

9. Christianity as the Sixth Aspirational ‘C’

Megachurches and the Changing Landscape of Religion, Prosperity, and Wealth in Singapore

Catherine Gomes and Jonathan Tan

Abstract

Singapore is one of the richest countries in the world, whose citizens have an insatiable appetite for economic mobility. Many Singaporeans have become highly attracted to emerging Christian groups which marry basic Christian beliefs, such as the worship of Christ, with wealth accumulation. Known as megachurches, these groups preach a liturgy known as ‘prosperity gospel’ which equates wealth with worship. Though digital ethnography and content analysis of webpages and social media platforms, this chapter investigates two prominent megachurches in Singapore and their founding pastors: New Creation Church with Pastor Joseph Prince and City Harvest Church with Pastor Kong Hee. The results of such analyses reveal that wealth and material accumulation have become the foundations of Singaporean Christianity.

Keywords: megachurches, prosperity gospel, Singapore, City Harvest Church, New Creation Church

Introduction

Singapore is one of the wealthiest nations in the world; ranked third after Qatar and Luxembourg (Karmali, 2015). The country is a centre for technology, manufacturing, and finance, with a GDP (purchasing power parity) per capita of almost US\$56,700; a country of millionaires with 1 in 35 people considered a member of this group, with this proportion predicted to increase

Hoang, L.A. and C. Alipio (eds.), *Money and Moralities in Contemporary Asia*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020.

DOI: 10.5117/9789463723107/CH09

by 2020 (Wealthinsight, 2015). Moreover, the mantra for economic aspiration in Singapore is the 'Five Cs' – condominium, car, cash, credit card, and country club memberships (Tan, 2016, p. 17); often an unveiled code for materialism among Singaporeans. However, wealth and materialism are not the only elements that play out in everyday life in Singapore. Religion is a significant part of Singaporean life, with 80 per cent of the population affiliated with a religion. While Singapore is one of the most religiously diverse countries in the world, it is Christianity (including Catholicism) that is the fastest-growing faith in the nation. How do Singaporean Christians reconcile wealth accumulation with materialist culture, particularly since the Christian bible schools its followers in equality (i.e. sharing with others less fortunate than themselves) and is critical of the pursuit of material possessions? By looking at two wealthy and popular megachurches in Singapore and their larger-than-life pastors – New Creation Church with Pastor Joseph Prince and City Harvest Church with Pastor Kong Hee – this chapter will use digital ethnography methods (e.g. webpages and social media platforms) to examine how wealth and material accumulation have become acceptable and incorporated into the essence of Singaporean Christianity.

Singapore: A Rich Nation and Aspirations of the Five Cs

In 2015, Singapore's gross domestic product (GDP) was worth US\$292.74 billion, which represented 0.47 per cent of the world economy. The GDP in Singapore averaged US\$71.73 billion from 1960 until 2015, where it reached an all-time high of US\$306.34 billion in 2014 (Trading Economics, 2017). Singapore's wealth comes primarily from its financial services sector and its chemical export industry, as well as its open-minded economic policies, which support growth and innovation. Singapore is also the second busiest port in the world. In 2011 alone it exported an estimated US\$414 billion of goods (World Atlas, 2017). However, Singapore's wealth is also represented through its citizens.

With a per capita income (PPP) of US\$82,763, Singapore has 'five times the average per capita income for an ordinary individual in the world' (World Atlas, 2017). Approximately 1 in 35 Singaporeans are millionaires (Williams, 2016), with these rich citizens holding US\$806.3 billion (S\$1.15 trillion) in net wealth. While there are currently 154,000 millionaires in Singapore, this number is expected to rise to 188,000 by 2020 (Williams, 2016). In its annual global wealth report for 2016, Credit Suisse summarizes Singapore's household wealth situation:

Wealth distribution in Singapore is only moderately unequal. Just 18% of its people have wealth below US\$ 10,000, compared with 73% globally. The number with wealth above US\$ 100,000 is six times the world average. Reflecting its very high average wealth, 5% of its adults, or 222,000 individuals, are in the top 1% of global wealth-holders, a very high number given that it has just 0.1% of the world's adult population (Credit Suisse, 2016, p. 54).

While the Singapore government's economic policies have no doubt created an environment of opportunities for wealth creation, Singaporeans themselves (and implied earlier by Sylvia Ang in Chapter 5 of this book) are self-motivated in their quest for wealth. Accumulation of the five Cs – condominium, car, cash, credit card, and country club memberships – have arguably been the unofficial set of aspirational values behind Singaporeans' desire for wealth. While the acquisition of the five Cs has been criticized even by Singaporeans as an ugly side of Singapore's materialist culture (Tan, 2016, p. 17), it provides us with a template for understanding how material success has become a marker for achieving personal success in Singapore. While the five Cs may seem ordinary and with some of the Cs (e.g. cars and credit cards) basic in any developed country, they are in fact tied to Singapore's high cost of living.

Cars, condominiums, and country club memberships cost a lot of money. In heavily populated and built up Singapore, where its approximately 5,763,044 residents live in 719.1 square kilometres of land, most Singaporeans rely on Singapore's arguably efficient train transportation known as the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) to get around. Moreover, more than 80 per cent of Singaporeans (Housing and Development Board, 2016) live in flats built by Singapore's housing authority, the Housing and Development Board (HDB). Cars in Singapore are expensive to buy and to maintain. The Toyota Corolla Altis, which was the best-selling car of 2015 in Singapore, for instance, is estimated to cost S\$138,723. This price includes the cost of the car (S\$110,888), in addition to estimated loan payments, road tax, and the certificate of entitlement (COE), which is a licence or right to own that particular vehicle (Woodpecker Asia Tech, 2017). Cars in Singapore also only have a lifespan of ten years before they are often deemed as worthless and destined for destruction at the scrap yard. Meanwhile, a four-bedroom condominium in Singapore may cost upwards of S\$1.8 million (SG Young Investment, 2014). While a four-bedroom HDB flat may cost S\$300,000 to acquire (SG Young Investment, 2014), it only has a leasehold span of 99 years. After the 99-year leasehold ends, the property reverts to the state and the owners' rights are

extinguished. Condominium apartments, however, have a 999-year lease or are freehold properties. Country club memberships cost at least S\$100,000, if not more, to purchase, which does not include yearly subscription fees.

The acquisition of the Five Cs, however, shows more than just material accumulation – they also reveal the tenacity and hard work behind the acquisition of these success markers, which, interestingly, are tied to the state's version of the ideal Singaporean. Singapore government leaders, such as the late Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, have enshrined Confucian Chinese notions of hard work, personal sacrifice, and commitment to community, family, and nation as admirable qualities that define Singaporeans through the Asian Values debates of the 1990s and the Singapore Shared Values, which was formalized in 1991 (Singapore Parliament, 1991; Gomes, 2009). The Singapore Shared Values, as Gomes (2014) explains, is a set of values that incorporates the different aspects of Singapore's cultural heritage, namely the attitudes and values that have helped Singapore survive as a nation. In essence, it was a blueprint for the development of a national ideology, which all Singaporeans regardless of race could subscribe to and live by (Gomes, 2014, p. 107). These values are thus instilled into Singaporeans at a very young age in schools. Moreover, both the Shared Values' hierarchical disposition (parents before children) and egalitarianism (community before self) fit in well with Christianity's own hierarchical (clergy over congregation) and egalitarian (equality within congregation) purposes.

