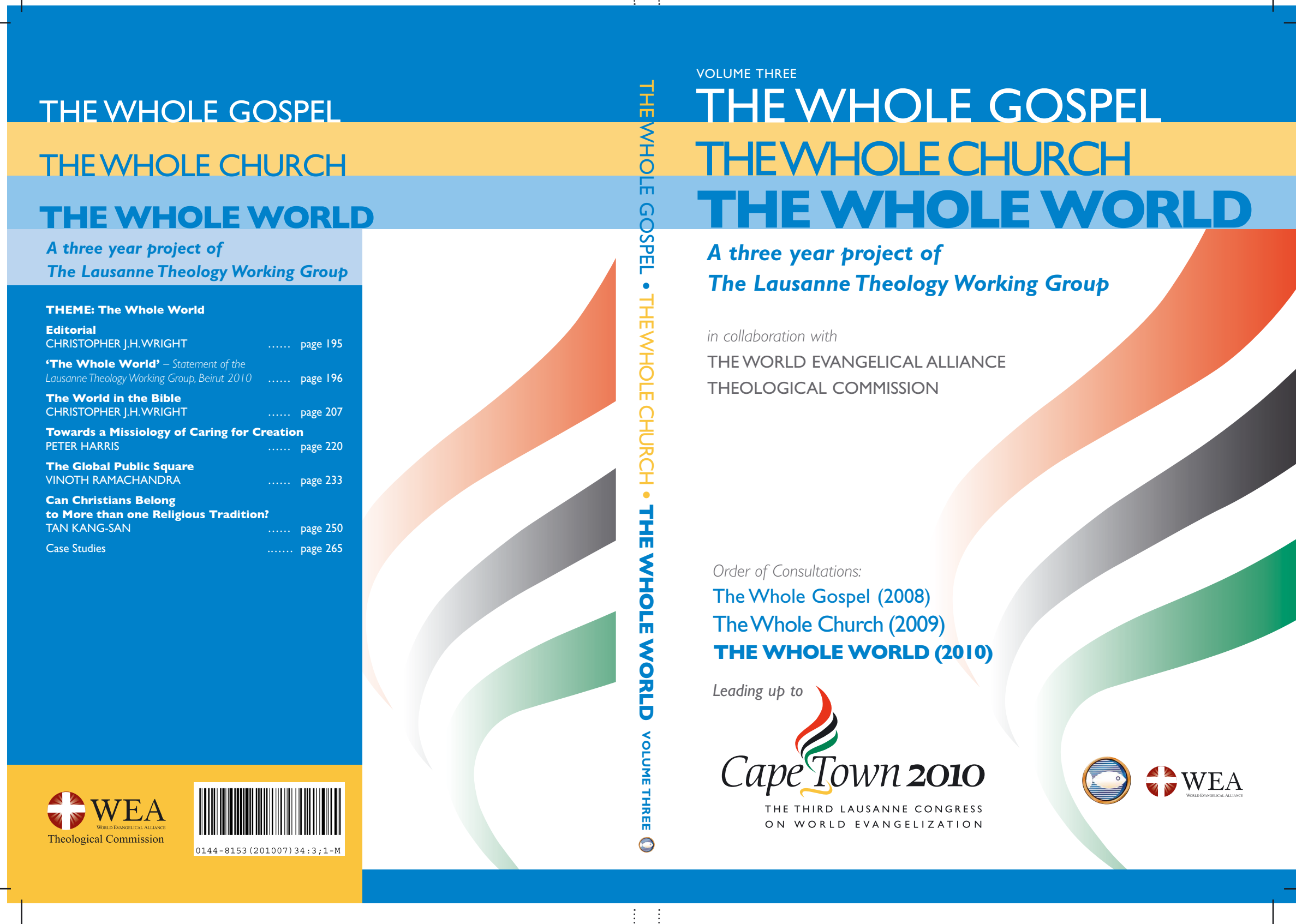


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THE WHOLE GOSPEL

THE WHOLE CHURCH

THE WHOLE WORLD

*A three year project of  
The Lausanne Theology Working Group*

**THEME: The Whole World**

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VOLUME THREE

THE WHOLE GOSPEL

THE WHOLE CHURCH

THE WHOLE WORLD

*A three year project of  
The Lausanne Theology Working Group*

*in collaboration with*  
THE WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE  
THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

