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SUMAINYO ANG KAPAYAPAAN: CAN PEACE BE DISPENSED? SEARCHING FOR THE PROBABLE MEANING OF THE PEACE GREETING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN JOHN 20

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Abstract. *Sumainyo ang kapayapaan* is a formal translation of the peace greeting in John 20. But does the Filipino, specifically the Tagalog translation, capture the intent of the Gospel writer? The evangelist seems to be saying that he intended more than a peace greeting when he employed on three different occasions in the passage as mentioned above, "Peace be with you." The literary structure of John 20 provides hints that the author is considering other functions for the peace salutations, such as an exhortation to the frightened disciples to be courageous. This perspective is discerned from the Johannine use of literary devices like dualism, symbolism, contrast, repetitions, and other literary clues such as statement of time element (late Sunday evening) and the locked doors that may suggest the collective fear of Jesus' disciples amid the threat of violence posed by the religious authorities. The Greek form of the peace salutation, Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν, seems to present alternative meanings of the greetings in John 20 concerning the story about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. A practical application of the result of the exegetical analysis of the peace phrase in John 20 will be sought in the light of the current theological and ecclesial

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political crises that are tearing The United Methodist Church in the Philippines apart. In the face of such religious violence, how can the United Methodist Church appropriate the peace greetings of John 20?

Keywords: *kapayapaan*, greeting, exhortation, homosexuality, LGBTQI+, *loob*

Introduction

Peace be with you is almost always understood to mean a traditional Jewish greeting. In fact, its fixed categorization as a Jewish greeting of well-being seems to discourage any appreciation of it other than as a salutation.

However, a close reading of the phrase may reveal a rift or a break between "the Semitic background of the peace greeting and the notion of the Greek word for peace in the minds of John's audience."[1] Is *Peace be with you* a peace salutation in the manner of a traditional Semitic greeting only, or should one understand it in the context of John's Gospel? The evangelist seems to have put forth a different function for the peace phrase, especially as one considers how it was woven into the narrative of John 20:19–29. One sees at once the inappropriateness of a salutation function when one factors in the context of the episode. The fear and unbelief of the disciples emanating from the threat of violence from the religious authorities and their followers inform the story about the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in the upper room. The dark and gloomy atmosphere pervading the story makes one anticipate not a greeting but an exhortation, i.e., do not fear.

It is also noteworthy that the word for peace in the Gospel appears in specific instances where the disciples appeared worried, upset, or afraid (14:27; 20:19) or in a state of unbelief (16:29–33; 20:24–28).2 These passages hint that the evangelist John may not even

[1] R. Arevalo, "Peace with You: Exploring Translation Possibilities of the Peace Greeting in John 20 in Tagalog," *The Bible Translator* 74, no. 1 (2023): 80.

[2] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 80.

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be considering peace in a theological sense but may have ascribed to it a psychological meaning. Thus, *sumainyo ang kapayapaan* may have been an artificial translation of the peace phrase so that it ill fits the context of John 20. *Kapayapaan*, in the mind of the Filipino, is the tranquil or serene state or condition of the *loob* (inner self) that one cannot simply dispense or give to another, as is implied in "peace be with you."[3] This translation leaves open the possibility that there lies a different meaning and usage in John's Gospel of "Peace be with you" other than a traditional Jewish salutation. But first, the problem of a literal translation of the peace phrase must be addressed before proceeding to the task of determining its probable meaning.

Sumainyo Ang Kapayapaan: The Problem of a Literal Translation

The peace statements in John may trace their origins and functions in the Old Testament and so reveal a Semitic background. "Peace be with you" finds several expressions in Hebrew, namely, שָׁלוֹם לָכֶם in Genesis 43:23, אַתָּה שָׁלוֹם in 1 Sam.25:6, and the more popular one שָׁלוֹם לְךָ (Judges 6:23, 19:20; 1 Sam.20:21, etc.). The Hebrew form varies in form depending on whom it is addressed. In the above examples, the first is addressed to multiple recipients (Joseph's brothers), and the next two forms were directed to individual addressees. What keeps the Hebrew salutation recognizable, at least in form, is the word *shalom* (שָׁלוֹם). Shalom suggests wholeness, completeness, good health, and peace with the self and with others. Shalom may also connote "love, full health, prosperity, redistribution of goods and reconciliation."[4] Peace is, therefore, just one aspect of the Hebraic concept of shalom. Because of shalom's broad meaning, it could be understood to occupy the topmost place in the tier of the Old Testament's covenantal values. The unpredictability of life in the wilderness and the constant threat

[3] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 80.

[4] L.N. Navarro Castro and Jasmin Nario-Galace, *Peace Education, A Pathway to a Culture of Peace,* 2nd ed. (Quezon City: Miriam College, 2010), 25. See also Willard M. Swartley, "The Relation of Justice/Righteousness to Shalom/Eirēnē," *Ex Auditu* 22 (2006): 29–53.

