

2020

## Jesus, the Last Scapegoat: A Chinese-Indonesian Christian Theological Imagination for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

Hans Harmakaputra  
*Hartford Seminary*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social\\_encounters](https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters)

 Part of the [Chinese Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Comparative Politics Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#), [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#), [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#), [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#), and the [South and Southeast Asian Languages and Societies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Harmakaputra, Hans (2020) "Jesus, the Last Scapegoat: A Chinese-Indonesian Christian Theological Imagination for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation," *The Journal of Social Encounters*: Vol. 4: Iss. 2, 50-60.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69755/2995-2212.1053>  
Available at: [https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social\\_encounters/vol4/iss2/5](https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/vol4/iss2/5)

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Social Encounters by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@csbsju.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@csbsju.edu).

**Jesus, the Last Scapegoat:  
A Chinese-Indonesian Christian Theological Imagination  
for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation**

Hans Harmakaputra  
Hartford Seminary

**Abstract**

*After enduring the systematic oppression under Suharto's three-decade regime (1967-1998) in Indonesia through discriminatory policies, Chinese-Indonesians suffered an enormous loss in the 1998 riots that signified the end of Suharto's regime. Many Chinese-Indonesians were killed, raped, and displaced. A few years later, the new government abolished the discriminatory policies against Chinese-Indonesians, and they started to enjoy equality as citizens of Indonesia. However, negativities that resulted from the traumatic experiences cannot be diminished easily. This essay suggests a Chinese-Indonesian Christian theological imagination of Jesus' crucifixion that aims to deal with communal trauma and contribute to the peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. This theological imagination can transform the negative feelings and trauma of Chinese-Indonesian Christians through the hermeneutic lens of memory, forgiveness, and hope.*

**Introduction**

May 1998 marks the abrupt end of Suharto's authoritarian rule for thirty-two years in Indonesia as president after he resigned from his office. Before his resignation, Indonesia had a terrible financial crisis since 1997 that prompted massive demonstrations led by college students in Jakarta as well as across the country. Amid these crises, Chinese-Indonesians became obvious targets in riots that happened in Jakarta and several other cities. The killing, looting, raping, and displacement from home traumatized not only direct victims and survivors, but also numerous Chinese-Indonesians around the country. The event looks like a culmination of the discriminatory politics established by Suharto's regime toward Chinese-Indonesians since he assumed power in the late 1960s. The prohibition of Chinese cultural expression in public, not being able to take certain governmental jobs, and the imposition to change Chinese names into more "Indonesian" names are among them. Nevertheless, the history of discrimination of Chinese-Indonesians can be traced back to Dutch colonial times. Since Indonesia's independence in 1945, whenever a social crisis occurred, Chinese-Indonesians always became one of the victims (Winarta, 2008; Sindhunata, 2007). Although the situation has improved gradually in the post-Suharto era, which is known as the "Reformation" era from 1998 to now, the bad memory of discrimination and violence still haunts many Chinese-Indonesians.

The Reformation era ushered in positive developments related to democratization, including limiting the role of military officers in public; freedom of the press; multiparty elections, among others. Particularly important to Chinese-Indonesians, several discriminatory policies were abolished so that Chinese-Indonesians could integrate more fully into society. Several changes in the Reformation era include admitting Confucianism as one of the official religions (along with Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, and Hinduism); making the Chinese New Year a public holiday; and lifting the ban to express Chinese culture in public. As a multi-cultural country that consists of more than one hundred and fifty ethnic groups (Suryadinata, 2018), those positive

*Jesus, the Last Scapegoat:  
A Chinese-Indonesian Christian Theological Imagination  
for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation*

developments were meant to amend the adverse treatment of Chinese-Indonesians who were treated as second-class citizens and the scapegoats of the society. Moreover, the positive relations between people of different ethnic backgrounds ensure the political, social, and economic stability in a multi-cultural society. Unfortunately, trauma does not dissipate easily among Chinese-Indonesians even after the Reformation era has proceeded for more than twenty years, nor does anti-Chinese sentiment. The controversy of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama between 2016 and 2017 (Cochrane, 2017) demonstrates how anti-Chinese sentiments still exist and can be utilized as tools for political gain (Setijadi, 2019). Purnama was a Chinese-Indonesian Christian former governor of Jakarta who lost an election and was imprisoned for the allegations of blasphemy toward Islam. Although the issue of religion was more apparent, anti-Chinese sentiments played a significant role too.

