of righteousness may sound as if it separates private and public life in such a way as to discourage Christians from their callings in the civil realm; however, this is a significant misunderstanding of the teaching. The two kinds of righteousness and the two governments actually relate faith and life in such a way that spiritual righteousness animates a renewed and joyful civil life that willingly engages and supports society in the face of our neighbor.

Historically, Christian values and sensibilities have significantly shaped Singaporean law and civil religion. This has had a positive effect on the toleration of all religions and on free religious expression. This Christian influence has continued into the modern city state in the form of jurists and legal experts who attempt to influence public policy and civil law. Mathew Mathews has argued that, in fact, conservative Christian forces provide a conscience for the state. The prophetic function of Christian dialog with the leaders and jurists in Singapore is laudable. It serves to align public morality with Christian convictions regarding moral life. It also tends toward good order. Yet, Christians should be clear in their understanding and witness that there is no Scriptural command for a complete Christianizing of law and many would argue that

high moral standards adequate for civil life are accessible to all people through natural law and reason. The danger in turning civil law into a direct reflection of the law within any religious tradition is that civil righteousness can then be construed as right standing before God. In other words civil righteousness can easily be seen to crowd into the doctrine of justification. This is exactly what happens within the Confucian tradition, where righteousness in civil matters confers heavenly favor and blessing. Christian leaders need to guard against this intrusion into the righteousness of faith by teaching and preaching the unmerited righteousness that is given to all believers in Christ.

The narrative of Singaporean civil religion also has a reductionist tendency that regularly places the individual and family in service to the state and larger society in the name of material prosperity and political stability—to the exclusion of religious reason. Its pragmatic/utilitarian pole uses “salvation” as a metaphor for economic life and success. Of course, to Christians who see an abundant and blessed life in a life restored in relationship to the eternal and personal Creator of All, this misses the mark of what salvation means. Distinguishing the two realms and the two kinds of righteousness that God desires offers some promise of restoring a unity to lives characterized by a separation of civil and religious reason and action. The Christian two kinds of righteousness perspective encourages an active life in the world and social institutions that is grounded in the truth of how God has structured human life and creation. This perspective maintains that divine righteousness and relation with God is established solely through the work of Christ and liberates those who have been given this righteousness to actively contribute to communal life that is shared with people from any religious tradition.

Lastly, the aforementioned political challenges to peaceful civil life encourage governmental leaders to characterize and treat all religions as similar. Those in public life who

characterize and experience religion primarily as a dangerous source of division in civil life tend to receive more than a fair hearing in a society that values peace and harmony. This does not necessarily lead to the homogenization of different religious beliefs, but in practice it seems already to have that tendency in Singapore political life.⁵⁵⁶ To combat the homogenization of different religious belief Christian leaders should delineate in a non-threatening manner the honest differences that exist between the many faiths in Singapore. Tolerance and love for our fellow citizens need to be distinguished from syncretistic worship practices, for example. From the Christian perspective, the most important point to keep in mind during this type of apologetic and witness is that Jesus was crucified for our sins and that as a result He gives to us, at no cost and as a result of no merit, the forgiveness of our sins and a new life that begins today. Moving on to issues of secondary concern, such as how gratitude for Christ's gift to us is expressed in our lives, should not occupy central position in this public dialogue. On the surface many facets of ethics and law appear to be similar in different faith traditions. This blurs deeper doctrinal divisions. Moving too quickly to assess and promote cooperation between faith traditions without speaking to the distinctly different animating nuclei denies the centrality and uniqueness of what Jesus of Nazareth has accomplished.

⁵⁵⁶ Goh Chok Tong, "In Celebration of Religious Harmony", speech given at Stamford Green, Fort Canning Park, Singapore, 19 July 2008, National Archives of Singapore, <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/public/> (accessed January 15, 2013). In this speech Goh lauds how "different faiths are located side-by-side, and how *religious organisations participate in each other's major celebrations*." He also notes favorably how "the efforts of the government are complemented by our religious organisations, which increasingly incorporate an inter-faith dimension within their own celebrations." From the civil government's perspective this brings about greater understanding across religious communities.

Further Work

In a project of this type it is inevitable that many different research areas are treated as secondary and do not receive the attention they warrant. In this situation there can be no substitute for sharing one's research with local specialists in the fields of political philosophy, jurisprudence, sociology, and religion in order to gather perspectives and correctives to the work already undertaken. Since Singapore has an established and growing academic and theological community, it would be greatly desired to share and interact with those communities in order to critique and plan any further work as it relates to Singaporean civil religion and religious climate.

In a more general sense, since the events of September 11, 2001, the global context for the coexistence of various religious traditions has shifted significantly, especially in countries where no clear majority dominates religious discussion in either a populist or an academic sense. In this kind of context it seems that national civil religions will take on a greater importance in maintaining social cohesion within many countries. This may certainly be the case in liberalizing Asian states such as China, Vietnam, and Burma. The same might also be said for the growing democracies in Eastern Europe who have also experienced liberalization since the end of the cold war. They, too, would seem to have growing secular civil religions which are functioning as strong narratives in popular life. It would be of great interest to study and understand the nature of civil religion in these states and compare them with Singapore.

Finally, the project thus far has been suggestive, in that a vehicle of discourse, civil religion, has been used in order to speak about the interaction of religious and public life using vocabulary and narratives other than the separation of church and state, or the rights of citizens to freedom of religious practice and expression. Instead of maintaining that civil life and religious life must be kept strictly separate, the discussion of civil religion and traditional

religions illustrates that there is a competition between the narratives of national life and any other distinct religious tradition. There will always be tensions and points of conflict. This honest assessment of the state of affairs in modern pluralistic society can be beneficial for both civil and religious authorities because it allows for dialogue and interaction instead of domination and domestication of either religion or public life. It would be fruitful to further develop these ideas within the Lutheran confessional context.

APPENDIX ONE

2010 SINGAPORE CENSUS STATISTICS

Table 1: Resident Population Percentages Aged 15 Years and Over by Religion

<i>Religion</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>
Total	100.0	100.0
Buddhism/Taoism	51.0	44.2
Christianity	14.6	18.3
Islam	14.9	14.7
Hinduism	4.0	5.1
Other Religions	0.6	0.7
No Religion	14.8	17.0

Table 2: Resident Population Percentages Aged 15 Years and Over by Religion & Ethnicity

<i>Ethnic Group/Religion</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>
<u>Chinese</u>	100.0	100.0
Buddhism/Taoism	64.4	57.4
Christianity	16.5	20.1
Other Religions	0.5	0.7
No Religion	18.6	21.8

<u>Malays</u>	100.0	100.0
Islam	99.6	98.7
Other Religions	0.4	1.1
No Religion	0.1	0.2
<u>Indians</u>	100.0	100.0
Hinduism	55.4	58.9
Islam	25.6	21.7
Christianity	12.1	12.8
Other Religions	6.3	5.4
No Religion	0.6	1.1

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