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of war would have moved the Hebrew individual to long for shalom. These threats to one's existence thrust shalom high in the consciousness of every Israelite to become a most cherished ideal. It may have been because of this that shalom is used in a greeting of well-being. *Shalom* becomes synonymous with the Hebraic ideal of the good.[5]

In the New Testament, the NT writers used the Greek word for peace, εἰρήνη, with three meanings in mind. εἰρήνη may mean the absence of strife (Luke 14:32; Acts 12:20; Eph 2:14-17) or a restored relationship (Rom 5:1; Eph 2:15; Col 1:20) or peace of mind or serenity (Rom 15:13; Phil 4:7).[6] The third meaning of peace may have been what the evangelist John had in mind when he employed the concept in his narration of the Jesus' story. εἰρήνη appears six times in the Gospel. In these instances, peace could be understood to mean a quiet heart or joy within or joy in the heart.[7]

If the peace that John's Jesus spoke of in John 20 concerns peace of mind, then context will tell us that "Peace be with you" could not be understood in terms of its usual function or sense as a Hebrew or Jewish salutation. This context partially explains why its literal translation in Tagalog, *sumainyo ang kapayapaan*, appears artificial and lacks any sense. In the context of fear of the disciples due to the threat of violence and physical harm from the Jewish authorities as hinted by the locked doors of the upper room (John 20:19), the Filipino or Tagalog reader does not expect a greeting of peace but an exhortation not to fear, *huwag matakot*, from Jesus. This peace is the quietness of the heart in the face of the tribulation that Jesus had just disclosed to his disciples in John 14:27. Peace, understood in this manner, may be something inherent in the Filipino concept of the *loob* (inner self). The *loob* is likened to "a cave of Filipino thought, an emotive state, a true self, a center of personality, a world of being, and a core of indigenous

[5] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 81.

[6] C.L. Milton, "Peace in the NT," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, ed. George Arthur Buttrick et al., 5 vols. (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 4: 706.

[7] Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, A Handbook on the Gospel of John, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980).

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value."[8] It belongs to the realm of the *within*, inner traits that "build peace, compassion, empathy… and a hunger for reconciliation."[9] In other words, this peace takes root in the heart and mind or *loob* of an individual, which can only be nurtured or possibly be lost under certain conditions like the presence of threats to one's existence. Peace, in the mind of a Filipino, cannot be sourced from the outside, even if it comes from the dispenser of peace, who is Jesus Christ.

An exegetical analysis of John 20:19-29 will help narrow the gap that exists between the function of the peace statements and the Filipino expectation of an exhortation of the peace formula, "Peace with you."

Peace With You in the Context of the Threat of Violence in John 20

Before one can deal with the peace phrase in John 20, one needs to find out the evangelist's understanding and employment of the key term *peace* in the Jesus' story as it was presented in his gospel. How important is peace in the overall Johannine theology in the Gospel and 1 John? What is this peace all about? Is the 'Johannine' peace more than a component or element in the traditional Jewish peace salutation? This inquiry needs to start with John's use of peace in the Gospel.

[8] Jairus D. Espiritu and Marielle A.H. Zosa, quoting Pe-Pua (2017), "Loob and Meaningfulness: A Filipino Theory of Meaning in Life," paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Philosophy and Meaning of Life, University of Pretoria, South Africa, January 17–19, 2022, https://www.researchgate.net/publication. See also Jeremiah Reyes, "Loób and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics," *Asian Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2015): 148–71, https://doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2015.1043173; Christine Carmela R. Ramos, "Filipino Concept of 'Loob'," *Respons: Jurnal Etika Sosial* 25, no. 2 (2020): 143–57, https://doi.org/10.25170/respons.v25i02.2467.

[9] J. Backman, "Peacebuilding from the Inside Out: The 'Work of the Soul' as a Key to Working with Others," *Journal of Living Together* 4–5, no. 1 (2018): 73.

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Peace in the Gospel of John

The word peace (εἰρήνη) appears 6 times in the Gospel of John. It is noteworthy to comment on the concentration of the evangelist's employment of the word in chapters 14 and 20. The first two occurrences are in John 14:27 and the next three in John 20:19, 21, and 26. The passage where it stands alone is found in John 16:33. In all these cases, Jesus pronounced peace in the context of crises, namely, in his forthcoming departure from the world in chapters 14 and 16 and from the threat of violence in John 20. In John, peace does not mean the absence of strife but a quiet heart or peace of mind in the face of the uncertainty that would follow Jesus' departure and the threat of annihilation from the hands of the religious authorities and their supporters.

To understand the Johannine concept of peace, it must be related to the key concepts employed several times in the Gospel. These words are *life, light,* and *truth*. These Johannine concepts appear to tie up the Jesus' narrative into a cohesive whole in the Gospel. John used life thirty-six times, light twenty-two times, and truth eight times.[10] In the evangelist's thought, these three terms are interconnected. This interconnection is established very early in John 1 where *life* is used twice, *light* five times, and *truth* two times.[11] By his multiple use of these words, John appears to be making the connection that life originates from the Word, and from life comes light (1:4) and truth (1:17).

The Jesus' story, according to John, revolves around the plot where the sons of darkness, Abraham's descendants, threatened life, which source is the Word (8:37). The enemies, the Jewish authorities in Judea,[12] tirelessly looked for ways and means to end Jesus' life causing

[10] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 82.

[11] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 82.

[12] Regarding the Gospel of John's perceived negative portrayal of Jews, Ekkehardt. Müller examines the terms "Jews," "Israel," and "Pharisees" as found in the Synoptic Gospels and Johannine literature. His findings suggest a more balanced view, showing that John does not condemn all Jews but highlights a

him to restrict his movement (7:1). The threat became so great that Jesus himself decided that it is not profitable to place his person into harm's way (11:54). Thus, John presents Jesus retreating from the world in chapters 13 to 17 where he placed Jesus in the upper room with the disciples. Inside the room, Jesus spent the remaining days of his life addressing the disciples through a long discourse.

