

UWTSD

Christian-Muslim Relations: Texts, Past & Present (HPRS7023)

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Assessment 3: Select one area of historical interaction between the Christian and Islamic traditions. Analyse and assess its continuing relevance to, and influence on, those contemporary interactions between Christian and Islamic communities.

Topic: Continuity and Change: Christian-Muslim Relations in Singapore From the British Colonial Era to Post-Independent Singapore

INTRODUCTION

This paper posits that Christian-Muslim relations in Singapore during the British colonial period (1819-1965) and post-independent era was largely one of tolerance and avoidance, with little interactions at the grassroots level. Prior to colonialism, while there were records of European men who settled in Southeast Asian Islamic communities prior to the colonial period, intermarry with local women, converted to Islam and blended into the local culture, this was a rarity rather than a norm (Barnard 2015, 259, 264, 268). Most British during colonial times found it unbelievable that any Europeans would want to live in the Malay world by their own choice (2015, 264). For most part of their interactions with the local Muslim community, the Europeans viewed Christianity and Western culture as more superior to Islam and Islamic culture. In the Singapore context, living in separate enclaves during British rule and because of class differences, there was hardly any opportunities for deep interactions to take place between the European Christians and Malay-Muslims. During colonial times, otherwise peaceful, Christian-Muslims interactions in Southeast Asia were often fraught with issues of strong religious affiliations to one's identity, cultural differences, and differing perceptions of each other (2015, 264).

This paper will first discuss the Christian-Muslim relations during the British colonial rule in Singapore. It will argue that the British's socio-economic policies and their perception of the Malay-Muslims hampered their interaction with the Malay-Muslim

community in Singapore. More than anything else, commercial interests came first for the British when they first arrive in Singapore. Thus, their implementation of the policy of “divide and rule” was considered as the best approach to manage the different ethnic communities at the point in time (See 2019, 78). This would help communities stay out of each other’s affairs and “divide and rule” was clearly an avoidant strategy to prevent conflicts. However, it was detrimental to the building of relations between the various communities and especially between the European Christians and Malay-Muslims. This would compound the issue of the Malay-Muslims’ perception of Christianity’s being closely associated with the British Colonial Enterprise and their wariness of the Christian missionaries to convert them. The British colonial legacy would continue to bear relevance to the development of contemporary Christian-Muslim relations in post-independent Singapore as we see a continuity of some of the policies and perceptions, albeit with shades of changes. Finally, as See noted, Christian-Muslim relations in Singapore “has to be seen amidst a wider context of Christian-Muslim relations in Southeast Asia and the rest of the world” (2019, 79). Thus, this paper will conclude with two ongoing global challenges facing Christian-Muslim relations in Singapore and what it means for them.

BRITISH COLONIAL RULE AND ITS IMPACT ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN SINGAPORE (1819-1965)

On January 30, 1819, the British arrived in Singapore. Subsequently, On February 6, 1819, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, representing the British East India Company signed a trade treaty with the Temenggong Abdul Rahman and Tengku Hussein Mohamed Shah (whom the British recognised as the Sultan of Johor) who represented the Johor-Riau-Lingga Sultanate to establish a trading base in Singapore (See 2019, 18-19). This treaty formally established British presence in Singapore and paved the way for Singapore to be placed under British colonial rule subsequently. It must be noted that at the time of the arrival of the British, the Malays, who were the indigenous people of the Malay Archipelago were already present in Singapore and they have adopted Islam as their religion (See 2019, 20; Nasir et al 2010, 35). With the coming of the British to Singapore, Christianity was introduced to Singapore. The London Missionary Society (LMS) with the support of Raffles would formally establish its

mission in Singapore and evangelise to the local unconverted masses (Goh 2009, 9). The British's socio-economic policies, perception of the Malay community, and Christianity's close association with colonialism would contribute significantly to the lacklustre Christian-Muslim relations conducted during the colonial era.