*Order of Consultations:*  
The Whole Gospel (2008)  
The Whole Church (2009)  
**THE WHOLE WORLD (2010)**

*Leading up to*



THE WHOLE GOSPEL • THE WHOLE CHURCH • THE WHOLE WORLD VOLUME THREE

The Lausanne Movement's Theology Working Group gathers evangelical theologians from the global Church. These papers, the fruit of discussions in Beirut, Lebanon (February 2010) under the chairmanship of Dr Christopher J H Wright, are published to stimulate further thinking and writing on issues surrounding the nature of the gospel.

The Lausanne Movement grew out of a global Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, spearheaded by Billy Graham. John Stott was chief architect of The Lausanne Covenant, a major legacy of that Congress, which was to define evangelicalism for the following thirty years. The second Lausanne Congress was held in Manila, Philippines, in 1989; the Third Lausanne Congress will take place in Cape Town, 2010.

For further information visit [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org).

# Evangelical Review of Theology

GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

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## Editorial Preface

# ‘The Whole World’—

### Reflections of the Lausanne Theology Working Group

THE LAUSANNE Theology Working Group hosted a consultation in Beirut, Lebanon, 14-19 February 2010. 23 people from fourteen countries convened and worked together around four plenary papers and sixteen case studies, which provided us with a very wide variety of perspectives on what is meant by ‘the whole world’. We met in the comfortable facilities kindly provided by the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, and in collaboration with the WEA Theological Commission.

Each morning we studied Colossians, since in it Paul makes crystal clear the cosmic significance of Jesus Christ—in creating, sustaining and reconciling the whole world to God—and the correspondingly vast relevance of the gospel to the whole world at every level. The biblical themes that arose from our study each day informed and infused our reflection on papers and case-studies.

The topic, ‘The Whole World’ is the third in a series of consultations on the theological significance of the three phrases of the Lausanne Covenant, *The whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world*. The first was in February 2008 in Chiang Mai on ‘The Whole Gospel’; the second was in January 2009 in Panama on ‘The Whole Church’. These are part of the contribution of the Theology Working Group to the preparation for Lausanne III Congress, Cape Town 2010.

When the three-fold expression was first used, it was probably meant primarily in a quantitative and geograph-

ical sense—that the gospel should be shared with all the people who live in every place on earth, which is certainly a vital dimension of its meaning. We still face the fact that millions of the world’s inhabitants have never heard the name of Jesus Christ or the good news of the salvation that God has accomplished through him. We affirm and pray for all those in the Lausanne Movement whose calling focuses primarily on the world of the unevangelized, including particularly the Lausanne Strategy Working Group along with other Working Groups and Special Interest Groups.

However, as we reflect on ‘the whole world’ in the light of the Bible, there are also qualitative dimensions that we need to address, and which the gospel certainly does address. Our conference was initially framed around six major themes:

- *The World in the Bible*
- *The World of God’s Creation*
- *The World of Religions*
- *The World of the Globalised Public Square*
- *The World of Violence*
- *The World of Poverty and Injustice*

The findings in the following Statement summarise some of what we learned together. They are not final or comprehensive but reflect the ongoing nature of doing theology—it is ‘theology on the way’ and the results of a consultation of a working group.

**Chris Wright**  
**Chair, Lausanne Theology**  
**Working Group**

# The Whole World

## Statement of the Lausanne Theology Working Group Beirut 2010

### A. The World In The Bible

1. There is in the Bible a fundamental ambivalence about 'the world'. On the one hand it is God's good creation, loved by him and to be redeemed by him; on the other hand it is the place of human and satanic rebellion and opposition to God. We have to bear both of these in mind, in creative tension, in all our missional reflection and engagement in the world. In evangelical circles there is a tendency to think of 'the world' primarily in the second negative sense, and we need to be willing to appreciate the other dimensions, for example in terms of what we can learn from all cultures of human beings made in the image of God.