Changing regulations or policies alone cannot guarantee the sustainability of peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. As scholars have demonstrated, peacebuilding and reconciliation in post-conflict societies require other means as well. John Paul Lederach argues for the importance of narratives in peacebuilding, including in the context of severe social conflict (Lederach, 2005). Violence does not form a single action. Instead, it tends to re-recreate itself and multiply into a cycle of violence. Lederach states that an effective way to transcend violence is through generating, mobilizing, and building moral imagination (Lederach, 2005). Here, narratives play a significant role in such an attempt. Similarly, scholars of trauma studies speak about the importance of narrative or stories. Cathy Caruth points out the inextricable relations between narratives and trauma (Caruth, 1996). Stories signify the ongoing impact of the traumatic experience to the present lives of the people, not merely past history that has little or no relevance. At the same time, stories provide opportunities for healing. More specifically, from a theological point of view, Shelly Rambo utilizes the Christian imagination of Jesus' death and resurrection to help Christians dealing with trauma (Rambo, 2017).

In this essay, I propose a Chinese-Indonesian Christian theological imagination of Christ's crucifixion as a way to shape the narrative of Chinese-Indonesian Christians about themselves and their relations to other people in public space. Trauma generates negative feelings toward oneself and other people. It obstructs the efforts toward social reconciliation and peacebuilding. By proposing this theological imagination, I hope to provide a way to transform negative feelings of Chinese-Indonesian Christians caused by trauma, encourage forgiveness, and motivate their participation in reconciliation and peacebuilding. The proposal combines the experience of Indonesian-Chinese Christians with S. Mark Heim's (2006a; 2006b) theological construction of Jesus Christ as the last scapegoat, which is derived from René Girard's (1998; 2010) theory of mimetic desires and scapegoating.

First, I will briefly explore the negative experience and communal trauma of Chinese-Indonesians. The following part presents a theological imagination of Jesus as the last scapegoat, which draws insights from René Girard's scapegoat mechanism theory and S. Mark Heim's elaboration on Christology from a Girardian perspective. Third, I connect the theological imagination of Jesus as the last scapegoat with the traumatic experience of Chinese-Indonesian Christians and present the ways which such theological imagination can be transformative.

### **Stranger in Their Own Land: Chinese-Indonesians' Negative Experience and Trauma**

The book of Judges Chapter 12 recounts a narrative about an intertribal conflict between the Gileadites and Ephraimites. The people of Gilead under Jephthah hunt the remnant of the defeated Ephraimites by forcing every person to say 'Shibboleth.' When they find a person who pronounces it 'Sibboleth,' they immediately kill the person. In this story, because both groups share similar physical features as the children of Israel, only the linguistic accent distinguishes one tribe from the others. For Chinese-Indonesians, the 'Shibboleth' that differentiates them from other ethnic groups is not an unseen feature—like an accent—but their outer, physical appearance. As soon as people see their slanted eyes and lighter skin color, they are recognized as Chinese-Indonesians. Chinese-Indonesians have been living in Indonesia as their own land, and the current law states their legal status as indigenous Indonesians, but, still, others often treat them as strangers (Freedman, 2000; Suryadinata, 2018; Setijadi, 2019).