Raymond Brown takes a different position. He points out that peace in 14:27 neither means the absence of warfare nor has anything to do with psychological tension.[13] Brown sees in it the fulfillment of the eschatological dreams of the Old Testament prophet in Jesus' indwelling of the disciples at his post-resurrection appearance in John 20:20-22. Brown observes that John's use of peace with joy in 20:19-20 leads one to the beginning of the eschatological period,

> … in Jewish thought, peace and joy were marks of eschatological period when God's intervention would have brought about harmony in human life and in the world.[14]

Brown's position may be at odds with the framing of peace in the Gospel of John, and his eschatological position is unsupported in the other book traditionally assigned to the evangelist, 1 John. While there are some questions as to the Johannine authorship of 1 John, internal evidences show presupposition of important theological features of the Gospel in the epistle, like the prologue and the play of the old and new commandments that were sustained in the epistle.[15] In this writer's view, the author of the Gospel and the epistle may be

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Messianic community of believers composed of both Jews and those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah. See Ekkehardt Müller, "The Jews and the Messianic Community in Johannine Literature," *DavarLogos* 4, no. 2 (2005): 159–80.

[13] Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XII-XXI: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York, Doubleday, 1970), 653.

[14] Brown, *The Gospel According to John XII-XXI*, 1035.

[15] Robert A. Spivey and D. Moody Smith, *The Letters of John: Love, Doctrine, and Church Politics, in Anatomy of the New Testament, A Guide to Its Structure and Meaning*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 416.

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one and the same person. It was previously mentioned that in the six times that peace appeared in John's Gospel, the contexts suggest fear owing to the uncertainty following Jesus' impending departure (14:27, 16:33) and the threat of violence from the religious authorities to their corporate existence (20:19, 21, and 26). In 1 John, the evangelist appears to anticipate a battle royale against the enemies of Jesus. This confrontation would happen in the last days. Brown's eschatological hope of total harmony is not realized in Jesus' indwelling of his disciples as hinted in the locked doors of John 20:26, just a few days after the risen Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on the disciples (v.22). The war with the enemies of their Lord was about to begin. This realization is picked up in 1 John 2:18–21.

The author opens this section of the letter with a pronouncement of the last day,

Παιδία, ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν, lit., children, it is (the) last hour

The appearance of the antichrist (ἀντίχριστος) would determine the last hour. In John's view, the coming out of many antichrists (ἀντίχριστοι) would precede this event. What distinguishes the former from the latter? The antichrist refers to a figure that will appear at the end of time. Its distinguishing feature is that "such a person is not to be a part of ordinary life."[16] The plural form, on the other hand, refers to the "false teachers, persons whom John and his readers were encountering everyday."[17] By placing the antichrist and the antichrists in close proximity in verse 18, the epistle writer seems to be making this argument: "the antichrist will come in the last hour—antichrists

[16] C. Haas, M. de Jonge, and J.L. Swellengrebel, *A Handbook on The First Letter of John,* UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1972), https://demo-tips.translation.bible/story/translation-commentary-on-1-john-218/.

[17] Haas, et al, *A Handbook on The First Letter of John,* https://demo-tips.translation.bible/story/translation-commentary-on-1-john-218/.

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exist now—consequently the last hour is now."[18] The latter sign firms up his belief that the last hour has indeed approached,

> ὅθεν γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν. lit., from which we know that it is the last hour

1 John 2:20 seems to allude to the evangelist's report of Jesus' breathing (ἐνεφύσησεν) the Holy Spirit on the disciples in John 20:22. However, the dispensing of the Holy Spirit here is through anointing (χρῖσμα), and the agent of the process is unclear, simply being referred to by the author of the letter as ἀπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου, lit., from the Holy One, which may refer either to God or Jesus. If this reference reflects the event in John 20:22, then Jesus will become the agent of the anointing (as in CEV and GNT)[19] demonstrating the fact that the Johannine eschatology does not stand on the eschatological period of harmony that Brown proposes. Rather, John seems to anticipate a *conflict eschatology*, that is, in the last days, the disciples must brace for a conflict with the antichrist and his minions. John's eschatology is not to be realized inside the upper room, but a call to readiness to face the opposition outside of the room, hence, the collective fear of the disciples illustrated by the locked doors of John 20:19 and 26. John may have hinted about conflict eschatology in 11:53 in the way time is indicated here (ἀπ᾽ ἐκείνης οὖν τῆς ἡμέρας, lit., therefore, from that day) when Jesus withdrew from the world as his response to its hostility. Jesus even revealed to his disciples what awaits them outside in John 16:33, ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ θλῖψιν ἔχετε, lit., in the world you have tribulation.

Conflict eschatology may help clarify the meaning of peace in John's Gospel. A description of this peace is provided in John 14:27. Jesus had a term for this peace; he called this peace εἰρήνην τὴν ἐμὴν, lit., my peace. Because Jesus was the source of this peace, he could freely

[18] Haas, et al, *A Handbook on The First Letter of John,* 1972, https://demo-tips.translation.bible/story/translation-commentary-on-1-john-218/.

[19] See Contemporary English Version (CEV), https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2020%3A22&version=CEV; and Good News Translation (GNT), https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2020%3A22&version=GNT.