British's Socio-Economic Policies Displaced the Malay-Muslim Community

Firstly, the British's liberal migrant policy greatly upset the status quo of the Malays in Singapore. The Malays were quickly outnumbered by the large influx of migrants from China and India in the early nineteenth century. To develop Singapore which was largely an uninhabited island at the point of the British's arrival in 1819, the British welcomed a large influx of migrants mainly from China and India (See 2019, 27; Nasir et al 2010, 5). By 1860, Turnbull noted that the Malays population has fallen third place after the Chinese and Indians (37). By 1967, the Chinese migrant community has become the single largest ethnic community in Singapore and grew to constitute 65% of the Singapore population (Turnbull 1980, 36). Subsequently, with the coming of more different migrant groups such as the Indian-Muslims and Arab Muslims, the Malays were also displaced in terms of traditional leadership (See 2019, 26). Being outnumbered suddenly in their place of origin, and coupled with a "loss of identity, heritage and a sense of place in society," See argued that the "psychic security" of the Malays were affected, and they remain insecure largely (2019, 26).

Secondly, the British's policy of "divide and rule" is fundamentally a pragmatic socio-economic policy, which was based on the British's notion of race and aimed at Singapore becoming a thriving trading port (Nasir et al 2010, 5, 36). Underlying this policy is the belief that the migrant communities did not have any emotional ties or vested interest in Singapore and would soon return to their homeland when they have earned enough. The British were first and foremost focused on each of the migrant community contributing to the economic interests of the British. The policy of "divide and rule" was seen as the best way at that time to keep each racial group to their own social enclaves to prevent social conflicts and to leave it to their own community to take care of their own needs (Chua and Kwok 2001, 87-88). As a result of this policy of "divide and rule," there was hardly any social integration that took place during the colonial rule. While the communities largely co-exist peacefully during the early

colonial period, Turnbull noted that there was barely any inter-mingling between the various ethnic communities as each group was kept separated in their own social enclaves and by their “deep differences in language, religion and customs” (65-66). Colonial Singapore was a classic example of a plural society created by the British “with different sections of community living side by side, but separately within the same political unit (Furnivall 1956, 304). Thus, during the colonial period, one can safely conclude that at the grassroots level, each ethnic group kept mainly to their own kind and interacted within their own community. There was no attempt on the part of the British to integrate or assimilate the migrant communities to the indigenous Malay culture. See opined that for most part of the nineteenth century, there was hardly any deep interactions between the Christian and the Malay-Muslim communities in Singapore (2009, 44).

Thirdly, the British’s education policies for Malay children created a wider religious, cultural and economic rift between the Malays and the rest of the migrant communities as it kept them contented at a basic level of vernacular Islamic education (Mutalib 1990, 14). The Malays were resistant to send their children to the Malay vernacular schools which the British encouraged as means to upgrade their learning and skills (31). The Malay-Muslims were displeased that the bible was being used as a school text and the study of Qur'an relegated to secondary importance (31). As a result, the Malay-Muslim community became isolated from the rest of the other communities in colonial Singapore and retreated further to their own Islamic schools to safeguard their faith and way of life (Aljunied and Hussin 2005, 254-55). With no opportunities for upgrading of their skills and livelihood due to the lack of the English language, the working language of the elites and low level of education, the Malay-Muslims were largely left behind during the colonial period. This would become a systemic problem for the Singapore government to deal with when it became independent from British rule.

British’s Perception of the Malay-Muslims

Another factor impeding Christian-Muslim relations in colonial Singapore would be the British’s common perception that the Malays were an “indolent race” (Aljunied 2009, 3). The Malays were often associated with laziness and this view has been perpetuated again and again till this present time (2009, 3). With regards to the Islamic

faith of the Malays, the British held certain erroneous views that the Malay-Muslims in Singapore were nominal in their faith and practice of the religion (2009, 9). The British also held on to the belief that the majority Malay-Muslims in Singapore would not lean towards extremist militant Muslims and become violent towards the British (2009, 10). However, this myth of the indolent, passive and nominal Malay-Muslims was set to be debunked and shattered with the Maria Hertogh Riot in 1950.

The Maria Hertogh Riot is historically viewed as a Christian-Muslim conflict (See 2019, 65). A legal tussle over a 13-year-old child erupted into a major religious conflict in Singapore and forever scarred the local communities in Singapore. The child in question was a Dutch Roman Catholic by background who was adopted and raised in a Muslim family and who converted to Islam (2019, 67). The Maria Hertogh Riot demonstrated that when religious sentiments are stoked for the wrong reasons, and fuelled by biased and insensitive press reporting, it became an issue of a Christian government pitting herself against the Muslim *Ummah* and their Islamic laws (2019, 65-72). It also clearly showed that the British did not have a proper and good understanding of what was going on within the Malay-Muslim community. The British had underestimated the power of the Islam to unite all Muslims regardless of their religious leanings when their religion is being denigrated or challenged.