Many times in the United States, people ask me this set of questions: "Why are you named 'Hans'? Is it not a German name? Is it a made-up name?" Some of them are satisfied with my usual answer: "It is because I came from a Chinese-Indonesian family, who has embraced Western culture. I have plenty of cousins with Western names: Rebecca, Ian, Diana, Matthew, Audrey, and so on." However, only a few dared to ask further, "And what prompted your family to do that? Why are they not satisfied with their own culture?" Among other factors, the most significant one for that cultural-shift was the implementation of discriminatory policies against Chinese-Indonesians conducted by Suharto's regime. Chinese-Indonesians were prohibited from displaying any cultural expression in public, were forced to change their Chinese name, and endured other kinds of limitations in social and political realms (Setijadi, 2019; Suryadinata, 2018). Such policies legalized the segregation that had already existed in Indonesian society and contributed to the larger negative atmosphere between Indonesian-Chinese people and people of other ethnic groups. As a result, enmity and stereotyping permeated the relationships between different social groups in society, especially when some Indonesian-Chinese people, as a minority ethnic group, enjoyed better economic prosperity (Freedman, 2000). This stereotype based on economic assumptions persists even in the post-Suharto era (Setijadi, 2017). In this case, the negative relationship is not only caused by ethnicity *per se*, but is interwoven with political and economic factors as well. It is not surprising then that Chinese-Indonesians always become an ideal scapegoat whenever conflicts and riots emerged in Indonesian society. The beginning and the end of Suharto's power were marked by anti-Chinese violence (Setijadi, 2019).

Chinese-Indonesian, as an ethnic group, consists of around 1.20% of the total population of Indonesia (approximately 240 million in 2010). In terms of religion, Indonesia has the largest number of Muslims in the world. Around 85.51% of the total population identified as Muslims. The second-largest religion is Christianity (Protestantism/Catholicism/other denominations) with 9.90% of the total population. The rest is comprised of Hindus (1.69%), Buddhists (0.72%), and Confucians (0.05%) (Suryadinata, 2018). Chinese-Indonesian Christians comprise around 43% of all Chinese-Indonesians in 2010, which demonstrated an increase from 35% in 2000 (Koning, 2018). Regarding participation in politics in the post-Suharto era, more Chinese-Indonesians have been elected as members of national and provincial parliaments as well as elected as mayors or deputy mayors (Suryadinata, 2018)

*Jesus, the Last Scapegoat:  
A Chinese-Indonesian Christian Theological Imagination  
for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation*

By using term Chinese-Indonesian, I do not mean to erase the diversity within Chinese-Indonesians (Suryadinata. 2018; Setijadi, 2016) and Chinese-Indonesian Christians (Hoon 2013). The category of “Chinese-Indonesian” entails ambiguity in itself because there are at least three cultural positions. First, some Chinese-Indonesians culturally lean toward their Chinese heritage by keeping its customs, languages, world-view, and so on (Suryadinata, 2018). Second, there are Chinese-Indonesians who are more prone to one of the other Indonesian indigenous cultures (Hoon 2013). Joas Adiprasetya’s position is an example of the second position as his hybrid identity is more informed by Javanese culture despite being a Chinese-Indonesian (Adiprasetya, 2013). Last is the position where they prefer to identify with Western culture and to adopt a Western lifestyle. These three categories have porous boundaries, and each can overlap with each other easily. Some Chinese-Indonesians might fit in the first or second category but are informed by Western culture as well. Here, I speak of a more dominant cultural preference rather than an exclusive cultural boundary. For example, some Chinese Indonesian Christians can be included in the third category because of their perception that the conversion to Christianity means an abandonment of Chinese culture (Hoon, 2013). Yet, they still maintain a Chinese identity despite being incapable of speaking Chinese and rarely partake in any Chinese cultural customs. The three cultural positions I proposed suggests the ongoing negotiation between cultural and religious identity.

One of the most traumatic events for contemporary Chinese-Indonesians is the riots in May 1998. During these riots surrounding the fall of Suharto, and the political transition into the *Reformasi* (Reformation) era, Indonesian-Chinese people in Jakarta and several other cities suffered many casualties. Data shown by the National Commissions for Women (*Komnas Perempuan*) confirms that there were strong anti-Chinese sentiments among the perpetrators and a large number of Chinese-Indonesian men and women among the victims (Komnas Perempuan, 2006). Chinese-Indonesians’ houses and properties were targeted specifically by the rioters, either being vandalized, stolen, or burnt to ashes. Many men were killed, and women were gang-raped—even in public places—during the riots (Purdey, 2006; Soebagjo, 2008; Freedman, 2000). The atrocities left a deep scar for Indonesian-Chinese people, either for those who were directly victimized or indirectly affected by severe fear, trauma, and lack of trust toward those outside their ethnic enclave (Sutandio, 2019).