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dispense it to his disciples. This peace is different from the kind that the world gives (οὐ καθὼς ὁ κόσμος δίδωσιν, lit., not as the world gives). The world's understanding of peace is the absence of war or strife, or a threat to one's existence. Jesus' peace thrives even in the conditions of conflict. Jesus' peace flourishes and succeeds even in times of troubles and tribulations. Jesus' peace is not dependent on outward circumstances for it is the condition of the heart and the mind. Jesus' peace is the absence of worry and cowardice (μὴ ταρασσέσθω ὑμῶν ἡ καρδία μηδὲ δειλιάτω, lit., do not let your heart be troubled; do not be cowardly). The peace that Jesus speaks is, therefore, the quietness of the heart or the peace of mind amidst tribulation. This kind of peace seems to lean more towards the psychological dimension of peace. C.K. Barrett sees this peace as "the absence of fear and perturbation of the heart; and that is the gift of Christ alone."[20]

Jesus' peace is the type of peace that would assist the disciples to tide them over the approaching tribulation and persecution. This is very well expressed in John 16:31–33. In this passage, Jesus told his followers of the coming break-up of the group, each retreating to the comforts of home and abandoning Jesus at the very hour of his passion. Knowing beforehand about the disciples' forthcoming failure does not amount to an open rebuke of their relapse; the tone of the passage tells otherwise. Jesus' peace statement in John 16:33 gives the disciples a foreknowledge that would prepare them for a more optimistic outcome; peace in the face of violent opposition that they would shortly encounter in John 20:19 ff. Jesus' peace of John 14:27 and John 16:33 becomes an alert word to the peace statements in John 20:19, 21, and 26, reminding them that they already possessed Jesus' peace despite the noise and the rambling of the murderous opposition. J.N. Sanders and B.A. Mastin offer this view,

[20] C.K. Barret, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text,* 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 468.

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> … the emphasis given by its repetition at verses 21 and 26 suggests a reference back to 14:27 and 16:33.[21]

This last piece of the peace puzzle in John has completed the picture of the phrase "Peace with you". Jesus' peace, therefore, is the inner serenity that comes from the words that the Lord had revealed to his emotionally unstable group of confused and fearful disciples before experiencing themselves the violence that would be instigated by the religious authorities.

What is the function then of "Peace with you" in John 20:19, 21, and 26? Is it a peace greeting or more than a traditional Jewish greeting?

Peace Be With You in John 20:19-29: A Greeting or More Than a Greeting

It is worth noting that the peace phrase is used in the New Testament about 24 times.[22] The most common form appears to be grace to you and peace (lit., χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη), which was employed thirteen times in the whole corpus.[23] Because of the preponderance of the forms of the peace formula in the NT, efforts were expended to track both its forms and functions. Brown notes that there were peace formulas that employed a verbal form, and there were also instances when a verbal form was absent[24] The first type, distinguishable by the presence of a verb, is illustrated by the following examples: δῴη ὑμῖν τὴν εἰρήνην, lit., he may give peace to you (2 Thess 3:16); ἔσται μεθ' ἡμῶν χάρις ἔλεος εἰρήνη, lit., it will be with us grace, mercy, peace (2 John 1:3). The second type may be classified as a nominal-pronominal peace formula where a verb is absent and a noun-pronoun combination completes the phrase. This construction appears five times in the

[21] J.N. Sanders and B.A. Mastin, The Gospel according to St. John, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1968), 431.

[22] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 85.

[23] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 85.

[24] Brown, *The Gospel according to John XII-XXI,* 2021.

second person plural dative (Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν, Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19, 21, 26 and 1 Pet 5:14) and once in second person singular dative (εἰρήνη σοι, 3 Jn 1:15). The plural form also appears in this expression, Εἰρήνη τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς, lit., "peace to the brothers," found in Eph 6:23.

What makes this distinction so important and necessary in this endeavor? The reason is that the form determines the function of the peace formula. The verbal peace salutation, by virtue of the presence of a verb in the formula, expresses a note of certainty that is stronger than the note of wish or possibility.[25] Thus, in 2 John 1:3, it functions as an assurance to the believers that they will receive the peace whose source is God and Jesus Christ. In 2 Thess 3:16, it functions as a supplication whereby the Lord of peace, i.e., Jesus, would grant peace to the community of the faithful. The nominal-pronominal form may either function as a statement of a fact or as an expression of a wish. C. Haas et al, in discussing the meaning of the peace greeting in 3 John 1:15, underscore the fact that "(t)he Greek construction of two nouns not connected by a verb may serve to express a fact or a wish."[26] The nominal-pronominal form appears 6 times in the New Testament (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21, and 26; 1 Peter 5:14 and 3 John 1:15) and is normally understood as a wish.

This distinction is necessary because the peace formula is almost always rendered "Peace be with you". The effect would be that this translation dampens the rhetorical effect of the nominal-pronominal form when it inserts the verb "be" so that peace becomes a wish. As a wish, this translation forwards the idea of a desire that peace be restored or granted in a situation where it is lacking or absent. However, the narrative structure of John 20 does not seem to encourage such a reading.

[25] Brown, *The Gospel according to John XII-XXI,* 2021.

[26] Haas, et al., *A Handbook on The First Letter of John,* 1972, https://tips.translation.bible/story/translation-commentary-on-3-john-115/.

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Peace Be With you: Probable Meanings in John 20:19–29

In John 20:19–29, the peace formula does not seem to suggest a wish function but rather appears to be making a statement of fact that in the last days, the risen Jesus is the dispenser of peace. The evangelist witnesses to Jesus as the source of true or genuine peace. As the source of peace, the risen Lord can give and distribute it to his disciples, as John 14:27 suggests. Because Jesus is both the source and giver or distributor of peace, he can rightly demand or command his disciples to apply in their lives the type of peace that he dispenses among his disciples in John 20:19, 21, and 26. Jesus' peace stabilizes the soul at a time of prospective difficulty inherent in the persecution to come.