Christianity's Close Association with the British Colonial Enterprise

The close association of Christianity with British colonialism is another key issue that affected Christian-Muslim relations in Singapore. By the time Christianity came to Singapore, Islam has already been entrenched in Southeast Asia since the twelfth century (Nasir et al 2010, 36). Christianity is often seen as a Western foreign religion and “an outsider compared to the ‘Asian’ religions of Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism” (Goh 2009, 10). It is difficult for the British government to disassociate herself from Christianity nor Christianity from British colonialism. Christianity is almost synonymous with colonialism most times. As Goh opined, “Christianity and Christian institutions were inevitably aligned with colonial rule and the cultural hegemony of the Europeans” (2009, 9). Christian mission schools were seen by the Malay-Muslims as a key avenue for the advancement of Christianity and the imposition of western values by the British.

In the early days of the colonial enterprise in Singapore, Christian missions started schools to educate children from all races and religions. However, they were given monetary assistance and land resources by the British government to assist them in their attempts to educate the locals (See 2019, 23-24, 30-31). Thus, the Malay-Muslims were extremely wary of such endeavors in the name of education as covert means to convert their children to the Christian faith. It was only until 1891 with the coming of William Shellabear, a missionary from the Methodist missions that there was a breakthrough in a warmer relation between the Christians and the Muslims and some Malays began to send their children to the schools run by the missionaries (2019, 44).

Shellabear showed a genuine interest in the Malay language and culture, and concern for the socio-economic progress of the Malay-Muslim community through higher education (Hunt 2002, 9, 30). Shellabear's legacy paved the way for Christian missions to the Malay-Muslims in Singapore to be conducted in a respectful manner; honouring the Islamic religion instead of the usual anti Islam polemics by early Christian missionaries to the region. However, Baines and Marrison both made similar conclusion that the Christian missionaries made no headway in their evangelisation efforts to the Malay-Muslims in Singapore (Baines 1960, 119; Marrison 1957, 296). Up to the 1960s, Muslim converts to Christianity were far and few in between (Baines 1960, 119). Marrison also noted that Christian-Muslim relations in Singapore prior to independence continued to be conducted in a sensitive, tolerant manner (Marrison 1957, 296). On top of the mind of the British government was that relations between religions should not bring about disturbances in the society (1957, 296).

CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN POST-INDEPENDENT SINGAPORE (1965 - PRESENT)

Post-independence in 1965, the British colonial legacy continues to bear much relevance and impact on Christian-Muslim relations in Singapore. Christianity's close association with the West and colonialism continues to stay in the mind of the people (Goh 2009, 9-10). Today, Christianity is clearly an anglophone religion in Singapore, with most adherents using English during religious services (Goh 2009, 11).

Christianity's evangelical zeal continues to present uneasiness to the Malay-Muslim community just as it did in the colonial times, and this remains a major roadblock in Christian-Muslim relations in Singapore. On the management of race and religion issues in Singapore, British colonial policies also continue to bear weight on Singapore's State's policies in the post-independence era. Continuity and change in relations with Singapore's social policies and its impact on Christian-Muslim relations will be discussed in this section.

The Label of Christianity As An Anglophone Class-Based Religion

The label of Christianity as an anglophone class-based religion remains a problematic category to deal with when it comes to Christian-Muslim relations in post-independent Singapore. Goh opined that the practise of religion in Singapore is intricately bound to "racial-cultural identities to a high degree" (2009, 4). This can be seen as a colonial legacy. During colonial times, Christianity was associated with the "whites" and thus was seen as a religion belonging to a superior race and upper class. Race, language, culture and class difference would be the top key barriers to any interaction between the Christians and Muslims. Furthermore, because of the social enclaves that the British has deliberately created during their time to prevent social and racial conflicts, the European Christians living in the urban town area would hardly mix with the Malay-Muslims in the rural areas. In post-independent Singapore, the practise of Christianity and Islam would remain closely bound to racial cultural identities. Today, the Muslims remains majority Malays while the Christians in Singapore are majority Chinese instead of the Europeans (Goh 2009, 3). This can certainly be attributed to the impact of the British education policies during the colonial times (Goh 2009, 11).