Christianity: A Growing Religion in Singapore

Religion plays a fundamental part in the culture and everyday life of Singapore, where religion, race, and ethnicity are sometimes inseparable. While it is common for most Hindus in Singapore to be racially grouped as South Asian and ethnic Chinese to be considered Buddhist or Taoist, religious practices and beliefs are not the primary identifiers of race. The same, however, cannot be said about Singaporean Malays who are born into the Islamic religion. For Singaporean Malays, Islam is intrinsically and culturally bound up with race. While non-Malays have the choice of converting to Islam because of community pressure, the same cannot be said of Malay Muslims if and when they so desire to convert to other religions. In other words, being Malay in Singapore is equivalent to being Muslim. The Singaporean Malay community's racial identity as inseparable from its religious identity is not unique in Southeast Asia. The Malay community in Malaysia, for example, shares an identical racial–religious identity to the

Singaporean Malays. This, of course, is primarily because of the common pre-colonial and colonial history that Singapore and Malaysia share with each other, particularly with regard to racial and ethnic (diasporic) groups and the adoption of different Asian (Islamic, Buddhist, Taoist, and Hindu) and European (Christianity) religions.

Christianity constitutes the most rapidly growing religious ideology in Singapore. The Singaporean sociologist Terence Chong notes that Christianity has not only grown rapidly in Singapore, increasing from ten per cent of the population in 1980 to 12.7 per cent in 1990, 14.6 per cent in 2000, and 18.3 per cent in 2010, but also a disproportionate number of Singaporean Christians, and in particular, over 40 per cent of Singaporean Protestants, hail from the professional classes and hold university degrees (Chong, 2016, p. 94). Catholicism accounts for one third of all Christians in Singapore, with the rest belonging to various Protestant denominations (Department of Statistics, Singapore, 2001, pp. 33–34). Moreover, Christianity in Singapore is also exclusively connected with the Eurasian ethnic group, with most Eurasians identifying themselves as Catholic. The rapid growth of Protestant Christianity in Singapore is especially significant because the majority of Singaporean Protestants are converts to Christianity.

While Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism are Asian-centric religions that are well rooted in Asia and have successfully circulated throughout Southeast Asia for centuries, Christianity is a relatively new faith that is making a profound impact on the Asian region as a whole. The first wave of Christianity occurred with the arrival of European colonial powers in Asia as far back as the fifteenth century. Catholicism, for example, was spread by Spanish and Portuguese colonists in Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines and Malacca. Protestant Christianity, such as Methodism and Anglicanism, found its way to the colonies, mainly through European conquerors in different parts of Southeast Asia. Comprising a transnational (and transitional) place of trade, the British crown colony of Singapore became a valuable location for proselytizing by Christian missionaries, who set up churches for the newly baptized and educational institutions known as 'mission schools' for orphaned or abandoned children. Today such mission schools have become somewhat exclusive, and often cater to the English-educated and middle class rather than the indigent and orphaned as in times past.

A growing religion in Singapore, Christianity not only has new converts, but also expanding denominations taking root in the nation-state. Some very well-known and popular churches are home grown, and their expanding overseas ministries have given rise to the term 'megachurches' and are represented by larger-than-life pastors. The three megachurches in Singapore

are Faith Community Baptist Church (FCBC) founded in 1986 and led by Senior Pastor Lawrence Kong, New Creation Church founded and led by Senior Pastor Joseph Prince, and City Harvest Church founded in 1989 and led by Senior Pastor Kong Hee – all of which boast five-figure membership numbers. Often offshoots of the Baptist, Evangelical, and Charismatic branches of Christianity, these new Christian megachurches minister to huge congregations, have very healthy finances, and frequently number well-known Singaporeans amongst their adherents. City Harvest Church, for example, counts as one of its members the popular Mandarin pop singer Sun Ho (Ho Yeow Sun). Sun, incidentally, is also one of the co-founders of the church and the wife of its principal founder, Pastor Kong Hee. In 2015, Sun became a pastor of City Harvest.

It is thus far from an exaggeration to say that Christianity is openly practised in Singapore. When Gomes worked for the government service, a number of her colleagues were devout practicing Christians who brought their religion into the workplace. One small unit in the government department Gomes worked in, for example, made Christianity part of their daily discourse by peppering their conversations with biblical references, playing Christian music on the radio at all times, and displaying posters in the room dedicated to Jesus Christ and passages from the bible. Today, such displays of Christianity have reached new heights of performativity with the advent of social networking sites. Besides allowing users to display their allegiance to their faith through status updates, Facebook, for example, has numerous groups with healthy memberships dedicated to different facets, issues, and denominations of Christianity in Singapore. A Facebook search for the words 'Singapore' and 'Catholics' revealed the existence of 21 groups, while 'Singapore' and 'Christians' displayed no less than 86 groups. Meanwhile, a Google search of the terms 'Singapore' and 'Catholics' yielded no less than 907,000 hits, while 'Singapore' and 'Christians' displayed over 68 million. For Christian respondents, practising their faith by actively becoming part of Christian communities, even though their specific congregations may not have included significant numbers of Singaporeans, was still an effective method of reproducing Singaporean culture.

Part of the reason why Christianity is growing in importance among Singaporeans is due to its strong links with family and nation. Christianity generally stresses the importance of family, filial piety, and obedience within an ordered hierarchical framework – values familiar to the ethnic Singaporean Chinese majority. In Singapore, the family is a basic tenet of the society's nationalist culture and agenda, while serving effectively as a microcosm for the nation. Moreover, the Singapore government has

successfully managed to infuse the Chinese Confucian value of filial piety into the culture of Singapore through the 'Asian Values' label. Asian Values was a political ideology first introduced in the 1990s in Southeast Asia and East Asia to differentiate Asian cultural and societal values from those of the West. It was a term often used by Lee Kuan Yew (Prime Minister of Singapore, 1959–1990) and Mahathir bin Mohammad (Prime Minister of Malaysia, 1981–2003) to promote a pan-Asian identity that emphasized community and hierarchy over the individual. Hence, loyalty to family in terms of structure and hierarchy becomes anecdotally interpreted as allegiance to the government and state and vice versa.

Beyond the social, cultural, and political reasons for Christianity's growth and popularity, one must not forget that Christianity's ability to act as a bridge or commonality between diverse communities is also inherent in the universalism that was present at the birth of the Christian movement at an event known as Pentecost. Specifically, the Acts of the Apostles (2:9–11) presents a grand vision of the Christian movement embracing all cultures, ethnicities, and languages of the world in a universal community without any requirement that these be abandoned for a singular normative culture or identity. This vision of the in-gathering of new believers took place at Pentecost, where those present in Jerusalem heard the gospel proclaimed to them in their own languages. This suggests that cultural, ethnic, national, and linguistic particularities need not be abandoned when one embraces the Christian faith, as borne out by the fact that those present were not asked to give up their particular ethnicity, culture, national identity, or language to hear the Gospel in Hebrew or Aramaic, the languages of the early Christian Movement. It is within this context of Christianity's growth that we examine the interconnected variables of wealth and faith as demonstrated on digital media platforms.