How can one understand the peace phrase in the context of the narrative of John 20? There are several contextual clues that the evangelist left for his readers to decipher if one is to understand the events reported there as well as the peace formulas that are scattered in certain key parts of the story, especially in verses 19, 21, and 26. In verse 19 alone, the Gospel writer employs several "contextual codes" that suggest a meaning other than what they seem to impart on the surface. John starts with the temporal element, Οὔσης οὖν ὀψίας τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ (lit. So, it was evening on that day). Because the evangelist John is a skillful employer of a literary technique known as dualism in his Gospel, the terminology or concepts that he employed may be infused with theological implications. For instance, the word that he preferred to describe the time of the day when this event happened, ὀψίας, lit., evening, had some theological associations. For John, evening is associated with the darkness of the night, where darkness is opposed to light. When one traces the theological link in the mind of the evangelist, darkness as light's opposite may also be suggestive of death as against life and the lies of the opposition versus the truth of Jesus. Thus, evening in the temporal clause of verse 19 may not be simply suggestive of time but indicative of chaos at the moment of Jesus' death.

That John was thinking more than time in this temporal clause of verse 19 was revealed in the second part of the clause, τῇ μιᾷ σαββάτων,

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lit., on the first of the week. John seems to allude to the creation event of Genesis 1, where God's first creative act was the separation of darkness/chaos and light/order. Here, on the first day of the week, when it was still evening, chaos reigned among the disciples as illustrated by the locked doors and their corporate fear of the Jewish authorities as they huddled inside the upper room. The evangelist seems to be saying more when he mentions this temporal clause for the second time. He employed it for the first time in his opening of Chapter 20. Following the Genesis creation account, it was early on the first day of the week that the first ray of light broke through the darkness of the night (πρωὶ σκοτίας ἔτι οὔσης) when Mary Magdalene found the tomb empty. It was not a coincidence but a deliberate theological statement that on the first day of the week, Jesus is risen! The evangelist masterfully linked light with life, and so was fulfilled the prophecy of John 1:5: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The chaos of the evening of the first day of the week is now dealt with by the order established by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had just subdued the ultimate enemy, death. Then, Jesus appeared among the disciples proclaiming, Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν, lit., "Peace to you". How significant is this peace statement in the context of verse 19? Verse 19 is quite clear that the fear of the disciples came from no other reason but fear of the Jews (τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων). "Peace to you" here is not a salutation but is performing an exhortative function. Leon Morris seems to concur with this observation when he writes that he sees more than a conventional greeting in Jesus' peace statement.[27] The peace statement seems to address the fear of the disciples. Thus, peace with you in verse 19 may tend to bring the readers back to Jesus' words in John 14:1, 27, where the peace of Jesus is clarified to mean, "Do not let your hearts be troubled; and do not be afraid."

Jesus uttered the same peace phrase in John 20:21. This utterance happened after the risen Lord revealed his wounded hands and sides to his very surprised followers. The Gospel writer reports that there was

[27] Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 745.

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a visible shift in the disciples' mood from fear to rejoicing (ἐχάρησαν, lit., they rejoiced) when they saw their Lord very much alive in their midst. What follows next is Jesus' words of commissioning of the disciples, which were patterned after the Father's sending the Son into the world. The peace formula of verse 21 seems to lead his readers back to Jesus' words in John 15:16 and 16:6. In the first passage, Jesus revealed to the disciples that it was through his sovereign choice that they became his followers and that he "appointed them to go and bear much fruit." Jesus was in effect commissioning the disciples for the first time in 15:16. But because Jesus revealed all these things including his forthcoming departure from the world, this brought sorrow to the hearts of his disciples (16:6). The repetition of the peace phrase in 20:21 becomes a reassurance to the disciples of Jesus' "real presence and a renewal of their commission as disciples."[28] However, Jesus' commissioning of the disciples would involve going outside of the locked upper room where conflict with the opposition awaits them (16:33b). Jesus exhorted the disciples to be brave because he had already defeated the world (v.33c). Thus, by being forewarned, the disciples would experience peace only if they would remain united with Jesus (v.33a). The peace phrase of verse 21 would have served as a kind of alert word bringing the disciples back to Jesus' words in 15:16, 16:6 and 33. "Peace with you" in John 20:21 would have meant, "Be brave," or "Be of good cheer."

The third occasion of Jesus' "Peace with you" statement took place a week after Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to the disciples in the locked upper room. The evangelist's framing of the event in the context of Thomas' unbelief (John 20:25) appears to parallel the accounts of John 16:31–33, where the disciples' inability to comprehend Jesus' figures of speech (16:25, 29–30) is indicative of their collective unbelief. "Peace with you" in John 20:26 would have meant "Take courage" or "Be brave," which has the effect of intensifying Jesus' direct exhortation to Thomas in John 20:27, "Do not doubt but believe" (καὶ μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός, lit., and not become unbelieving but believing).

[28] Merrill Tenney, "John," in *NIV Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 370.

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Jesus' peace statement in John 20 appears to be making the following statements about the evangelist's concept of peace. First, the Johannine concept of peace seems to be tied up with his view on eschatology, particularly by his *conflict eschatology*. Second, John seems to infuse psychological values or meanings to his idea and usage of peace as demonstrated in the six instances that this concept appeared in the whole of the Gospel, where peace is closely associated with fear and unbelief. Third, the peace statements in John 20.19, 21, and 26 were intended by the evangelist to function more as a statement of fact than as a wish.