During the British colonial times, while most Malay-Muslims were resistant to an English-medium education provided by Christian mission schools for fear of their Islamic faith being corrupted and conversion to Christianity, the Chinese migrant community enthusiastically enrolled their children in these schools (See 2019, 31 Turnbull 1980, 104). This resistance caused the Malay-Muslims to separate themselves further from the rest of the migrant communities in Singapore. The Chinese migrants would subsequently emerge as the majority race in Singapore as many settled down permanently in Singapore, and converted to Christianity (Goh 2009,

3). Goh's analysis of the Christianity community in Singapore today paints a picture that is almost similar to the colonial times. Majority of the Chinese in Singapore who converted to Christianity are like the Europeans who were English-speaking (Goh 2009, 11). Socio-economically, they also belonged to the middle and upper-middle class in the society like the Europeans because of the higher education they received in comparison to other races. This set the Chinese Christians in great contrast to the struggling working class in Singapore, of which majority of them are the Malay-Muslims (Goh 2009, 13; Nasir et al 2010, 37-39). While most Singaporeans today speak English as the first language because of a clear shift in the education policy since independence, there remains a clear divide between Chinese-Christians and Malay-Muslims today in Singapore because of religion, class and race.

Christianity's Evangelistic Zeal An Affront to the Malay-Muslims

Christianity in post-independent Singapore, as in colonial times, continues with its distinctive evangelistic zeal to convert the unconverted. This was clearly an affront to the Malay-Muslims community who saw themselves as target of these evangelistic activities. In Singapore, it is known that "To Be a Malay Is to be A Muslim." Thus, to get the Malays to consider converting to Christianity is clearly offensive to them. The religion and customs of the Malays have in times past been safeguarded under the British because of their indigenous status as original people of the land. In post-independent Singapore, the religious and cultural interests of the Malays continue to be safeguarded by the Singapore constitution (Nasir et al 2010, 36). The Singapore government recognised the special position of the Malays as the indigenous people of Singapore (2010, 36). Christian evangelisation to the Muslims remains a very sensitive issue in Singapore and has to be handled with much respect and care. Otherwise, it will certainly bring about inter-faith conflicts between the two religions.

A case in point would be in the 1970s and 1980s when Singapore witnessed two decades of intensive evangelistic activities, which contributed to the high growth rate in Christianity (Sng 2003, 284). Evangelistic rallies were held in churches and public spaces, and Christian tracts were distributed nation-wide to households (2003, 286). The evangelistic zeal of the Christians created unhappiness in the Malay-Muslim community and the Christians were being criticised for being insensitive to people of

the other faiths (2003, 297-298). According to Sng, the Malay-Muslim community counter-attacked the Christians' evangelistic endeavours with an Islamic conference in the 1980s to address the issue of being the target of Christian outreach (2003, 297-298). As a result, the relationship between the Christian and Muslim communities was tense. Most times in Singapore, it takes the State to intervene in the religious conflicts of different faiths and to maintain religious and racial harmony in the country. By November 1990, the Singapore government has passed the "Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act" to regulate religious practice in Singapore. This act came into effect in 1992 and it was done to ensure that no one religion or person stirs up any feelings of "enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility" between religions and disrupt the peace and harmony within the society (Singapore Statutes Online 2023). As Goh notes, the Act is "actively restrictive, explicitly policing and reinforcing the boundaries between the religions" (2009, 5). Enacting laws is the government's pragmatic approach to prevent any serious religious conflicts from arising in Singapore that will be damaging and detrimental to the ongoing nation-building efforts towards a peaceful multiracial society.

Singapore's Framework of Multiracialism to Safeguard Communal Harmony

Singapore prides itself as a success story of a secular state with a multicultural society at work. Singapore's brand of multiculturalism is better known as multiracialism (Nasir 2010, 6, 36). Multiracialism in Singapore largely functions according to the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others) concept, respecting and allowing each ethnic group's language, culture and religion to flourish in the nation-state (Nasir et al 2010, 3). In a sense, this multiracialism concept continues to fit J.S Furnivall's classic description of a plural society and is somewhat also a continuity from the British colonial policy of "Divide and Rule" where the distinctives of each race, culture and religion co-exists side by side (Furnivall 1956, 304; Marranci 2011, 824; Nasir et al 2010, 36). However, at the same time, there are significant changes that have taken place since Singapore become an independent nation-state.