Methodology

This chapter uses digital ethnographic (Pink *et al.*, 2015) methods, involving content analysis of websites and social media platforms in order to understand the impact of New Creation Church and City Harvest Church on Singaporeans, particularly those who are members of these organizations. Digital ethnography, as Pink *et al.* note, 'outlines an approach to doing ethnography in a contemporary world ... [and] ... invites researchers to consider how we live and research in a digital, material and sensory environment', because we do not live in 'a static world or environment'

(2015, p. 1). In addition, Pink and her colleagues go on further to explain that digital ethnography:

explores the consequences of the presence of digital media in shaping the techniques and processes through which we practice ethnography, and accounts for how the digital, methodological, practical and theoretical dimensions of ethnographic research are increasingly intertwined (Pink *et al.*, 2015, p.1).

We use digital ethnography as a method because digital media is part of everyday life. Digital media is pervasive in Singapore and connected to materialism, wealth, and consumerism, where the latest gadgets are indicators of economic and social statuses. Digital media has also become prevalent in the Christian churches in Singapore, particularly those we showcase in this chapter. While websites are now a necessary way for organizations to communicate their business and purpose, social media dominates the communication relationships between organizations and their publics. Never a one-way communication process, social media now gives agency to individuals to express their relationship with organizations. Gomes (2016, p. 8), for instance, observes that social media goes beyond 'more than just presenting us with various ways of communication with each other' to 'also allows us to broadcast our thoughts, opinions, ideas and ideologies to a broad audience'. Social media, in other words, does not only allow us to communicate our thoughts and opinions to an organization, but also to broadcast them to others. Before we examine our case studies in depth, let us look at the intertwined growth of wealth and faith through the contemporary phenomena of the prosperity gospel and the megachurch.

Prosperity Gospel and Megachurches

First emerging in the United States in the 1970s and experiencing tremendous growth from the 1980s onwards in North America and across the globe in Africa, Asia, and Australia, the megachurch movement seeks to provide a one-stop venue where every need and desire of a person or family, from faith to community support, could be met. Within the contemporary North American socio-cultural context, the rise of megachurches parallels the rise of neoliberalism and the triumph of profit-making and massive economic growth during this period. This economic development emerged as a result of the social and economic policies of Ronald Reagan, which has resulted in the rise of mega

shopping malls and massive superstores like Walmart that seek to provide a one-stop destination for every desire and need. In this regard, megachurches represent the 'Walmartization' of Christianity, i.e., building on the same goals of supersized growth to transform Christianity from traditional church structures and denominations to one-size-fits-all supersized behemoths of Christian communities where every need – spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physical – could be met and fulfilled (Thumma and Travis, 2007).

Within the broader history of Christianity's evolution, megachurches represent an unprecedented transformation of Christianity from traditional small-sized neighbourhood or local churches that belong to various denominations to one-size-fits-all supersized communities that are led by charismatic pastors who, by virtue of the emotional pull of their personal charisma and 'cool' factor, have been able to amass a large following of Christians who share their vision of church communities that seek to fulfil every facet of a believer's life. To attract and retain believers, worship services at megachurches emphasize the emotional aspects, i.e., high degrees of emotional energy and psychological highs, which in turn reinforces feelings of belonging and commitment. Not surprisingly, megachurches' worship services are highly emotional events for their congregants that comprise staged and choreographed performances by Oprah-like charismatic pastors with live praise bands and big screens, as well as special effects lighting and sound inside vast cavernous spaces that serve not only to accommodate their huge congregations, but also to create the spectacular effect of vastness as part of their branding.

In a society where the traditional extended familial and familiar social structures of society are fragmenting as a result of the rapid growth of internal migration of Americans away from their families in search of job opportunities, megachurches provide an alluring sense of community and an attractive framework of communal support for both individuals and typical American nuclear families who are far away from their traditional extended familial networks. Within the all-encompassing communal framework that megachurches offer, these individuals or families could feel at home and experience a sense of belonging to large communities of like-minded fellow Christians that are able to provide for all their spiritual and physical needs and growth under one roof. Unlike their traditional church counterparts, megachurches not only offer Sunday worship services, but also ancillary services for all kinds of therapeutic needs, including support groups for all kinds of needs, childcare, educational classes for both spiritual and physical growth, and other community building exercises (Thumma and Travis, 2007).

Not surprisingly, megachurches in North America are also characterized by their homogeneity in terms of social class, economic status, and

racial–ethnic identity, with white, wealthy, and middle-class Americans being overrepresented and racial, social, and economic minorities being underrepresented (Bird and Thumma, 2011). Studies conducted in North America (Thumma and Travis, 2007; Bird and Thumma, 2011) indicate that one defining characteristic of megachurches in North America is the fact that the majority of the megachurch membership are well educated and wealthy. Because the general megachurch membership is economically well off to begin with, megachurches have been able to leverage this aspect of their membership to raise large sums of money from their membership to finance their growth and further increase in size. In other words, megachurches represent the triumph of the American lifestyle of growth and success as a defining mark of successful churches. Megachurches that are able to provide for their members' lifestyles and needs experience continued growth, which in turn attracts more members who are desirous of such affirmation in their lives.

In addition, supersized growth as a key performance indicator of the megachurches' success is central to the identity construction of megachurches and the continuing validity of the theology of prosperity gospel that undergirds the worldview and ethos of these megachurches. The Australian sociologist of religion Marion Maddox speaks of megachurches as 'growth churches' with an intense focus on increasing their market presence and utilizing the key performance indicator of material success as evidence of divine blessings of their growth strategy and spiritual development (Maddox, 2012). This in turn generates a self-perpetuating cycle of growth that depends on the ability of the megachurches' pastors to attract and retain an ever-increasing number of new members to maintain this cycle of growth and justify the validity of the megachurches' prosperity gospel for their members' own economic prosperity. The prosperity gospel, in other words, is where capitalism fundamentally intersects with the intimately personal (Wilson, 2004; Ong, 2006); and where, as Cheryll Alipio (Chapter 8) and Roy Huijsmans (Chapter 10) note, money and morality meet.

The Emergence of Megachurches in Singapore

The roots of the emergence of megachurches in Singapore in the 1980s can be traced to certain demographic trends and key socio-political developments in 1980s Singapore. First, central to the rise of megachurches is the socio-economic class and 'English only' literacy of Singaporean Christians. Sociologist Terence Chong notes that Singaporean Christians in the 1980s were:

Certainly the best educated, with an overrepresentation of its number in upper secondary and tertiary education, and also the most economically well off, with overrepresentation in terms of the number living in “bungalows, semi-detached and terrace houses,” and “private flats,” and ‘almost half of all Christians’ said that ‘they were “literate” in “English only” (Chong, 2016, p. 98).

Second, unlike earlier generations of Singaporean Christians, many of whom hailed from the lower classes, many of these Singaporean Christians are converts to Evangelical Christianity, which took root and experienced tremendous growth in Singapore from the 1980s onwards (Goh, 2010, p. 65). In particular, Evangelical Christianity is attractive to a large number of Singaporeans because of its emphasis on black and white moral clarity that not only integrates well with the Singapore government’s emphasis on morality, but also with the traditional Confucian underpinnings of moral-ethical conduct and self-cultivation that continues to undergird wider Singaporean society (Chong, 2011). Unsurprisingly, these newly-minted Singaporean Christians, as beneficiaries of the social and economic policies and members of a privileged socio-economic class, are less enamoured with the Social Gospel of earlier Singaporean Christians who championed social-economic reforms and worked to change the lives of the economically marginalized and disenfranchised in Singapore (Goh, 2010, p. 65). Rather than empathizing and seeking solidarity with the lower classes, they are instead attracted to the prosperity gospel of megachurches that appears to justify their socio-economic privilege within the stratified Singaporean society as signs of God’s blessings and grace on their success.