Although the situation has improved significantly in the Reformation-era due to the rescinding of the discriminatory policies from Suharto’s time, it does not mean that the anti-Chinese sentiments have diminished, as shown by scholars (Setijadi, 2019; Suryadinata 2018). As I mentioned briefly in the introduction, in the blasphemy case of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, the former governor of Jakarta who is also a Chinese-Indonesian Christian, the anti-Chinese sentiment was quite apparent through racist rhetoric (Setijadi, 2017). It means the anti-Chinese sentiments were suppressed but did not dissipate. On the other hand, Chinese-Indonesians still harbor negative feelings, fear, and trauma. The resentment, hatred, stereotyping, fear, trauma, and other negative feelings hinder true reconciliation and peacebuilding. There are people, both Chinese-Indonesians and not, who still maintain these reciprocal negativities. These realities apply to Chinese-Indonesian Christians too.

In my spiritual journey as a Chinese-Indonesian Christian, and also for many other Chinese-Indonesian Christians, Jesus' crucifixion stands as the core of the faith. The most popular understanding of Jesus' crucifixion perceives the event as a sacred sacrifice of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, who brought atonement reconciliation. The cross is a strong symbol of redemption and salvation. Nonetheless, the event is mainly interpreted as a salvation for the soul. As a result, the traditional understanding of Jesus' crucifixion is inadequate to transform the negative feelings entrenched in society. As an alternative, a better narrative that enables the victims and survivors, who think of themselves as the scapegoat of the society, to overcome their trauma and to establish a better relationship with other people in the society should be constructed (Lederach 2005). In this regard, René Girard's thought of the scapegoating mechanism is applicable to construct a theological imagination that can transform Indonesian society in general by shaping the narrative of Chinese-Indonesian Christians.

### **Jesus, the Last Scapegoat**

Girard's projects deal enormously with the issue of violence in human society. His theory explains the cause of violence in the history of humanity as a primordial pattern—inherent and hidden. The pattern of mimetic-violence functions primarily as a mechanism to sustain the stability of society through sacrificing one person or one group as the scapegoat for society. When a community is in chaos and disorder, the people will focus their violence on one person or group to bring order and tranquility to that society. The victim becomes a sacrifice, and, yet, is treated afterward as something of a divine being. “‘To sacrifice’ in fact means ‘to make sacred,’” says Girard (Vattimo & Girard, 2010, p. 24). Unfortunately, it is not the end because the mechanism is a cycle of violence that can appear again and again in human history.

Christianity, according to Girard, rejects this mechanism of violence and, as attested by the Bible, continuously attempts to disclose and overcome this hidden truth of it. “Christianity reverses this situation,” claims Girard, “demonstrating that the victim is not guilty and that the unanimous crowd knows not what it does when it unjustly accuses this victim” (Vattimo & Girard, 2010, p. 25). Through the disclosure of the mimetic-violence, Christianity intends to save both victims and crowds from this eternal cycle of mimetic-violence.<sup>1</sup> Jesus' self-sacrifice has revealed the mechanism completely. Jesus has disclosed, not only how mimetic rivalries work, but also how the mechanism leads only to murder and death. In any dreadful situation where perpetrators oppress victims, God has always been on the side of the victim, not the perpetrators (Girard, 1998).

The theme is further elaborated more theologically by S. Mark Heim (Heim 2006a). Heim confronts the theological view that situates God as the one who wanted the blood of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Instead, society—not God—demanded Jesus' crucifixion as a sacrifice. This paradigm is called redemptive violence because, by doing violence to the scapegoat, all members of society are saved from the destruction of killing each other. Heim states:

The Romans are at odds with the Judean Jews. Jewish factions are at odds with each other. The Romans are afraid of rebellion. The religious leaders are afraid of repression. Pilate is ready to make Jesus a politically redemptive sacrifice, to keep his contagious preaching from stirring social crisis. Some of the chief priests are ready to make Jesus a religiously redemptive sacrifice, to keep his blasphemy and sin from contaminating the community. They all expect Jesus' death to have a reconciling effect on this situation (Heim 2006b, p. 23).