While the Singapore government still recognises the need for the religion, culture and language of different ethnic groups to flourish, they have realised that social integration is seriously lacking at the grassroots level since colonial times. Without social

integration and meaningful interaction at the deeper level, this would bode potential issues and conflicts for inter-race and inter-faith problems. Having witnessed the Maria Hertogh riot in 1950 during the British times and two serious racial riots in 1964 just before independence, management of racial and religious issues was critical for the new nation state in 1965. Social policies were deliberately implemented to enable different races/religions to interact more and for the State to have better control over the religions and races in Singapore for social stability (Nasir et al 2010, 4). One substantial change to the social policies emerging from the colonial days pertained to housing policies. The government began to move away from housing the same ethnic group in the same social enclaves like in the colonial times. Instead, by the 1980s, in the public housing estates, there are ethnic quotas to be maintain for each ethnic group so that there will be some form of interactions among its residents (SG101 2023a). In 1989, the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) was introduced. Then Singapore Minister for National Development S. Dhanabalan warned that “it would be ‘unthinkable’ for Singapore to regress to the days before independence, when a certain place was seen as belonging to a certain ethnic or dialect group” (SG101 2023a). Thus, the EIP would help the different races/religions in Singapore to intermingle with one another more at the grassroots, everyday level and for community leaders to understand better the needs of the different races/religions.

Following from the British times, the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO), a non-government organisation continues to play a key role, coming alongside the Singapore government to help maintain peace and harmony in the society within the multiracial framework today. See noted that the idea of the IRO which came into being in 1949 was first mooted by a prominent Muslim leader and chaired by a Protestant Christian (See 2019, 51). See also noted that the IRO has been the main platform on which Muslim and Christian leaders interact engage and work together over the last five decades (2019, 51). The IRO has since expanded to include representatives of other faiths and works with the government to help different faiths understand each other better through regular inter-faith activities and places of worship sites visits. The IRO is an indispensable grassroots organisation in inter-faith dialogues and interaction today in Singapore.

ONGOING CHALLENGES FACING CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM INTERACTIONS IN SINGAPORE

Singapore is located in between two neighbouring countries, Malaysia and Indonesia which are Muslim majority countries (Nasir et al 2010, 6). Not only does Singapore have to manage the Christian-Muslim relations within with sensitivity but constantly, Singapore and both faith communities will also have to manage what is happening globally and ensure it does not ensnare their relations locally and globally. Global events such as the 9/11 Twin Towers attack in 2001 and the rise in religious fundamentalism and revivalism will continue to have significant impact on Christian-Muslim relations in Singapore and pose challenges to their ongoing interactions.

9/11 And The Aftermath

The 9/11 Twin Towers attack by the Al-Qaeda in the United States (U.S.) in 2001 and thereafter the launch of the U.S. “War on Terror” and the Western media constant use of the term “Muslim and Islamic terrorists” led to the increase in Islamophobia in the West (Green 2015, 122; Kabir 2010, 117-119). Muslims were often labelled as the “other” in their host countries and seen as potential terrorists posing a dangerous threat to national security (Green 2015, 296; Morey and Yaqin 2011, 64; Najimdeen 2015, 88). The rise in Islamophobia also spread to Southeast Asia when she was positioned by U.S. as a second front of U.S. war on terrorism (Gershams 2002, 60). This together with the arrest of thirty-four members of the terrorist organisation Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Singapore in August 2002 further led to the heightened fears towards Malay-Muslim loyalty to Singapore and their religious affiliations to external Islamic organisations (Marranci 2011, 826). There were Muslim Singaporeans among those arrested who were planning bomb attacks throughout Singapore (826). As a result of the rise in global threat of Islamic terrorism to national security, churches in Singapore were also called to beef up their security and surveillance during key festive events such as Christmas, especially when there were recent acts of terrorism globally (Ng 2016).

In the post 9/11 era, the rise in incidences of acts of terrorism committed by Islamic extremist group overseas have led to renewed concerns and fears over Islam as a religion and its threat to local security in Singapore (Nasir et al 2010, 48-49 . At the

same time, due to easy access to social media, networking and contents pertaining to extremist ideologies, the Christian and Muslim communities in Singapore also have to deal with more incidences of self-radicalisation among her people. In recent times, more cases of self-radicalised Singaporean Muslims and recently a young Christian youth who was planning to commit acts of terrorism against Muslims in two mosques in Singapore were being reported (Mahmud 2021; SG101 2023b).