2. The Bible has a rich vocabulary to describe 'the world'—including: the earth; the world; the heaven and the earth; all things [in heaven and earth]; the fullness of the earth; the creation; the cosmos; all the nations; all flesh; the inhabited world. In all this variety, the Bible seems to speak of 'the world' in at least five major ways.

- a) as the *physical creation* (the world of nature in which we live);
- b) as the *whole human race*, (the world of nations, languages and cultures and all that goes with them, including religions);
- c) as the *place of rebellion and opposition* to God (the world of sin and judgement);

d) as the *object of God's love and the arena of God's redemptive mission in history* (the world that God so loved that he gave his Son for its salvation);

e) as the *new creation* (the world being made anew in Christ).

All of these are important dimensions that should be included in missiological reflection. The final section of this report combines the last three of those dimensions under the heading, 'The World of Sin and Redemption'.

3. The Bible tells us that God owns the world, rules the world, reveals himself through the world, watches all that happens in the world, and loves the world of 'all he has made'. God's relationship with the world he created is profound and dynamic.

4. Therefore, human beings as creatures share in all of those relationships between God and the world. This must impact what it means to think about 'the whole world'. All humanity, every person, has these things in common, along with all creation.

- a) They belong to God, however much they have surrendered that ownership to other lords.
- b) They live under God's sovereignty, however much they resist it. History is governed by God, as is all creation.
- c) They know God to some degree sim-

- ply by living in the world that reveals him, however much they have suppressed that knowledge in darkness and perversion.
- d) They are created to glorify God and give him thanks and praise, though they fail to do so.
  - e) They are accountable to God, who watches all they do and understands not only the actions but also the motives of every human being.
  - f) They are loved by God, however much they reject his love, or ignore the daily proofs of it, or indeed treat God as the enemy.
  - g) Wherever we go in the world, we never go to where God is not present and active in sovereign revelation and grace.
5. While the term 'the world' easily speaks to us of great magnitudes (the planet, all the nations), we must learn to see the world 'from the bottom up'. God is concerned also about persons in families, in villages and neighbourhoods. It is noteworthy that the earliest form of the promise of God to Abraham promises that 'all the households/clans of the world will be blessed through you'.
6. We must learn to see the world as God sees it and as the Bible describes it. We do not see the world as Toyota or McDonald's do (as a vast marketplace for unlimited expansion); nor as atheist biologists (as an intricate but purposeless product of evolution); nor with the extremes of sentimentality on the one hand or ruthless exploitation on the other.

## B. The World of God's Creation

1. We human beings ought never to forget that we are part of God's creation—we are of the earth: *Adam* from '*adamah*'. As such, we take our part in the worship of God that is the proper function of all creation. We do so in uniquely human ways, of course, as the one creature made in God's image. But the goal of bringing glory to God in worship is intrinsic to creation as a whole.
2. '*Most important among the Bible's ways of placing us among the creatures, not over them, is the theme of creation's worship of God portrayed in the Psalms (Pss 19:1-3, 97:6; 98:7-9 and especially 148) and, with Christological and eschatological character, in the New Testament (Phil 2:10; Rev 5:13). All creatures, animate and inanimate, worship God. This is not, as modern biblical interpreters so readily suppose, merely a poetic fancy or some kind of primitive animism. The creation worships God just by being itself, as God made it, existing for God's glory. Only humans desist from worshipping God; other creatures, without thinking about it, worship God all the time. There is no indication in the Bible of the notion that the other creatures need us to voice their praise for them.*'<sup>1</sup>
3. '*The earth is the Lord's*'. To the non-Christian world we bear witness that 'the earth is *the Lord's*'—it has an owner to whom humanity is accountable. The earth is neither ours to do with what we like because we are the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 176.

most dominant species, nor does it belong to nobody because we are only one species among others. But in Christian circles we need to proclaim strongly that '*The earth is the Lord's*'—and not just the people on it: that all creation is God's property. The earth is the property of the God we claim to love and obey. Creation care is therefore an inescapable part of our responsibility and love towards God for what belongs to our Father and is the inheritance of the Son. We care for the earth, quite simply, because it belongs to the one whom we call Lord.

