

The JD Northey Lecture

Thursday 21 September 2017 7:00 pm
at The Centre for Theology & Ministry
29 College Cres., Parkville VIC 3052

Christian Witness in an Age of Violent Competing Fundamentalisms

Lecturer: Prof Sathianathan Clarke

Religions tout peace, peace even when they themselves are identified more with violence on the world stage. Some of this stems from the expansion of fundamentalism, whereby religions cultivate the muscular, inflexible and imperial from their scriptural and theological storehouses to construe their witness in the world. Against the escalation of what I term competing religious fundamentalisms, I envision Christian witness as encompassing two aspects of engagement with the world: “the undoing project” dismantles beliefs and practices that legitimize the violent establishment of divine imperial order and “the redoing project” circulates nonviolent ways of living between religions, mindfully completing each other in God’s economy of abundance.

The first part of the lecture analyzes the absolutist, conflictual and expansionist vision and mission of fundamentalisms in the world as a religious problem. Using Islam and Christianity as competing fundamentalisms, I glean religious themes that bind these present day violent movements. In the second deconstructive segment of the lecture, I make an audacious though honest effort to disarm the violence that is extracted from Scripture to legitimize such a destructive worldview. I suggest that an embodied canon of nonviolent self-giving (Jesus Christ) be utilized to relativize and humanize an encrusted canon of violent self-expansion. In the third constructive part of the lecture, I revisit the sacrosanct theological concepts of ‘grace’ and ‘work’. I reinterpret both of these key doctrines with an eye toward curing the violence that religions have fermented in the world. I suggest that ‘distributive grace’ and ‘costly work’ are Christian offerings to guide witness in our violence-ridden world.

For further information, please contact:

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Sathianathan Clarke has graduate degrees from Madras University (MA), Serampore University (BD), Yale Divinity School (STM) and Harvard Divinity School (ThD). He is the author of *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India*, and more recently, *Competing Fundamentalisms: Violent Extremism in Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism* (Westminster John Knox, 2017).

He started his ministry in the Church of South India as a social worker and priest for the Diocese of Madras among Dalit communities in rural India. From 1996-2004, Clarke taught in the Theology and Ethics department at the United Theological College, Bangalore, India. He works passionately for justice for the poor and has travelled extensively to educate and encourage inter-religious dialogue. For the last fifteen years, he has taught and lectured on global Christianity, contextual theology, postcolonial mission, and interreligious dialogue in India, U.S.A., United Kingdom, Germany, Sri Lanka, Korea, South Africa, and Liberia. Clarke bridges the world between establishment and the marginalized, the global and the local, and academy and the congregation.