Alternative Meaning of the Peace Greetings in Filipino or Tagalog

From the discussion above, it is discerned that the evangelist intends to employ the word "peace" (εἰρήνη) in its psychological sense rather than theologically. John is simply being consistent in his presentation of Jesus in his Gospel as someone who possessed exceptional knowledge of human nature, as John 2:24–25 suggests.[29] The Johannine concept of peace appears to point to the fact that Jesus is the true source of peace for his disciples. Jesus' peace is the quietness of the heart or the peace of mind in the face of the violence that the forthcoming persecution would bring. In the time of persecution, Jesus would no longer be physically around to guide and comfort them, so the only way to appropriate this peace is by staying united with the True Vine. Since Jesus is the source and dispenser of genuine peace, he could make a demand on how this peace should be applied. Thus, the "Peace with you" statements in John 20 would be performing an exhortative or command function rather than as a peace greeting. Unlike the "Peace be with you" of Luke 24:36 (also 1:28), which does not lay down any predicate at all but is abruptly introduced into the narrative and so must be construed as a Jewish salutation, the same cannot be said of John. "Peace with you" is clearly not a greeting here.

[29] Arevalo, "Peace with You," 84.

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Peace with you is almost always translated literally in Filipino, or in Tagalog, "*Sumainyo ang kapayapaan*". It is a one-to-one correspondence with the source language (Greek or English). Since it is a formal translation of the peace statement, what function is it performing in the vernacular? Is it a greeting or is it an exhortation? *Sumainyo ang kapayapaan* does not appear to be a proper Filipino or Tagalog salutation primarily because it is not used for greeting someone except within the context of the liturgy. It cannot be taken as words of exhortation either, as it neither urges nor encourages someone to move or act in a certain way. *Sumainyo ang kapayapaan*, therefore, does not meet the narrative demands or expectations of John 20.19ff. because it is an artificial construction.

The movement or the transpiring of events in John 20 leads to the highest point in the story where the resurrected Christ appeared to his disciples inside the locked doors of the upper room in verses 19-26. Here, the reader anticipates not a peace greeting but remarks that may tend to alleviate the disciples' crisis of faith. Thus, in John 20:19, "Peace be with you" would have meant "*Huminahon kayo* (Calm down or Be calm)" or "*Lakasan ninyo ang loob ninyo* (Take heart)" or "*Huwag kayong matakot* (Do not be afraid)."

Jesus pronounced the peace phrase in John 20:21 in a changed circumstance. The corporate mood inside the room has shifted from fear in John 20:19 to joy. Jesus followed up his peace statement with a word of commissioning of the disciples in a manner that was patterned after the Father sent Jesus to the world. This appears to function as a reminder of Jesus' word of prior commissioning of the disciples in 15:16. What follows was the bequeathing of the gift of the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins to the disciples in verses 22–23. Given this context, "Peace with you" would have meant "*Magalak kayo* (be of good cheer)."

"Peace with you" in John 20:26 seems to repeat the intended function of the peace formula in John 20:19. The joyful disposition of verse 21 dissipates, and the fear of verse 19 is suddenly relived. The locked doors were suggestive of the collective fear of the disciples.

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The unbelief of Thomas even compounded the fear of the disciples. The same evidence that Jesus presented to the disciples seven days ago was the same proof or witness that he is alive was shown to Thomas to dispel all his doubts. "Peace with you" may mean "*Lakasan ninyo ang loob ninyo* (Take heart)" or "*Huwag kayong matakot* (Do not be afraid)" or "*Sumampalataya ka at huwag mag-alinlangan* (Believe and do not doubt)."

Jesus' peace statements addressed a faith community in crisis during the first century of the common era. How effective or relevant would they be in meeting the challenges of the contemporary time that threaten the very existence of a faith community, i.e., the United Methodist Church?

The Peace Greetings of John: A Call to Courage in the Face of a Possible Permanent and Painful Church Split

The pressing issues that gnaw bit by bit on the very existence of The United Methodist Church (UMC) come from inside the Church itself. These issues can be classified into three groups of serious "gripes," namely, theological/ethical, ideological, and political (Church polity).

The first grave challenge threatening the United Methodist Church comes from a group that called itself The Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA), which launched a 'separatist or disaffiliated' denomination known as The Global Methodist Church (GMC). The decision to separate from the UMC commenced with its determination to rescind its initial agreement to the temporary measure arrived at in early 2020 to hold in "abeyance on submitting or processing complaints related to homosexuality until after a process for separation had been approved and the denominations that may result from it could hold their post separation General Conferences."[30] The GMC sought to

[30] Ask the UMC, a ministry of United Methodist Communications, "What Is the Church's Position on Homosexuality?" September 24, 2019, https://www.umc.org. See also "FAQs on Legislation," https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/faqs-legislation; and "Legislation," https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/legislation.

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uphold the theological and ethical Christian orthodoxy.[31] This meant that the disaffiliated church "opposed the recognition of same-sex marriage and the ordination of non-celibate gay clergy."[32]

This concern should not be an issue that must rip the Church into splinter groups. The United Methodist Church affirms that sexuality is God's good gift to all persons.[33] Thus, it advocates inclusiveness in the Church where members may live out their faith through their local church irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity and believes human rights are due to all people, regardless of sexual orientation.[34] There is, however, a caveat against a liberal interpretation of the position of the Church on homosexuality. The United Methodist Church makes a distinction between sexual orientation and practice or behavior. The Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.[35] Since 1972, this Church's position was upheld at every General Conference until 2019, but in 2020, the General Conference removed this language, reversing a 52-year ban.

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[31] See "Global Methodist Church," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Methodist_Church.

[32] See "Global Methodist Church," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Methodist_Church.

[33] Ask the UMC. See also Taylor W. Burton Edwards, "What is the Church's Position on Homosexuality?" https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-the-churchs-position-on-homosexuality.

[34] Ask the UMC. See "Social Principles – The Social Community," *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2020/2024,* https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-social-community#human-sexuality. It says: "We support the rights of all people to exercise personal consent in sexual relationships, to make decisions about their own bodies and be supported in those decisions, to receive comprehensive sexual education, to be free from sexual exploitation and violence, and to have access to adequate sexual health care."