Third, Operation Spectrum, which the Singapore government carried out in May 1987 against twenty-two Catholic social activists who were working on politically explosive issues involving labour, social welfare, and the marginalization of the economically underprivileged, had a chilling effect on the Social Gospel and the fight for social justice in the name of Christianity. While this is not the forum to discuss whether Operation Spectrum’s charges of Marxist conspiracy are justified, for the purposes of this discussion on megachurches it serves to reinforce the idea that liberation theology, social gospel, and social justice advocacy for the marginalized were dangerous and subversive in the eyes of the government. The unintended consequence was that Singaporean Christians who benefited from the Singapore government’s social economic policies had yet another reason to avoid raising social questions and instead sought to justify their social economic success as evidence of God’s blessings in their lives. As a result,

the decline of the Social Gospel and liberation theology under relentless pressure from the Singapore government paved the way for prosperity gospel and its emphasis on personal empowerment to take root in Singapore.

In other words, the socio-economic policies of the Singapore government in the 1980s that birthed and nurtured the middle class, the emphasis on meritocracy and self-improvement, and the triumph of capitalism and market forces over socialism and social intervention laid the ground work for the rise of megachurches in Singapore, which emerged in the 1980s as small breakaways from established mainline churches led by charismatic leaders with a strong evangelical worldview and an ambition to grow their nascent congregations, as can be seen in the case studies below. In many respects, megachurches in Singapore take their cues from their North American counterparts in terms of both theological worldviews and an emphasis on emotional and affective worship styles, thereby giving rise to the centrality of charismatic pastors, rock concert-style worship in massive auditoriums, and an emphasis on popular culture, consumerist ethos, self-growth, and business marketing that seeks unfettered growth to reinforce its image of successful growth.

Like their North American counterparts, Singaporean megachurches blend Evangelical and Pentecostal worldviews, emphasizing absolutist moral clarity clad with biblical injunctions in a world filled with shades of grey and the primacy of ecstatic worship experiences and personal, material, and spiritual growth. In doing so, they draw on capitalism's branding, consumerist, and marketing strategies to nurture their growth. Not surprisingly, the 'English only' middle class Singaporeans, with their familiarity with popular culture, rock concerts, shopping malls, and social-economic mobility, are thoroughly at home in megachurches and have driven the growth of megachurches in Singapore. Terence Chong's summary of his literature review on Singaporean megachurches and their membership is especially insightful:

Quantifiable criteria such as numerical and financial growth were more likely to be taken by megachurch Christians as signs of divine blessing and personal faithfulness. Echoing capitalist logic, the time, energy, and indeed finances that megachurch Christians invest in doing 'God's work' will be multiplied, in turn, as blessings. Reinforcing this is the myth of meritocracy, which justifies material blessings for hard work. In correlating the material with the spiritual, one is able to measure the immeasurable, perfect for younger professionals who desire a linear and progressional gauge of their journey with God. Finally, many of these young Singaporean Christians not only find a brand of spirituality and

theology that is familiar to the ethos of post-industrial Singapore but also cultural empathy with those of similar backgrounds undergoing the same class transitions, suggesting that the Singapore megachurch shares 'elective affinity' with the aspirations of young, upwardly mobile Singaporeans (Chong, 2016, p. 100).

With this background in the prosperity gospel and megachurches, let us now look intensively at New Creation Church and City Harvest Church.

Glamour, Fame, and Wealth: New Creation Church

New Creation Church is a non-denominational church based in Singapore and a member of the National Council of Churches of Singapore. While it was formed by a small group of Singaporeans, which included Joseph Prince, Henry Yeo, David Yeow, and Jack Ho, it is Prince who is almost exclusively associated with the church and associated with its rise. This is because New Creation Church's brand is exclusively tied with Prince's own cult of personality. As the church's website proclaims:

A founding member of New Creation Church, Joseph initially served as an elder and associate pastor. However, his unanimous appointment as senior pastor in 1990 marked a turning point in the history of the church, which started experiencing phenomenal growth. Under Joseph's leadership, the church congregation has grown by more than a hundredfold – from about 150 to more than 31,000 attendees.

While New Creation Church had humble beginnings, with its original venue being a flat in a HDB apartment block, it now boasts a S\$500 million performing arts centre as its main venue. The Star Performing Arts Centre seats 5000 people and has an amphitheatre that accommodates an additional 300 worshippers, and was built and is managed by Rock Productions, its business arm. The venue also incorporates a shopping mall called The Star Vista, which is owned and managed by CapitaLand Mall Asia (Zaccheus, 2016). The church is made up of members who have contributed to the financial strength of the organization, as this excerpt from a report in *The Straits Times* shows:

In a 2012 tax document obtained by The Sunday Times, the organisation said its daily broadcast could reach 680 million households globally. And in that financial year alone, the organisation listed a revenue of

US\$27.6 million, most of which came from 'contributions and grants'. Of that amount, US\$21.2 million was spent on the broadcasts. ... Still, the church has been a fund-raising powerhouse, collecting \$21 million in donations in a single day in 2010. This broke its own one-day records of \$19 million in 2009 and about \$18 million in 2008 (Feng, 2014).

Loyal worshippers not only convene at the Star venue for Sunday services, but also in other venues in different locations throughout Singapore where services are simultaneously broadcast. These include the Shine Auditorium, Marina Bay Sands Ballrooms, Cathay Cineplex Causeway Point, Shaw Theatres Seletar, Golden Village Grand (Great World City), and Golden Village Yishun. Shaw Theatres is a movie-theatre chain and Golden Village is a Cineplex chain in Singapore. While attendance for churchgoers at the Star venue is free, worshippers need to use an online booking form in order to reserve a seat for themselves. While the principal services, which are often conducted by Prince or one of the associate or visiting pastors, are in English, New Creation also offers worship services in Mandarin, Hokkien, and Cantonese at the Marina Bay Sands Ballrooms venue. The church also uses new media to reach out to its flock.

As reported by *The Straits Times*, the church reaches 680 million households worldwide through its daily broadcasts. These broadcasts take place on various cable television networks (e.g. Daystar Television Network and Christian Television Network), radio stations (e.g. KMOA 89.7 FM [American Samoa]), and online, for instance through the church's various social media outlets such as its YouTube channel (see <https://www.youtube.com/user/NewCreationChurch>), which has 13,793 subscribers, its Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/nccsg/>) with 149,328 followers, and its Twitter account with 17,700 followers (see <https://twitter.com/nccsg?lang=en>). The church's followers use the social media platforms to express their faith and loyalty to the church. For example, on its YouTube channel, comments to videos often look like the following from a worshipper in response to a YouTube video titled 'Jermaine Leong, New Creation Worship':¹

Thank you LORD JESUS for new creation church
So blessed with each wording... oh how beautiful savior we have in Jesus!
I love New Creation Worship.

¹ This is a response to a YouTube video titled 'Jermaine Leong, New Creation Worship: Finished', published on 5 April 2015 by the New Creation Worship wing. See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8M73dUPSjo>>, accessed 4 April 2019.