4. Taking the whole gospel to the whole world means that we must take full account of the whole story of the whole Bible for the whole world—i.e. for the world in all the dimensions portrayed by the Bible. Many Christians' understanding of the gospel seems to start with Genesis 3 ('We've got a sin problem'), to end with Rev. 20 ('There is a day of judgment coming'), and then present Jesus as the means to solve the first and escape the second. There is no doubt that this great reality of personal salvation from sin through the cross of Christ is at the heart of the gospel, as Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 15:1-3. But it is not the whole of the gospel, for it does not tell the whole biblical story.

5. The Bible begins with creation (Gen. 1-2), ends with a new creation (Rev. 21-22), and presents Jesus as the one through whom God has reconciled all things in heaven and earth to himself through the blood of his cross (Col. 1:15-23). The gospel is good news for creation, for the reason that the gospel is the good news of what God has done in Christ to undo all the effects of

human sin and satanic evil and to redeem his whole creation.

6. There are many possible reasons and valid motivations (secular and Christian) for caring for creation. In Christian mission the combined proclamation of the kingdom of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ constitutes sufficient foundation for the urgently needed integration of the care of creation into our missional thinking. This foundation provides a solid basis for determined action in word and deed. We care for the earth, not just for the earth's sake, or according to the motives or rationale of the secular world, but for the Lord's sake. If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot escape our relationship to Christ in how we act in relation to the earth, or separate the first from the second. To proclaim the gospel that says Jesus is Lord is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, for Christ's Lordship embraces all creation. Creation care is a gospel issue.

7. Trinitarian theology teaches us the fundamentally relational nature of all created reality. A gospel for individuals disconnected from society and/or from creation is not only unbiblical, but implausible and damaging. Such damage is inflicted not only on creation itself, but also on Christian witness and the credibility of the gospel. A partial gospel is not just a pity; it is toxic. To state it in environmental terms, the DNA of consumerist and individualistic society has so penetrated our message as to genetically modify it, giving us a GM (genetically modified) gospel.

8. Just as the biggest theological justification for creation care is our worship of God and submission to the Lordship



of Christ, so the biggest threat to creation in our world today is the alternative idolatry of consumerism and materialism. The gospel lays an axe at the root of consumerism. Confronting this dominant idolatry, including through creation care and environmental advocacy, is to engage in spiritual warfare in which only the power of prayer and the gospel are decisive.

9. Lausanne 1974 was a landmark for 20th century evangelicals in binding together the personal and the social dimension of the gospel in our understanding of holistic mission in relation to *human* need. Cape Town 2010 needs to call evangelicals to recognise afresh the biblical affirmation of God's redemptive purpose for *creation* itself. Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out, the biblical truth that the gospel is God's good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for persons, *and* for society, *and* for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people.

10. Christians who are working in environmental biology and creation care have a valid missional calling which needs to be recognised, encouraged and resourced by the church, for they model how to integrate the care of creation into what it means to proclaim Jesus as Lord.

11. We urge Lausanne to ensure that Cape Town 2010 is a 'green' congress, as far as is possible, by taking a range of practical steps that have been established and tested by *A Rocha* for similar events. We urge this, not merely as

a conscientious gesture to the watching world, but as a matter of profound theological conviction. We would not choose to run a Christian congress in a way that exploited human beings; we cannot choose to run it in a way that exploits and damages God's creation.

12. Most of the riches of the earth's bio-diversity are concentrated in about 2% of the surface of the earth. Such places have been mapped as bio-diversity hot-spots, many of them under severe threat. Further mapping has revealed that it is frequently the case that the majority of people who live on that 2% are Christians. Even secular organisations have now expressed concern that Christian indifference to creation could be an environmental disaster.