[35] Ask the UMC. See also Peter Smith, "United Methodists Remove Anti-Gay Language from Their Official Teachings on Societal Issues," *Associated Press,* May 3, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/methodists-lgbtq-samesex-marriage-gay-rights-e3a7677a3b025b07211153179727c255.

The United Methodist Church's stance on homosexuality alienated a sizable portion of its membership. The LGBTQ advocates argued for the inclusion of homosexuals in all aspects of life in the Church. The Church rightly acknowledged that the 12 million United Methodists scattered all over the world "are not of one mind" on the issue, so it allowed its membership to disagree with the Church's position and to openly express a change in ecclesial policy. In early 2020, the competing groups agreed to adopt the following steps, namely, (1) an abeyance or delay on submitting or processing complaints, and (2) to submit and advocate among their constituencies for legislation creating a process for separation.[36] The second part of the decision allows a peaceful separation from the Mother Church without completely severing ecclesial relationships in the event of a failure to arrive at a consensus on the issue at hand. These temporary measures were arrived at until the General Conference makes a full decision on the homosexuality question in 2028. Meanwhile, in the interval, the General Conference of 2024 adopted *regionalization*. Regionalization is a measure that allows each Central Conference, regional bodies of UMC churches outside of the United States, to adopt a policy that accords with the legal, cultural, and social contexts of host communities/nations. This measure provides a sort of limited autonomy for national United Methodist Churches to address the homosexuality issue on a case-by-case basis. Rev. Edwards, a UMC clergy, calls regionalization "connectionalism (basic ecclesial relationships/polity within the UMC- RMA) customized to enhance local effectiveness."[37] Regionalization appears to be a Solomonic decision arrived at by the General Conference in the meantime until a more definitive and permanent decision will be made in 2028.

The Philippine United Methodist Church (PUMC) exercised the benefits provided by regionalization. The PUMC affirms the long-

[36] Ask the UMC. See https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/faqs-legislation.

[37] Taylor W. Burton Edwards, "Regionalization, Series Part 2: Regionalization Is Customization," https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-regionalization-part-2/.

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standing position of the Church since 1972. The Philippine Church promotes inclusiveness while maintaining the traditional limitations imposed on the practice of homosexuality inside its confines. This confusing and somewhat contradictory position of the Church is indicative of its struggle in balancing the contending perspectives and interests among the progressives, centrists, and traditionalists in its general membership.

The conservative, evangelical-leaning faction of the Philippine Church followed the lead of its American counterparts by declaring that it would no longer wait for the General Conference of 2028 and decided to pursue a different path of disaffiliation. Disaffiliation is the extreme action of terminating the group's affiliation with The United Methodist Church. This group called the new organization Global Methodist Church (GMC) after the U.S. name of the disaffiliated Church. The influential leaders of the group took some ingenious but foul ways of taking over control of the church's properties while barring the entry of those who remained in the UMC inside the church premises. The real owner of the properties, the UMC, was even forbidden to use the church sanctuary for worship. The group resorted to slander and the propagation of fake news concerning the UMC and its bishops as Satanic and purveyors of homosexuality.

Aside from this staunch anti-homosexuality group, another faction motivated by its desire to cut its connection with the United States Church is threatening the stability of the UMC. This group calls itself the Filipino Methodist Church, whose main program is "Autonomy now!" The drive for autonomy is fueled by a nationalistic ideology and polity- a church that is free to chart its own future and ministry without seeking the nod or approval of the Mother Church in the United States.

This is the dilemma confronting The United Methodist Church. How relevant is the Johannine peace formula in the UMC experience? Since Jesus' peace statements in the Gospel of John are framed within the context of adversity, the more they gain credence as the Church deals with its own challenges. In the same way that Jesus' peace allayed the fears of the disciples, the same peace can address the confusion

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and panic within the faith community that stares at the prospects of corporate disintegration. How can The United Methodist Church appropriate Jesus' peace in the present time?

"Peace with you" is a call to The United Methodist Church not to be afraid to face the issues squarely and decisively. "Peace with you" would have meant for the United Methodists the following:

Do not be afraid to admit that the issue of homosexuality is a complex phenomenon, and the Bible may not provide adequate answers to the problem. Homosexuality is a very complex issue. Recent research informs us that homosexuality is not only a question of nurture but of nature as well.[38] The various types of homosexuality, i.e., LGBTQ +, are clues about the immensity and breadth of the subject matter. Homosexuality may best be framed as a biological question rather than as a theological supposition. The point being that the source of theological reflection, the Bible, does not provide useful information that may help untangle this Gordian knot. To admit this fact requires courage in this age of misplaced spirituality. The UMC must inform its constituencies that the Bible, though witnessing to the God of History working through its various literary genres, may be reflective of a long-gone time and so must be reflective of the concerns of the period. Homosexuality may not be an issue that the Bible writers may have reflected upon extensively because it was not a pressing question to the people of God at that time. Thus, the Bible may not be a good resource to address the issue. However, the teachings about God that inform the biblical narrative or poetry, etc., like his concern for the marginalized and the oppressed, may be taken into consideration to guide our faith and practice.

Do not be afraid to seek help from the disciplines of medicine and science to help fill up the gap in the biblical teachings.[39] The Bible does not claim that

[38] See Kimberly Cornuelle, "Nature vs. Nurture: The Biology of Sexuality," *BU Today,* November 16, 2010, https://www.bu.edu/articles/2010/nature-vs-nurture-the-biology-of-sexuality/.

