

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: York St John University</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 33 (Theology and Religious Studies)</p>
<p>Title of case study: Theology in the Public Sphere: development of public theology for peace-making</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This impact case study relates to the development of a public theology for peace-making. Public theology concerns Christians engaging in dialogue with those outside church circles on various issues of common interest and involves urging Christians to take the opportunity to participate in the public domain in modern secular democracies. In the course of, and as a result of, his research on the public engagement of theology in the modern and post-modern societies of India, Korea and the UK, Professor Sebastian Kim has developed methodologies which enable theology to make a public contribution to peace-making.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The impact depends on research in three areas: religious conversion in India; the role of religions in peace and reconciliation; and the development of the methodologies for theology in public life.</p> <p>a) Hindu-Christian debates on religious conversion in India: The most contentious issue between Christian and Hindu communities in India has been the problem of conversion. The research examined the major debates on religious conversion between Hindus and Christians and among Christian theologians in twentieth-century India after Independence in order to assess the main arguments for and against conversion and the reinterpretations of conversion. The result of the research was published as <i>In Search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversion in India</i> (OUP, 2005), and subsequently Kim has also published over fifteen articles on related topics.</p> <p>b) Religion, peace and reconciliation: Professor Kim started this project in 2006 in the Theology and Religious Studies Section in order to examine methodologies for sustainable and constructive contributions to peace and reconciliation, particularly in the Korean peninsula. The main aim of this project was to discuss the issues associated with building religious communities for sustainable peace and reconciliation, and for this the research team led by Kim utilized approaches from a variety of different contexts in order to gather concrete findings for peace-building initiated by religious communities. As a result, Kim published <i>Peace and Reconciliation: In Search of Shared Identities</i> (Ashgate, 2008) and a further three volumes – <i>Building Communities of Reconciliation: Reflections on the Life and Teaching of Reverend Kyung-Chik Han</i> (Nanumsa, 2012); <i>Building Communities of Reconciliation: Christian Responses to Situations of Conflict</i> (Nanumsa, 2012); <i>Building Communities of Reconciliation: Christian Theologies of Peace and Reconciliation</i> (Nanumsa, 2012).</p> <p>c) Theology in public life: For the development of public theology, Kim established the Centre for Religion in Society (CRiS), a research centre at York St John University in 2008. The activities of the CRiS include the publication of the <i>International Journal of Public Theology</i>, of which Kim is the founding and current Editor. In particular, it engages in conversation with policy-makers and practitioners through special issues such as ‘Climate Change and the Common Good’, ‘Obama: An American Commentary’, ‘Faith, Welfare and Well-being’ and ‘Restoring Justice’.</p> <p>The CRiS also organises the Ebor Lectures. Kim initiated this series of lectures as part of the practical application of public theology. The series aims to promote public conversation between the academy, religious communities and the wider society and to contribute to the formation of personal decisions and collective policy-making in economic, political and social spheres. These</p>

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lectures have been an instrument for the active application of academic thinking and reflection to contemporary issues of day to day society. Selected lectures have been published as *Liberating Sacred Texts? Revelation, Identity and Public Life* (SPCK, 2008) and *Christianity and the Renewal of Nature: Creation, Climate Change and Sustainable Living* (SPCK, 2011).

3. References to the research

Sebastian Kim, *In Search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversion in India* (New Delhi & Oxford: OUP, 2005).

Sebastian Kim, *Theology in the Public Sphere: Public Theology as a Catalyst for Open Debate* (London: SCM Press, 2011).

Sebastian Kim, 'Religious Conversion and Law in India: Controversy over the 'Freedom of Religion' Acts Chapter in Christine Lienemann (ed), *Change of Religion, Change of Confession, and Conversion within Confession, in Religious Plural Societies* (Göttingen: Neukirchener Verlag, 2012), 693-718.

Sebastian Kim, 'The Public Significance of the Christian Gospel in Plural Societies: Some Aspects of Engaging in Public Theology' in Martin Reppenhausen (ed.), *Kirche Zwischen Postmoderner Kultur und Evangelium* (Göttingen: Neukirchener, 2010), 113-31.

Sebastian Kim, 'Reconciliation Possible? The Churches' Efforts Toward the Peace and Reunification of North and South Korea' in Sebastian Km, Pauline Kollontai & Greg Hoyland (eds), *Peace and Reconciliation: In Search of Shared Identity* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 161-78.

Sebastian Kim, 'The Word and the Spirit: Overcoming Poverty, Injustice and Division in Korea' in Sebastian C.H. Kim (ed), *Christian Theology in Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 129-53.