They have such a true and sweet spirit.
 You can feel the anointing in their singing,
 all because of Jesus, we are thoroughly blessed! Hallelujah
 I bless the glorious king who gave you this amazing song.
 Let there be abundance of his grace on your ministry
 and your service to the holy church of the world

New Creation Church's open official Facebook page is no different, with commenters expressing their faith and positive impressions of the church. Examples of such posts are represented in posts and comments on the New Creation Church Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/nccsg/>). In a response to the church's post of a quote from the bible: 'May he grant your heart's desires and make all your plans succeed' (Psalm 20:4, NLT). The post received 1400 reactions ('likes' and 'loves'), 136 shares, and 159 comments. The comments that are featured often express faith by praising the Holy Trinity (God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit) particularly for favours done towards them. The first post for instance praises God and Jesus while expressing generic thanks. The second post is more specific about what the commenter is thankful for: business class (airline) tickets.

While the church is becoming increasingly popular, with its admittance now averaging a Sunday attendance of 33,000 worshippers (New Creation Church, 2017a), it accords its success to its larger-than-life Senior Pastor Joseph Prince. Prince, as the church's website explains, is:

The author of best sellers such as *The Power of Right Believing*, *Destined to Reign*, and *Unmerited Favor*, Pastor Prince is also a highly sought-after conference speaker. He has impacted church leaders worldwide by preaching the unadulterated gospel of Jesus with boldness. He is known for teaching God's Word in a fresh, practical, and revelatory way that always unveils Jesus. His humorous, dynamic and engaging style of preaching has also endeared him to a wide spectrum of viewers who tune in to his daily television programme. His broadcast currently reaches millions of homes across North America, Europe, Africa, Australia, and Israel on both secular and Christian networks.

A founding member of New Creation Church, Pastor Prince initially served as an elder and associate pastor. However, his unanimous appointment as senior pastor in 1990 marked a turning point in the history of the church, which started experiencing phenomenal growth. Under Pastor Prince's leadership, the church has grown by more than a hundredfold — from

about 150 to an average Sunday attendance of 33,000. He currently serves as the senior pastor of the church on a voluntary basis (New Creation Church, 2017b).

To understand the appeal of New Creation Church, we need to look at their larger-than-life Senior Pastor Joseph Prince, who is the face of the church.

Brand Joseph Prince: The Rock Star Pastor

Joseph Prince's success as a pastor is not only confined to New Creation Church. This success is despite his not having much, or indeed any, formal training in theology. While his roots as a pastor may have started at the the New Creation Church, Prince has been consciously developing his brand for mass appeal. We see this in his reconstruction of his identity (e.g. through his name change), his dominance on digital media, and his founding of another new church based on his brand of Christianity, which he brands 'the Grace Revolution' outside his base of Singapore. All the while, Prince uses visual cues that integrate wealth and glamour with his teachings of Christianity.

Prince was born Xenonamandar Jegahusiee Singh, but later changed his name to the Anglicized Joseph Prince. While critics of Prince point out that the name change may have been because 'Joseph Prince' is easier to remember and, more significantly, is reminiscent of Joseph, the Hebrew Prince of Egypt (e.g. Goddall, 2013; Empowered by Christ, n.d) in Genesis 42:6–8, Prince's neutralizing of his name to erase his biracial heritage (Sikh father and ethnic Chinese mother) may have made him more palatable, particularly to ethnic Chinese Singaporeans. Three quarters of Singapore's population is ethnic Chinese and proselytizing would be more effective in terms of mass appeal. Increasing this appeal further is Prince's marriage to an ethnic Chinese Singaporean. Having an Anglicized name perhaps also allowed Prince to appeal to an international audience outside of Asia. He states on his website:

Joseph has also seen doors open supernaturally for his broadcast program, which currently reaches millions of homes across North America, Europe, Africa, Australia and Israel on both secular and Christian networks (Joseph Prince Ministries, 2017).

A name change, however, is not the only way in which Prince appeals to his congregation. Recognizing the power of digital media, Prince dominates

cable television and the internet, where broadcast television is also finding a home. Currently, he is featured prominently on the New Creation Church official website and its social media platforms (e.g. Facebook and Twitter). Prince also has his own personal website *Joseph Prince Ministries* (see <http://www.josephprince.org/>), a comprehensive collection of Prince's teachings that take the form of podcasts of his prayers and sermons. This website has an online store where the faithful can purchase his books and his DVDs, some of which have fixed prices or prices based on the purchaser's preference. Prince also has a YouTube channel (see <https://www.youtube.com/user/JosephPrinceOnline>), which has 213,007 subscribers, a public Facebook profile with 3,777,320 followers, and a Twitter account with an estimated 334,000 followers. While Prince may have a large media profile, the image he conveys is always controlled, where he and his family always look slick and glamorous and what he says officially points to the intersection between wealth and religiosity. Doing so, Prince creates an unbreakable link between his brand of Christianity and himself, which marries wealth and faith seamlessly together.

A Google Image search of Joseph Prince, for instance, reveals professionally-taken images of him preaching on a lavish stage or portraits in a studio (see Google Images 2017). All the images always show him as nothing less than well-groomed. His portraits show him to have a friendly demeanour, while the action shots of him preaching show a commanding albeit friendly figure. The images no doubt convey a financially successful man. This success is evident in media reports that he is one of the world's richest pastors (Singh, 2014). While New Creation Church has stated that he had stopped drawing a salary from them since 2009 (Carmichael, 2016; Singh, 2014), his wealth could well easily be made from the selling of his merchandise (at least 20 books, including special editions and translations, as well as DVDs) and from speaking arrangements. His book, *The Power of Right Believing, 100 Days of Right Believing*, for instance, was No. 2 on the *New York Times* bestseller list under the advice and 'how to' section (Feng, 2014).

The image of wealth and success, however, is drawn from Prince's interpretation of Christian teachings, which he names 'The Grace Revolution'. On his website (Joseph Prince Ministries, 2017) he explains that God spoke to him directly, while he was holidaying in the Swiss Alps, and that his calling was to spread The Grace Revolution:

'If you don't preach pure, unadulterated grace, people's lives will never be gloriously blessed and gloriously transformed'. This one statement

that God made to Joseph Prince in 1997 completely transformed the way Joseph preached and taught the gospel.

And thus began the Grace Revolution.

Joseph had been holidaying with his wife Wendy in the Swiss Alps and there, amid the majestic landscape, God told him that he had not been preaching grace, and gave him the mandate to preach grace – pure and unadulterated. This meant preaching about God's grace without attempting to balance, or mix, it with the law. Desiring to see his congregation liberated, empowered and blessed by the Lord, Joseph fully embraced the mandate from God and has not looked back since.

The passage above reveals two things: a) that he was chosen by God to facilitate this 'divine' message of The Grace Revolution, and b) that Prince is a wealthy and successful man, as manifested by his choice of holiday locations. Prince claims that God spoke to him in 1997 when the Swiss Alps would have been – whether real or imagined – considered a luxury holiday by Singaporeans or anyone travelling internationally from outside Europe. God speaking to Prince in, as Prince himself states, a 'majestic landscape' gives the impression that God approves of this luxurious, if not opulent, lifestyle.

Prince's The Grace Revolution has resulted in the New Creation Church growing from 2000 members in 1997 to 31,000 at present, but has also increased his transnational mobility to the point where he has preached in Israel, Norway, the Netherlands, the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, and in various part of Asia (Joseph Prince Ministries, 2017). Moreover, he has found fame and wealth through the communication of The Grace Revolution (books, DVDs, television, radio and internet broadcasts, and speaking engagements), resulting in his social and religious cache increasing due to his association with fellow well-known pastor and televangelist Joel Osteen. In 2014, Prince opened The Grace Revolution Church in Texas, which shares identical beliefs with those of New Creation Church, but which is not financially supported by the Singapore church.