*Jesus, the Last Scapegoat:  
A Chinese-Indonesian Christian Theological Imagination  
for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation*

Although Jesus' death brought a reconciling effect, the cycle should not end there. After Jesus, other scapegoats may appear and face the same fate of becoming the sacrificial scapegoat for the society. The cycle of violence, through the sacrifice of innocents, would continue. Fortunately, Jesus' crucifixion did not follow the logic of mimetic-violence mechanism because it is God's intervention to stop this mechanism precisely by revealing the hidden truth behind the violence. Cycles of violence occur when mimetic rivalry exists, but because Jesus is God's incarnation, nobody can rival him (Heim 2006a). Jesus was the ultimate scapegoat, and his resurrection indicates God's favor upon all innocent victims. Heim says, "The one who lived without scapegoating is made a scapegoat. But resurrection and divine vindication make that witness permanent and inescapable. The Jesus who was a victim protects the victim" (Heim 2006a, p. 226).

From this theological vantage point, Jesus, as the last scapegoat, saves humanity once and for all from their inherent violent inclination. God's intervention through Jesus' crucifixion was a counter against the mechanism of scapegoating that had enchained humanity (Heim 2006a). Through Jesus, God disclosed the invisible pattern of sacred violence that had estranged humankind from the very beginning and, thus, saved them from the false peace at the cost of innocent victims. As a result, there is hope for the true reconciliation between God and humans, and between humans and their neighbors (Heim 2006a).

Sindhunata, a Jesuit from Indonesia who utilized a Girardian perspective, reflects on Jesus' resurrection as God's intervention with respect to the violent ways of humankind. Instead of avenging Jesus' death with another act of violence, God resurrected him and invited the killers to partake in a new life that is not bound to the cycle of mimetic-violence. God chose the path of non-violence, love, and forgiveness as the ultimate way of salvation and invited all people to follow it (Sindhunata, 2007). God's call to all Christians is to proclaim this good news under all circumstances so that violence has no power over human society anymore. Heim states that Christians are saved from the sacrifice through Jesus' self-sacrifice so they might live to end human violence (Heim 2006a). The empty cross of Jesus is a reminder for Christians "to remember Christ's death in order to avert others, and exhibits the truth of sacrifice in order to end it. There is in Jesus no desire for death, and no desire for suffering" (Heim, 2006a, p. 259).

**Memory, Forgiveness, and Hope:**

**Theological Imagination and the Transformation of Negative Experience and Trauma**

As stated by Rambo, trauma does not dissipate easily and automatically through the flow of time. Rather, it makes the past event persist as an intrusive reality to present life, both individually and collectively, and hinders "one's ability to engage the world as one did before" (Rambo, 2017, p. 4). According to Rambo, addressing trauma "entails attending to layers of covering and uncovering, appearing and disappearing, surfacing and receding" (2017, p. 5). It is the reason why the issue is not only related to the structure of the experience but also to the capacity to give witness to it. In other words, the ways in which the person with trauma deals with their memory matters.

On the other hand, Jesus' crucifixion shapes the Christian imagination on how Christians should deal with suffering by making their wounds connected to Christ's (Rambo, 2017; Rambo, 2010).

Theologians have raised issues with the cross as it has been used to legitimize violence and glorify suffering that contradicts the liberative power of the story of Jesus Christ. Jürgen Moltmann shows how the cross has fueled Christians with anti-Semitism that led to acts of violence toward Jewish people, and Christians should consider this awareness when looking upon the cross (Moltmann, 1993; Rambo, 2017). Black and womanist theologians express their criticism of the traditional way of understanding Jesus' crucifixion. James Cone argues that one must read together the cross and the experience of black lynching in the United States to see its liberative power (Cone, 2011). Delores Williams, a prominent womanist theologian, speaks about how the surrogacy experience of black women changes the understanding of Jesus' crucifixion. An example of the surrogacy experience is how black women had to take the role of nurturing white kids or took care of the household, which is comparable to the story of Hagar and her surrogate experience of birthing a child on behalf of Sarai in Genesis 16: 1-2 (Williams, 1993). Instead of holding tight to a doctrine, Williams propagates the primacy of black women's experience in understanding God's liberating power that empower them, "Thus black women's question about Jesus Christ is not about the relation of his humanity to his divinity or about the relation of the historical Jesus to the Christ of faith...Jesus is their mother, their father, their sister and their brother. Jesus is whoever Jesus has to be to function in a supportive way in the struggle" (Williams, 1993, p. 117).