4. Details of the impact

Kim's research on methods of theological engagement in the public sphere has had significant and demonstrable impact in the following respects:

(a) *In Search of Identity: Debates on religious Conversion in India* (OUP, 2005) was acknowledged as 'a landmark in studies on conversion' (*Seminar*) and 'a handy reference both for policy-makers and scholars' (*Telegraph*) by the media. Since joining York St John University in 2005, Kim has given invited public lectures and papers in various international meetings and events (e.g. Chennai & Pune 2005; Cambridge 2006; Switzerland 2010 & 2011). As evidenced through email discussions with Kim and invitations to speak at various church, religious and public events, this book has been read by policy-makers, journalists, religious leaders and the general public as well as researchers and students of sociology, religion, theology, history, politics, and law. In 2007 and 2008, Kim was consulted by Indian religious and political leaders (including Mr Ashok Chowgule, Director, Hindu Vivek Kendra; Mr Surendra Jain, National Spokesman, Vishva Hindu Parishad). Kim was invited to Lambeth Palace on 27th July 2010 as a consultant to inform the Archbishop of Canterbury regarding religious conversion in preparation for his visit to India during October 2010, and especially in preparation for a meeting with prominent Hindu leaders in Bangalore. The Archbishop and his assistants expressed their great appreciation to Kim for his advice on religious conversion, which is the most contentious issue between Christian and Hindu communities in India.

(b) The main impact of the work on religion, peace and reconciliation has been on the Christian communities and on the general public in South Korea, particularly during the time of the International Conference on Peace and Reconciliation in Seoul in 2010. 150 participants were invited from 40 different countries, mainly prominent church leaders, peace activists, NGO

personnel, theologians and scholars of peace studies. They were joined by some 200 South Korean church leaders, politicians, policy makers and NGO leaders. Together the participants visited the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and the Joint Security Area (JSA) on the border between the North and South Korea, which drew significant Korean media attention. Throughout the conference, national media broadcast and published the activities of the conference and disseminated the conference discussion through interviews with the participants. A press conference with the keynote speakers was held with 20 major national media organisations which covered various issues concerning the theory and practice of Christian contributions to peace and reconciliation in the Korean peninsula and lessons from other contexts. The amount of media coverage given throughout the 5-day conference indicates that this event was considered by wider Korean society as a major gathering for a serious examination of peace in Korea.

As a result of the publication of the book *Peace and Reconciliation*, Kim received an invitation from the University of York to provide a half-day session on religion and peace-building for the Chevening Conflict Resolution Course in 2010, sponsored by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). It brought together twenty participants from across the world who work in civil service, government, journalism, the military, NGOs and United Nations posts.

(c)The Ebor Lectures represent a significant landmark in the engagement of theology with public life in the UK. Between October 2007 and October 2013, a total of 12,100 people attended the Ebor lectures (the average attendance at every lecture was 400 and the lecture given by BBC business correspondent Robert Peston reached 1,500). As evidenced by the continuing high attendance, the lectures have become a major event in the region, generating discussions on contemporary issues and bridging between academics, policy makers and religious experts and the wider public. The lectures are published in book form and through podcasts and blogs. The lectures are reported by the local and national media as they meet the need for relevant interaction with various public issues (see, for example, BBC News, 26 March 2009; *The Telegraph*, 26 March 2009, *Daily Mail*, 26 March 2009; *Church Times*, 26 March 2009, 27 November 2009, 20 April 2010, 28 May 2010; *The Press*, 14 September 2006, 26 November 2009, 2 January 2010, 12 March 2010, 12 October 2009, 5 October 2010, 8 February 2011, 30 September 2011; *Yorkshire Post*, 16 February 2010; *Mensa Magazine*, December 2009, January 2010). The impact of the Ebor Lectures is evidenced through some of those attending who say that attending the lectures often gives them a better understanding of issues; in some cases people say that this has made them recognise the need to be more actively involved in issues (e.g. poverty, environmentalism, anti-racism) within their localities. Some of the Churches in York and the wider region are also using the content and discussion emerging from the Ebor Lectures in promoting understanding amongst their members about the important role of religion in the public sphere.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Christianity Today, 1st July 2008,

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/2005/issue87/indiarecommendedresources.html?start=2>)

BBC NEWS, 'God "will not give happy ending"', 26 March 2009,

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7964880.stm>

The Telegraph, 'Archbishop of Canterbury: Humanity risks environmental "doomsday"', 26 March 2009,

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/climatechange/5049919/Archbishop-of-Canterbury-Humanity-risks-environmental-doomsday.html>

Kuk-Min Ilbo (Korean daily national newspaper), 3 November 2010,

<http://news.kukinews.com/article/view.asp?page=496&qCode=all&arcid=0004287375&code=23111511>

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The Korean Christian Times, 14 October 2010,
http://www.kchristian.com/?mid=korea&page=3&document_srl=1693&sort_index=readed_count&order_type=desc

'Ebor Lectures Survey, 2012-2013 series', October 2013 (<http://www.yorks.ac.uk/ebor-survey>)

Former Archbishop of Canterbury/ Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, South Korea / Professor at Seoul National University

General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

Senior Pastor, Younknak Church, Seoul, South Korea