[39] See, for example, Andrea Rinaldi, "I Was Born This Way: New Research Confirms That a Mix of Prenatal Factors and Genetic Differences Could Explain

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it has the answer to all human problems. Only Christians make this claim. This is spiritual pride that makes meaningful conversation and mutual understanding impossible. The Church must seek the guidance and insights of medical and scientific experts to inform the UMC about homosexuality to make an intelligent position and decision on the matter. The Bible is not at odds with science and medicine. Science and medicine may help fill up the gaps in the biblical knowledge of aeons past.

Do not be afraid to take a position on the issue.[40] A position informed by the Bible and by science/medicine will put the UMC on a solid ground. A well-informed Church is not afraid to make a stance on any issues including homosexuality. A courageous Church stands firm because it knows that its position is supported by information provided by various disciplines. The Church, standing on a sure footing, will expose the barrenness of logic, shallowness of thesis, and ignorance of the opposition.

Do not be afraid to apply the gospel principles of acceptance, forgiveness, and understanding to guide the Church's actions in dealing with the issue.[41] The

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Human Sexual Orientation," EMBO Reports 23, no. 6 (May 16, 2022): e55290, https://doi.org/10.15252/embr.202255290; See also American Psychological Association, "Understanding Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality," October 29, 2008, https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation.

[40] "Homosexuality: 2020/2024 Book of Discipline Statements," United Methodist Church, https://www.umc.org/en/content/homosexuality-full-book-of-discipline-statements#:~:text=Persons%20who%20have%20been%20terminated,to%20the%20new%20appointment%20year. See also "Agreement: Statement of Principles," *Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and Restructuring,* https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/the-agreement.

[41] See Peter Smith, "United Methodists Remove Anti-Gay Language from Their Official Teachings on Societal Issues," *Associated Press,* May 3, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/methodists-lgbtq-samesex-marriage-gay-rights-e3a7677a3b025b07211153179727c255. See also Joseph Liu, "Religious Groups' Official Positions on Same-Sex Marriage," Pew Research Center, December 7, 2012, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/07/religious-groups-official-positions-on-same-sex-marriage/; and Michael Lipka and David Masci, "Where

gospels agree in their presentation of Jesus as one who accepts the refuse of society, namely, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the lepers, the hemorrhaging woman, etc. For sinners, the necessary step that he required of them was to repent. Repentance brings forgiveness. For those who were ill, Jesus asked them to believe in him. Acceptance and fellowship were made available by Jesus to those who were not even considered humans by the religious authorities. This is not to say that homosexuality is a sin that needs to be repented of. Homosexuals are created by God, too. However, because they do not fall into the strict male and female categories, the "normal ones" look askance at them. Some old and traditional families are hard on them; closed societies make them objects of ridicule. Some fundamentalist and evangelical Christian Churches have labeled them immoral and sinners so that they are excluded from their fellowships. Will Jesus' example of acceptance not find a place in the Church? Will Jesus' Church be a party to their rejection? If Jesus were alive today, he would have welcomed the rejected and despised homosexuals.

Do not be afraid to stand up against judgmentalism, self-righteousness, and rejection of marginalized people by legalistic religion.[42] Jesus stood with the masses, especially those being debased by the Temple authorities, as less than humans. Jesus' quarrels with the Pharisees and the scribes emanated from their strict reading and interpretation of God's Law. Jesus approached the Law according to its spirit and intention rather than by its letters. Jesus' appreciation of the Law made him accept the unacceptable and embrace the unembraceable. This was the legacy of Jesus to the Church. The Church should not be a party to the

Christian Churches, Other Religions Stand on Gay Marriage," *Pew Research Center,* December 21, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/12/21/where-christian-churches-stand-on-gay-marriage/.

[42] See Joseph Liu, "Religious Groups' Official Positions on Same-Sex Marriage," *Pew Research Center,* December 7, 2012, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/07/religious-groups-official-positions-on-same-sex-marriage/; Michael Lipka and David Masci, "Where Christian Churches, Other Religions Stand on Gay Marriage," *Pew Research Center,* December 21, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/12/21/where-christian-churches-stand-on-gay-marriage/.

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rejection of homosexuals. It should not be fast in passing judgments on their homosexual behavior or practice. This issue cannot be simply dismissed as sinful, especially in light of the new scientific discoveries. Nevertheless, there is also human convention to consider. The Church should learn to tread this fine line between the spirit of the Gospel and human tradition/conventionality. The answer is not easy. It could only provide a provisional answer that can be amended in the future. The current position of the Church, inclusivity tempered by the community's moral and social values and the laws of the land, may be a reasonable ground to stand on at the moment.

Conclusion

"Peace be with you" in John 20.19-29 is better translated and understood as "Peace is with you." The former functions as a greeting while the latter is a statement of fact. The determination that Jesus' peace statement is a factual statement largely stands on the Greek construction of the peace formula Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν, lit., peace to you. The nominal-pronominal (dative) construction allows its reading as a statement of fact. The reason why this is overly emphasized is that, as a statement of fact, the greeting points to Jesus as the source of peace. Jesus, being the source of peace, can dispense peace to his disciples and likewise, can command or demand from them a specific course of action, such as "Do not be afraid" and/or "Be of good cheer". In the context of the impending violence from the religious authorities, Jesus assures his disciples that his peace is with them so that they need not be afraid.

"Peace is with you," as a statement of fact, goes far beyond the peace statement of Jesus to his disciples in the first century CE. It still rings true today, especially when a community of faith, like the United Methodist Church, faces crisis situations that threaten its very existence. "Peace is with you," reminds the Church not to be afraid because Jesus' peace thrives in situations of distress and trouble. Jesus' peace is not the absence of strife but the instilling of peace of the soul when times are difficult.

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