The ventures of reinterpreting the cross are not only transforming the theological understanding on the cognitive level but also how people see themselves in relation to the cross. Therefore, as Rambo suggests, the trauma of people, including the negative experience of Chinese-Indonesians, challenges the meaning of redemption (Rambo, 2010). Here, the notion of memory and remembering play pivotal roles. It is important to realize that trauma affects all people and binds lives together because "no one remains untouched by overwhelming violence" (Rambo, 2010, p. 9). Rambo's statement supports Lederach's suggestion that the construction of any moral imagination must take account of all people in a web of relationships that includes those who are considered to be the enemies (Lederach, 2005). Unlike the familiar phrase "forgive and forget," true forgiveness can never be achieved without remembering. The memory of the horrendous event must be kept alive by perpetrators, bystanders, and victims/survivors. Thus, the constructed theological imagination must consider all people. On one side, it shapes the memory of the victims and survivors that help them to overcome their trauma. On the other side, it keeps the memory alive to allow repentance and prevent future violence. Here, I will emphasize more the first aspect of how the theological imagination helps Chinese-Indonesian Christians to deal with their trauma.

Girard has shown that the scapegoating mechanism is repeatable and will not end without proper treatment. Heim's understanding of the cross aims to unleash the liberative power of the cross to abolish violence and save both the perpetrator and victims/survivors through reconciliation. Through the theological imagination of Jesus as the last scapegoat, I suggest that Christians, including Chinese-Indonesian Christians, imitate Jesus' example by disclosing the hidden mechanism of violence and halt its cyclical effects. In this regard, memory, forgiveness, and hope are the essential elements of the theological imagination. Particularly for Chinese-Indonesian Christians and their deep trust in Jesus' redemptive suffering power through the cross, this theological imagination enriches their current understanding of Jesus' crucifixion, i.e., that Jesus died to save me from the power of sin.



*Jesus, the Last Scapegoat:  
A Chinese-Indonesian Christian Theological Imagination  
for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation*

The theological imagination of Jesus as the last scapegoat calls all victims and survivors of mimetic-violence to imitate Jesus. What does it mean to be the last scapegoat? Jesus' crucifixion does not guarantee that there would be no more violence in human history. Instead, it reveals God's stance toward human violence and God's preferential option to stand by the victims. Furthermore, Jesus' crucifixion discloses the primordial and hidden problem of human society, i.e., the sacred mimetic violence. Through resurrecting Jesus, God sets a prescription to stop the mechanism by following Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God. To follow Jesus' example as the last scapegoat means Chinese-Indonesian Christians and other victims and survivors of repression and violence should end the mimetic violence through memory, forgiveness, and hope.

Memory and remembering suggest that Chinese-Indonesian Christians look upon their negative experiences of discrimination together with Jesus' crucifixion. Here, as Rambo articulates, "the insights of trauma actually constitute the hermeneutical lens through which an alternative theological vision of healing and redemption emerges" (Rambo, 2010, p. 11). As God intends to make Jesus the last scapegoat to reveal the hidden pattern of violence and stop it, there is an imperative for the victims and survivors to fight all violence and stand by the side of the victims. Whenever violence and oppression occur, they should work together with the victims, regardless of ethnicity and religious background, to end all violence and oppression precisely because the memory of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection has transformed their negative experience. This way, the liberative power of Jesus' crucifixion that defeats sin and death may redeem the trauma.