Fall from Grace: Kong Hee and the Mismanagement of City Harvest Church Funds

Joseph Prince's cult-like figure among the faithful who go to New Creation Church is aided primarily by the rock-star image of the wealthy and glamorous preacher he has carved out for himself. This intersectionality works well in Singapore because it fits into the national discourse, which

values the rewards of material goods through hard work. Likewise, with the prosperity gospel that Prince both personifies and preaches, wealth and fame do come to those who work hard at being faithful to God through what Prince calls The Grace Revolution. Wealth, in other words, is the reward from God for complete loyalty and devotion. However, what happens when wealth is seen to corrupt?

In October 2015 the Singapore courts convicted Senior Pastor Kong Hee, together with five other leaders of the City Harvest Church, of misusing S\$50 million from church funds 'as part of a plot to further the music career of Kong's wife, pastor-singer Ho Yeow Sun. They funnelled \$24 million into sham bonds to bankroll her career, and used a further \$26 million to cover their tracks' (Cheong 2016). The reason for funding her career was for evangelistic purposes, as reported in the Singapore media: 'This was a situation which [...] involved no personal gain on the appellants' part', Judge Chao Hick Tin said. 'They believed that their acts [...] would ultimately advance the interests of City Harvest Church' (Reuters, 2017). At the time of writing, Kong Hee was sentenced to 3.5 years' jail. While Kong Hee has asked for forgiveness from members of his church, attendance has dropped by a third since his conviction. Numbers started to fall in 2010 when criminal investigations into the mismanagement of funds began. In 2009, the church attracted 23,565 people, but by the end of 2015 only 16,482 people worshipped there. At the time of the investigation, New Creation Church took the opportunity to distance itself from the investigation and to assure its members that their commercial ventures were legitimate. Before the finance scandal hit, City Harvest and New Creation followed an almost identical formula for success. Drawing large crowds of Singaporeans, both churches started out as the result of a small group of friends deciding to form a new church that grew in size, venue, and reach (through live webcasts), and was based around the personality cult of their respective leaders.

Kong Hee and his wife Sun Ho founded City Harvest in 1989, running it out of a single-storey terraced house with a congregation of just twenty teenagers in attendance (Zaccheus, 2017). While they have had different venues since then, they now have a permanent place of worship in a 2300-seater complex while broadcasting simultaneously to various halls in Suntec City. Kong's teachings combine worship with making money. Like Prince's Grace Revolution, Kong uses another term, which he calls 'Cultural Mandate', to explain how the worship of God leads to material rewards. He states on his website:

Through the message of the Cultural Mandate, many Christian professionals functioning within secular industries such as business and

entertainment have been inspired to harness their platforms, positively influencing their communities for Christ and furthering the kingdom of God (City Harvest Church, 2017b).

However, netizens in Singapore have taken to social media to express their disgust and displeasure at Kong Hee's misappropriation of funds as well as his religious mandate. Facebook pages of official and alternative news websites in Singapore, for instance, have been inundated with criticisms of him. Singaporeans responded critically to news reports appearing in the Facebook pages of *The Straits Times* (Singapore's flagship English-language newspaper) and *The Mothership* (an online alternate news site based in Singapore) of the sentencing of Kong and his associates, which was reported on 9 April 2017.²

These reports reveal that Singaporeans are not supportive of Kong, but rather see him as a criminal who defrauded the church and its devotees. Moreover, they critique Kong as being money-minded and a squanderer of church funds in the failed bid to promote his wife's singing career. Netizens, like those commenting in *The Straits Times*, question the validity of Kong to still continue preaching despite his conviction and sentencing, while those commenting in *The Mothership* doubt his sincerity. A search of both sites also reveals that netizens have coined the term 'konvict' – an amalgamation between Kong and convict – to describe Kong or to use the term to identify him.

While the numbers of the faithful attending City Harvest Church have been reduced by a third over the period of the investigation and conviction, those who still consider themselves part of the church appear to be supportive of Kong, at least on the City Harvest Church Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/cityharvestchurch/>). In the comments section of City Harvest Church's post titled 'CHC Trial: Statement from the City Harvest Church Management Board', 7 April 2017, worshippers of the church are supportive and forgiving of their pastor, with a number of posts expressing relief at a reduced sentence while others equate the reduced sentencing to divine interference. While this particular City Harvest Church post revealed a very small number who question Kong's actions (e.g. 'He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone; it will come back to him'), others

2 Both news agencies have high circulations, with *The Straits Times* being the premier English-language news agency in both print and digital and *The Mothership* claiming a monthly viewership of 3.8 million people (<<http://mothership.sg/about-us/>>). At the time of writing, the Facebook page for *The Straits Times* has 1,036,716 people subscribing to the page through likes, while *The Mothership*'s Facebook page has 183,244 likes.

see that he and his church leaders have done no criminal wrongdoing as the following comment shows:

My understanding on the definitions in Sec 23, Sec 24 and Sec 405 illustration (d) of Chapter 224 Penal Code, my opinion is no case for Criminal Breach of Trust when:
No criminal intention. No dishonest or wrongful gain. No dishonest or wrongful lost.

City Harvest Church members arguably seem to equate faith in Kong with faith in both the church and in God.

Conclusion

In many respects, the rise of megachurches in Singapore parallels the rise of megachurches in North America. With the economic growth engendered by the economic policies under the leadership of the late Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his People's Action Party, Singaporeans have been socialized to expect growth at all levels of society, the church included, as a mark of success and a sign of achievement. It comes as no surprise that megachurches in Singapore are able to capitalize on this mark of growth as a milestone of success to attract a membership desiring such growth and success in both their spiritual and physical lives.

While there are certainly large Catholic and mainline Protestant churches in Singapore with mega-sized congregations by North American standards (e.g., Wesley Methodist Church, St. Andrew's Cathedral [Anglican], the Jesuit-run St. Ignatius Church, and the Franciscan-administered Church of Saint Mary of the Angels), what sets megachurches apart from their Catholic and mainline Protestant counterparts in Singapore is not merely their huge numbers, but also the megachurches' near complete reliance on capitalism's language of business growth and marketing strategies in their operational structure and day-to-day operations. This can be seen in the savvy use of advertising campaigns and social media outreach campaigns (as discussed in the case studies above) and the megachurches' investment in Singapore's commercial real estate ventures (e.g., New Creation Church's Star Performing Arts Centre and its investment in the One North shopping mall, and City Harvest Church's investment in Suntec International Convention and Exhibition Centre), all of which seek to generate income and fund further growth in a virtuous cycle of more growth.

The prosperity gospel that emerges from the strategic blending of the Christian gospel with capitalism and its business and marketplace-centric emphasis on material success is alluring to 'English only' elites in Singapore. It should come as no surprise that young, upwardly mobile, affluent, and aspirational Singaporeans are therefore becoming attracted to megachurches in their droves. This affinity is driven in part by Singaporean Christians seeking a Christianity that also empowers their personal, material, and spiritual growth. However, this prosperity gospel is as far removed as one can get from the social gospel of historic mainline Protestant and Catholic churches that focus on addressing the ills of social injustice.