Each time a self-radicalised individual is arrested and detained by the local security authority and plans of an attack on a religious institution, or the community is disclosed, the respective Christian and Muslim religious authorities will almost immediately issue official statement to their congregants to condemn the planned acts of terrorism and speak up for their faith and also for the other religious party affected. For example, pertaining to a report of two self-radicalised Muslims being arrested in Singapore, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore issued a statement on 20 June 2017 to their congregant to speak about the issue and to exhort everyone that “security is everyone’s responsibility” and to urge all to maintain the peace, harmony and unity within the society. It was interesting to note that in the letter that there was also a deliberate effort to shore up support for the local Muslim community,

Importantly we need to stand by our Muslim brothers and sisters. These latest arrests painfully put the entire Malay-Muslim community under the spotlight through no fault of theirs. Muslims are peace loving people who are also looking forward to give thanks to God for their holy month of Ramadan as they prepare to celebrate the festival of Eid better known here as Hari Raya Adilfitri this weekend (The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore 2017).

Christian-Muslim relations in Singapore remains very much a sensitive issue in Singapore and both parties must swiftly handle issues like the threat of terrorism or self-radicalisation with care and sensitivity and not allowed any one to take advantage of the situation to create religious fault-line in the country.

The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism and Revivalism

The rise in religious fundamentalism and revivalism around the world for both Christian and Islamic faiths will continue to bear an impact for Christian-Muslim relations in

Singapore. The race to become the world's largest faith continues. According to the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life's projection in 2011, the global Muslim population is expected to grow at twice the rate of the non-Muslim population in the next two decades. From its current 1.8 billion adherents, Islam is projected to have 2.2 billion adherents by 2030 (Pew Research Center 2011, 13). Islam is also expected to be on par with Christianity or surpass Christianity in terms of adherents by 2050 (Pew Research Center 2011, 13).

With the internet and social media, the call to Islam (*da'wah*) has gone global and is now easier for Muslims all over the world to unite with the global *Ummah* and gain quick access to trending Islamic ideals (Mellor 2016, 4). As for Christianity, it is also a global faith. Goh noted that Singapore being an anglophone country with a cosmopolitan culture is a natural hub for Christianity in Southeast Asia and a link to other Christian cultural centres in Asia and the world (2009, 21). The proliferation of Christian evangelisation and Islamic *da'wah* activities in Singapore and around the Southeast Asia region is burgeoning (Goh 2009, 8; Johns 2002, 190). This will continue to pose a challenge to the interactions between both faiths as such religious activities hit at the raw nerve of each other's faith. The push and drive to expand the "Kingdom of God" on earth through evangelisation by the Christians will surely remain a threat and a point of sensitivity to the Muslims whose call to Islam is for their adherents to be faithful and devoted to their faith.

CONCLUSION

The historical baggage of the colonial past continues to haunt present Christian-Muslim interactions. It is not easy for the Christians in Singapore to shed off Christianity's association with colonialism and it being seen as a foreign religion – an anglophone faith. The social, cultural and religious distance that has been established between different race/religion during colonial times remain an ongoing work in progress in contemporary Singapore (See 2019, 143). In view of social stability, Christian-Muslims relations is heavily regulated by the State through its national policies and laws enacted. Formal inter-faith relations continue to be conducted mainly

via the Inter-Religious Organisation in Singapore and dialogues with the State. See opined,

For too long, we have taken the multi-religious and multi-racial nature of our Society as a given. We dealt with our differences by avoiding the issues or letting leaders settle problems behind closed doors (2019, 246-147).

As in the colonial times, Christian-Muslim relations in contemporary Singapore continues to be one of tolerance and avoidance, with little interactions at the grassroots level. With heavy state intervention at the onset of any religious tension or conflict, it does not behoove anyone, Christians or Muslims to get out of their comfort zone to engage each other at the grassroots level on hard issues pertaining to their faith. There is also no urgency for individual Christians and Muslims to understand each other's better by learning about one another's faith. The road ahead remains challenging for Christians and Muslims to have deep interactions at the grassroots level about issues of faith as there is simply no motivation or urgency to do so in peace times. Yet, history has shown us that all it takes is for a certain group to feel discriminated or for their faith to be denigrated that a little spark can set off a fire. Surely, Christians and Muslims must not wait for that to happen before they decide to engage at a deeper level in the grassroots and understand more about each other's faith and culture. Singapore does not have a common culture to bind Christians and Muslims together, but certainly the Christians and Muslims have a shared history to learn from and a common shared future to work towards a deeper understanding of each other's faith.

(5082 Words)

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