The next element is forgiveness. Many peace-building efforts in post-conflict areas demonstrate the importance of forgiveness to usher in true reconciliation. Nevertheless, it is not easy to forgive because trauma justifies reverting negative feelings in the forms of intergroup defense, violence, and revenge (Lederach, 2005). Another challenge is when one misunderstands forgiveness. One may think forgiveness means that the victims and survivors of oppression and violence must stay passive and obedient and forget what had happened. This understanding is not true. Instead, forgiveness urges the victims and survivors not to seek revenge or perpetuate negative feelings, including stereotypes, toward others. Such actions and feelings will continue the legacy of mimetic-violence. Forgiveness is the only way to break the cycle of violence. Combined with the notion of memory and remembrance, forgiveness can transform the traumatic experience and negative feelings.

The last element is hope. Hope can easily be understood as a utopia that fails to generate any action. Christian hope takes a different route because its fulfillment requires the participation of people. The events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that testify to God's presence through the Kingdom of God becomes the anchor of Christian hope. The insights of the Girardian perspective locate the root of all violence and oppression in the hand of humankind and not God. The theological imagination of Jesus as the last scapegoat conveys the event that culminates in God's inclination to stop violence throughout history. At the same time, it reminds the victims and survivors that they are no longer captivated by their status as a scapegoat of society. Rather, through memory and forgiveness, they are invited to imitate God's non-violent way to stop violence and to aspire to transform human society, as exemplified in Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God. Girard says, "The goodness of their good news [the Gospels] depends on all of

us abiding by the rules of the kingdom of God. If we do not, if we remain vengeful, it will become impossible....to restrain the spiraling violence that does not come from God but from unrestrained humanity” (Girard, 2010, p. 106). The Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus symbolizes hope because of its nature as already-but-not-yet. Therefore, there is an inherent dimension of hope in it. The Kingdom of God manifests itself when violence is transformed into peace, hatred into love, and injustice into justice.

### **Conclusion**

The theological imagination of Jesus as the last scapegoat is constructed by reading together the event of Jesus’ crucifixion and the negative experience that traumatized Chinese-Indonesians. It is a way to shape the narrative of Chinese-Indonesian Christians in a web of relations with other people in Indonesian society to enable peacebuilding and reconciliation. As trauma continues to corroborate negative feelings and obstruct the capability of victims and survivors to live, this theological imagination provides an alternate story that situates God, all people, including the enemy and bystanders, and the structure of violence in a transformative way. It does not guarantee the abolition of all violence immediately. Yet, it clarifies God’s intention from a Christian point of view and invites all people to partake in peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts.

In this theological imagination of Jesus as the last scapegoat, the cross of Jesus is no longer a symbol of violence and glorification of suffering, but a symbol of God’s liberative power and preferential option for the victims and survivors. God who resurrected Jesus is God who breaks all forms of violence. Through this story, negative experiences and trauma of Chinese-Indonesian Christians, as well as all other victims and survivors of violence and oppression, are transformed and redeemed. Jesus’ crucifixion signifies God’s intervention in human history to establish the Kingdom of God. The story empowers the victims and survivors and brings them into reconciliation with their enemies through memory, forgiveness, and hope.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Girard admits that he had rejected the word “sacrifice” for Jesus’ crucifixion; later, he firmly supported the proper use of the word (Girard, 2010, p. 92-93).

<sup>2</sup> Gustaf Aulén identifies it as satisfaction theory according to the classical typology of atonement theories. One of the most influential proponents of the satisfaction theory is Anselm of Canterbury (Aulén, 1975)

*Jesus, the Last Scapegoat:  
A Chinese-Indonesian Christian Theological Imagination  
for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation*