On the one hand, megachurches in Singapore represent a therapeutic turn in Christianity away from a counter-cultural religious faith that challenges its members to live out the gospel ideals to care for the underprivileged, toward a personalist and entrepreneurial religious faith that seeks to fulfil their members' quest for socio-economic mobility, accumulation of wealth, and attainment of upward social class. Indeed, the principal attraction of megachurches for the emergent middle class in Singapore lies in their appeal to the quintessential Singaporean sense of agency, entailing a quest for upward mobility within the meritocratic and achievement-oriented culture promoted by the Singapore government. This can be seen in the sermons of Kong Hee and Joseph Prince, who both seek to appeal to the 'can do' entrepreneurial ethos and achievement-oriented spirit of Singaporeans, and who have themselves made socio-economic class transitions in order to tap into the enthusiastic energy and economic wealth of these Singaporeans to undergird their churches' investments in various commercial real estate ventures and other growth projects.

On the other hand, the prosperity gospel that drives these megachurches and their theological and organizational innovations is rooted in the paradoxical secularization of Christianity, marking the triumph of capitalism and market forces as shaping the future of Christianity and Christian churches. Indeed, capitalism's faith in the 'invisible' hand of market forces has reshaped the interpretation of the Christian Gospel and led to the promotion of a Christian faith that dwells on personal growth and empowerment rather than societal transformation.

Furthermore, in the context of a contemporary Singaporean society where income inequality and the gap between the wealthy and the working poor is increasing, one should not be surprised that the prosperity gospel of the megachurches like New Creation Church and City Harvest Church provides the ultimate *theological justification* not just for wealth acquisition, but also for flaunting one's wealth as a sign of God's blessings in direct correlation to

one's faith (Maddox, 2012, 2013). In this regard, the New Creation Church and City Harvest Church join other megachurches like Hillsong in Australia in advancing the perspective that 'wealth, like salvation, is available to all who have faith enough to receive it' (Maddox, 2013, p. 110), thereby reinterpreting the fullness of salvation and a new life in Jesus Christ to encompass both the spiritual and also *material* blessings, i.e., prosperity and success in daily life. This is achieved not through the traditional Christian teachings of community, solidarity, social justice, or ethical living, as commonly identified with traditional Catholic social teaching, the mainline Protestant social gospel, or Latin American liberation theologies, but rather through the more individualistic quest for aspiration, self-improvement, and self-growth that would lead to the acquisition of wealth and successful living as signs of God's blessings and grace.

Nevertheless, because megachurches extend their operations well beyond simply being providers of worship services into non-religious aspects that generate income and profit for these churches and their leadership, they exist in a grey area with overlapping religious interests on the one hand, and economic, business, and profit-making interests on the other hand. The uncritical reliance on the metrics of numerical membership and income growth, the unfettered use of marketing discourse, and the unrestrained investments in commercial property investments could result in difficulties and challenges as lines are crossed and conflicts of interests arise, with opportunities for fraudulent and other financial shenanigans, e.g., embezzlement, tax evasion, criminal breach of trust, etc. by the church leaders, as can be seen in City Harvest Church and Pastor Kong Hee and his accomplices, as well as in the largest megachurch in the world, the Seoul-based Yoido Full Gospel Church, led by Pastor David Yonggi Cho, who was convicted of tax evasion and given a suspended sentence.

In conclusion, in the case of megachurches in Singapore, rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ prophetically critiquing and challenging the socio-economic inequalities caused by capitalism and market forces, one finds ironically that capitalism, market forces, consumerism, and hyperconsumption are themselves shaping how the Gospel is understood and appropriated by contemporary Singaporean Christians. Likewise, rather than the Christian Gospel shaping how Singaporean Christians respond to the world of contemporary Singapore with its increasing socio-economic inequalities, megachurches turn that equation on its head where the values and discourses of capitalism shape the way the Christian Gospel is interpreted, understood, and lived out by Singaporean Christians.

Bibliography

- Bird, Warren, and Scott Thumma, *A New Decade of Megachurches: 2011 Profile of Large Attendance Churches in the United States* (Hartford: Hartford Institute for Religious Research, 2011). Available at <<http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/megachurch/New-Decade-of-Megachurches-2011Profile.pdf>>, accessed 7 July 2017.
- Carmichael, Cody, 'Top 10 Richest Pastors in the World – 2017 List Updated', *Gazette View*, 27 February 2016. Available at <<http://gazettereview.com/2016/02/richest-pastors-in-world/>>, accessed 7 July 2017.
- Cheong, Danson, 'City Harvest Attendance Declines Again', *The Straits Times*, 8 May 2016. Available at <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/city-harvest-attendance-declines-again>>, accessed 30 July 2016.
- Chong, Terence, 'Filling the Moral Void: the Christian Right and the State in Singapore', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 41, no. 4 (2011), pp. 566–583.
- Chong, Terence, 'The Church and State in Singapore', in *Singapore: Negotiating State and Society, 1965-2015*, ed. by Jason Lim and Terence Lee (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 94–109.
- City Harvest Church, 'City Harvest DNA', *City Harvest Church* (2017a). Available at <<https://www.chc.org.sg/#!chc-dna>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- City Harvest Church, 'In the Marketplace', *City Harvest Church* (2017b). Available at <<https://www.chc.org.sg/#!in-the-marketplace/>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- City Harvest Church, *City Harvest Church Facebook* (2017c). Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/cityharvestchurch/>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- Credit Suisse, 'Global Wealth Report, 2016', *Credit Suisse* (2016). Available at <<https://www.credit-suisse.com/au/en/about-us/research/research-institute/global-wealth-report.html>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- Department of Statistics, Singapore, 'Religion', *Census of Population 2000: Statistical Release 2: Education, Language and Religion* (2001). Available at <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/publications/publications-and-papers/cop2000/census_stat_release2>, pp. 33–40, accessed 7 July 2017.
- Empowered by Christ, 'Joseph Prince', Empowered by Christ.Org (n.d.). Available at <<http://www.empoweredbychrist.org/joseph-prince.html>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- Feng, Zengkun, 'Singapore Pastor Joseph Prince Goes Worldwide', *The Straits Times*, 28 October 2014. Available at <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-pastor-joseph-prince-goes-worldwide>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- Goddall, Lance, 'The Fresh Prince – Destined to Ruin', Christian Witness Ministries (2013). Available at <<https://www.cwmf.org.au/cetf-magazines/the-fresh-prince>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- Goh, Daniel Pei Siong, 'The State and Social Christianity in Postcolonial Singapore', *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 25, (2010), pp. 54–89.