**Reference**

- Adiprasetya, J. (2013). Following Jesus the Clown. *Theology Today* 69(4), 418-427. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573612463027>.
- Aulén, G. (1975). *Christus Victor: An historical study of the three main types of the idea of the atonement*. A.G. Herbert (Trans.). SPCK
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Cochrane, J. (2017, May 9). Christian Governor in Indonesia Found Guilty of Blasphemy Against Islam. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/09/world/asia/indonesia-governor-ahok-basuki-tjahaja-purnama-blasphemy-islam.html>
- Cone, J. H. (2011). *The cross and the lynching tree*. Orbis Books.
- Freedman, A. L. 2000. *Political participation and ethnic minorities: Chinese overseas in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the United States*. Routledge.
- Girard, R. 1998. The God of victims. In G. Ward (Ed.), Y. Freccero (Trans.), *The postmodern God: A theological reader* (pp. 105-115). Blackwell Publishing.
- Girard, R. (2010). Not just interpretations, there are facts, too. In P. Antonello (Ed.), W. McCuaig (Trans.), *Christianity, truth, and weakening faith: A dialogue* (pp. 88-108). Columbia University Press.
- Heim, S. M.. (2006a). *Saved from sacrifice: A theology of the cross*. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.
- Heim, S. M. (2006b). No more scapegoats. *Christian Century* 123(18), 22-29.
- Hoon, C-Y. (2013). “By race, I am Chinese; and by grace, I am Christian”: Negotiating Chineseness and Christianity in Indonesia. In S-M Sai and C-Y Hoon (Eds.), *Chinese Indonesians reassessed: History, religion and belonging* (pp. 159-176). Routledge.
- Komnas, P. (2006). *Temuan Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta Peristiwa Kerusuhan Mei 1998*. Publikasi Komnas Perempuan. [https://www.komnasperempuan.go.id/file/pdf\\_file/SDK/2.PP3\\_SDK\\_2\\_Temuan%20TGF%20Peristiwa%20Kerusuhan%20Mei%201998.pdf](https://www.komnasperempuan.go.id/file/pdf_file/SDK/2.PP3_SDK_2_Temuan%20TGF%20Peristiwa%20Kerusuhan%20Mei%201998.pdf)
- Koning, J. (2018). Chinese Indonesians: Businesses, ethnicity, and religion. In R. W. Hefner (Ed.), *Routledge handbook to contemporary Indonesia* (pp. 177-186). Routledge.
- Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford University Press.
- Moltmann, J. (1993). *The crucified God: The cross of Christ as the foundation and criticism of Christian theology*. Fortress Press.
- Purdey, J. (2006). *Anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia, 1996–1999*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Rambo, S. (2010). *Spirit and trauma: A theology of remaining*. Westminster John Knox Press.
- Rambo, S. (2017). *Resurrecting wounds: Living in the afterlife of trauma*. Baylor University Press.
- Setijadi, C. (2016). Ethnic Chinese in contemporary Indonesia: Changing identity politics and the paradox of Sinification. *ISEAS Perspective* 12, 1-10.
- Setijadi, C. (2017). Chinese Indonesians in the eyes of the pribumi public. *ISEAS Perspective* 73, 1-11.

- Setijadi, C. (2019). Anti-Chinese sentiment and the 'return' of the pribumi discourse. In G. Fealy & R. Ricci (Eds.), *Contentious belonging: The place of minorities in Indonesia*, (pp. 194-213). ISEAS Publishing.
- Sindhunata. (2007). *Kambing hitam: Teori René Girard*. Gramedia.
- Soebagjo, N. (2008). Ethnic Chinese and ethnic Indonesians: A love-hate relationship. In L. Suryadinata (Ed.) *Ethnic Chinese in contemporary Indonesia* (pp. 137-153). Chinese Heritage Centre and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Suryadinata, L. (2018). Ethnic groups and the Indonesian nation-state: With special reference to ethnic Chinese. In R. W. Hefner (Ed.), *Routledge handbook to contemporary Indonesia* (pp. 43-53). Routledge.
- Sutandio, A. (2019). Cinematic representation of Chinese-Indonesians' trauma in Jason Iskandar *The Day The Sky Roared*. *Lingua Cultura*, 13(4), 275-281. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v13i4.6000>.
- Vattimo, G. & R. Girard. (2010). Christianity and Modernity. In P. Antonello (Ed.), W. McCuaig (Trans.), *Christianity, truth, and weakening faith: A dialogue* (pp. 23-47). Columbia University Press.
- Williams, D. S. (1993). *Sisters in the wilderness: The challenge of Womanist God-talk*. Orbis Books.
- Winarta, F. H. (2008). No more discrimination against the Chinese. In L. Suryadinata (Ed.), *Ethnic Chinese in contemporary Indonesia* (pp. 57-74). Chinese Heritage Centre and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.