- Gomes, Catherine, 'Keeping Memories Alive: Maintaining Singapore Nationalism Abroad', *Asia Journal of Global Studies*, 3, no. 1 (2009), pp. 37–50.
- Gomes, Catherine, 'Nationhood and Selective Memory: A Case Study of the Official Remembering of the Cantonese Black and White *amah*', in *Women and the Politics of Representation in Southeast Asia: Engendering Discourse in Singapore and Malaysia*, ed. by Adeline Koh and Yu-Mei Balasingamchow (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).
- Gomes, Catherine, 'Introduction', in *The Asia-Pacific in the Age of Transnational Mobility: The Search for Community and Identity and through Social Media*, 1st edition, ed. by Catherine Gomes (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2016), pp. 1–15.
- Google Images, 'Joseph Prince', *Google Images* (2017). Available at <https://www.google.com/search?q=joseph+prince&rlz=1C1CHBF_en-GBAU836AU836&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0ahUKEwixrLGPusHhAhWn8HMB-HYAgCrQQ_AUIDygC&biw=1366&bih=625>, accessed 1 July 2017.
- Housing and Development Board, 'Public Housing – A Singapore Icon', Housing and Development Board' (2016). Available at <<http://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/about-us/our-role/public-housing-a-singapore-icon>>, accessed 1 July 2017.
- Joseph Prince Ministries, 'About', *Joseph Prince Ministries* (2017). Available at <<http://www.josephprince.org/about/>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- Joseph Prince Online, *Joseph Prince Online YouTube* (2017). Available at <<https://www.youtube.com/user/JosephPrinceOnline>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- Karmali, Naazneen, 'Singapore Rich List 2015: Fortunes Of 50 Richest Drop in Country's Golden Jubilee Year', *Forbes* (2015). Available at <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/naazneenkarmali/2015/07/22/singapore-rich-list-2015-fortune-of-50-richest-drops-in-countrys-golden-jubilee-year/#42da0eb773bb>>, accessed 7 July 2017.
- Maddox, Marion, '“In the Goofy Parking Lot”: Growth Churches as a Novel Religious Form for Late Capitalism', *Social Compass*, 59, no. 2 (2012), pp. 146–158.
- Maddox, Marion, 'Prosper, Consume, and Be Saved', *Critical Research on Religion*, 1, no. 1 (2013), pp. 108–115, doi: 10.1177/2050303213476108.
- Mothership.sg, 'About', *mothership.sg* (2017). Available at <<http://mothership.sg/about-us/>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- New Creation Church, 'About Us', *New Creation Church* (2017a). Available at <<https://www.newcreation.org.sg/about-us>>, accessed 6 August 2017.
- New Creation Church, 'Announcements', *New Creation Church* (2017b). Available at <<https://www.newcreation.org.sg/updates/#announcements>>, accessed 6 August 2017.
- New Creation Church, *New Creation Church Facebook* (2017). Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/nccsg/>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- New Creation Church, *New Creation Church Twitter* (2017). Available at <<https://twitter.com/nccsg?lang=en>>, accessed 5 July 2017.

- New Creation Church, *New Creation Church YouTube Channel* (2017). Available at <<https://www.youtube.com/user/NewCreationChurch>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- New Creation Church, 'Jermaine Leong, New Creation Worship: Finished', *New Creation Church YouTube Channel*, 5 April 2015. Available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8M73dUPSjo>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- Ong, Aihwa. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
- Pink, Sarah, Heather Horst, John Postill, Larissa Hjorth, Tania Lewis, and Jo Tacchi, 'Ethnography in a Digital World', in *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*, 1st edition (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2015), pp. 1–18.
- Reuters, 'Jail Term Cut for City Harvest Church Leader in Pop Music Fraud Case', *Asiaone.com*, 7 April 2017. Available at <<http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/jail-term-cut-city-harvest-church-leader-pop-music-fraud-case>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- SG Young Investment, 'How Much Money Does Couple Need to Earn?', *SG Young Investment* (2014). Available at <<http://sgyounginvestment.blogspot.com.au/2014/02/how-much-money-does-couple-need-to-earn.html>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- Singapore, Parliament, 'Shared Values', *Parliamentary Debates: Official Report*, Shared Values, 15 January 1991, cols. 967–968.
- Singh, Bryna, 'Pastors Rich List: Who the Top 9 Are and How they Rose to Prominence', *The Straits Times*, 25 October 2014. Available at <<http://www.straitstimes.com/world/africa/pastors-rich-list-who-the-top-9-are-and-how-they-rose-to-prominence>>, accessed 3 July 2017.
- Tan, Ern Ser, 'Is Raising Singapore's Birth Rate Conceivable?', *The Graduate: The Magazine of the National University of Singapore Society*, April–June 2016, pp. 16–17.
- Thumma, Scott and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn From America's Largest Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).
- Trading Economics, 'Singapore GDP', *Trading Economics* (2017). Available at <<https://tradingeconomics.com/singapore/gdp>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- Wealthinsight, 'Singapore Millionaire Growth Overtakes Hong Kong', *Wealthinsight* (2015). Available at <<http://www.wealthinsight.com/pressrelease/singapore-millionaire-growth-overtakes-hong-kong-4731112>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- Williams, Ann, 'More Millionaires Choosing to Relocate to Singapore over Hong Kong Says Report', *The Straits Times*, 19 January 2016. Available at <<http://www.straitstimes.com/business/economy/more-millionaires-choosing-to-relocate-to-singapore-over-hong-kong-says-report>>, accessed 5 July 2017.
- Wilson, Ara, *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok Tomboys, Tycoons and Avon Ladies in the Global City*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

Woodpecker Asia Tech, 'How Much Does a Car Really Cost in Singapore', *Gobear.com* (2017). Available at <<https://www.gobear.com/sg/blog/how-much-does-a-car-really-cost-in-singapore>>, accessed 1 July 2017.

World Atlas, 'The Richest Countries in the World', *Worldatlas.com* (2017). Available at <<http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-richest-countries-in-the-world.html>>, accessed 1 July 2017.

Zaccheus, Melody, 'Rise and Fall of a Superstar Pastor', *The Straits Times*, 9 April 2017. Available at <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/rise-and-fall-of-a-superstar-pastor?utm_campaign=Echobox&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&xtor=CS1-10#link_time=1491700413>, accessed 4 July 2017.

Zaccheus, Melody, 'New Creation Church's \$500m Centre Fully Paid for', *The Straits Times*, 28 February 2016. Available at <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/new-creation-churchs-500m-centre-fully-paid-for>>, accessed 5 July 2017.

About the Authors

Catherine Gomes is Associate Professor at RMIT University in Melbourne and recently completed an Australian Research Council DECRA (Discovery Early Career Research Award) fellowship. Her work covers migration, transnationalism, and diasporas, particularly transient migration in Australia and Singapore with a special interest in international students, their well-being, their social networks, and their media and communication use. Catherine is founding editor of *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration* (Intellect Books). Her recent books include *Siloed Diversity: Transnational Migration, Digital Media and Social Networks* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), *Transnational Migrations in the Asia-Pacific: Transformative Experiences in the Age of Digital Media* (with Brenda S.A. Yeoh, Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), *Transient Mobility and Middle Class Identity: Media and Migration in Australia and Singapore* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), *International Student Connectedness and Identity: Transnational Perspectives* (with Ly Thi Tran, Springer, 2017), *The Asia Pacific in the Age of Transnational Mobility: The Search for Community and Identity on and through Social Media* (Anthem Press, 2016) and *Multiculturalism through the Lens: A Guide to Ethnic and Migrant Anxieties in Singapore* (Ethos Books, 2015).

Address: Catherine Gomes, School of Media and Communication, RMIT University, 124 La Trobe Street, Melbourne 3000, VIC, Australia

Tel.: 61-3-9925 5068

E-mail: Catherine.gomes@rmit.edu.au

Jonathan Y. Tan is Archbishop Paul J. Hallinan Professor of Catholic Studies and affiliated faculty in the Chinese, Ethnic Studies, Asian Studies, and International Studies programs at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, United States. His research and scholarship focus on Asian and Asian American Christianity, World Christianity, Migration Studies, and Interreligious Studies. He is the author of *Introducing Asian American Theologies* (Orbis Books, 2008) and *Christian Mission among the Peoples of Asia* (Orbis Books, 2014). He is also the lead editor of *World Christianity: Perspectives and Insights* (Orbis Books, 2016) and co-edited *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Address: Jonathan Y. Tan, Religious Studies Department, Case Western Reserve University, 10900 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44106-7112, United States of America.

Tel.: 1-216-368-6446

E-mail: jonathan@jonathantan.org; Web: www.jonathantan.org