13. Caring for creation is an act of fidelity to the whole biblical gospel and the mission that flows from it. It needs no pragmatic justification, for faithful obedience to God's command is intrinsically right. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that those who engage in such creation care as their missional vocation joyfully bear witness to its evangelistic fruitfulness as well. This is not seen as a prior motivation or a hidden intention of their work, but as a natural and unsurprising result of fidelity to God's will.

### C. The World of Cultures and Religions

1. We are committed to bearing witness to Christ in the whole world, which means among all people on the planet. The world of humanity exists, by God's clear intention, in nations, tribes, and languages—in other words,

in cultures. Human cultures are religious in varying forms and degrees. The distinction between religion and culture is far less clear than often portrayed. For all religions exist within cultures, permeating and shaping them. For that reason religions also share in the radical ambiguity of all human cultures.

2. We recognise that cultures and religions are neither monolithic nor static. Both change and vary throughout history and therefore should not be counted as 'given' or absolute. The church also changes, is influenced, and influences the cultures within which it is birthed and grows. The process of discernment within the local church is fundamental if Christians are to understand the ways (positive and negative) in which the cultures around them shape their witness and their calling.

3. If religions are fundamentally human cultural constructions and if cultures are also part of the created order, then we can be sure that at least three elements are intertwined within religions as cultural phenomena. First, because all human beings are made in God's image and receive God's general revelation, there will be some evidence of God's revelatory work within the religious elements of any culture. But second, because all human beings are sinners, such revelation will also be distorted and darkened by our wilful disobedience, and that too will take religious forms. And third, because Satan is also at work in the world, there will be elements of satanic deception and evil in all culturally embedded religions. In short, religions can include elements of God's truth, can be massively sin-laden, and can be sys-

tems of satanic bondage and idolatry.

4. We recognize that all followers of Christ experience the challenge of dual-belonging: we are Christians who belong to Jesus, *and* we find ourselves within some culture to which we belong by birth or circumstance (and such cultural belonging may be static or it can be fluid and changing through life). The challenge is that while we cannot escape the fact of such dual-belonging, we are called to single covenantal loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Western Christians face the 'dual-belonging' challenge of being disciples of Jesus while living within cultures of consumerism and militarism. They need to be aware of the idolatrous and quasi-religious power of those dominant forces in their culture and the extent to which they can be subverted by unconscious syncretism and cultural idolatry. There are some groups of people in other cultures, previously unconnected with established Christianity, who are now following Jesus Christ while living within their original religio-cultural traditions. As they seek faithfully to follow Jesus, they meet together with other followers of Jesus in small groups for fellowship, teaching, worship and prayer centred around Jesus and the Bible. At the same time they live their lives socially and culturally within their birth communities.

This phenomenon of following Jesus within diverse religio-cultural traditions needs careful biblical, theological and missiological evaluation. We are well aware that it is a complex phenomenon, drawing conflicting evaluative responses, and we do not seek to

take a position on it here. Our point merely is that it is a challenge that affects not only those who become followers of Jesus in the context of what are commonly called 'other faiths'. The dangers of syncretism are worldwide, and so are the complexities of careful, biblically faithful contextualization. We commend the work of other groups who are studying the latter in depth, but we would urge Lausanne to sponsor a more thorough biblical theology of religions within cultures and what following Jesus means in such contexts.

5. We are called therefore to careful discernment as to what elements of any religious culture are marks of God's common grace and providence (which we should welcome, bring under the Lordship of Christ, and be willing to learn from), and what are idolatrous (and to be renounced and rejected). We need to repent of approaches to people of other faiths that reject or denounce their existing religion as *wholly* evil or satanic, with no effort to understand, critique and learn, and to discern through genuine encounter, friendship and patient dialogue where there may be bridges for the gospel.

6. Such discernment is primarily the responsibility of Christian believers in their own religio-cultural context, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures, as the gospel takes root in their lived discipleship. It is not something to be decided for them or imposed upon them by outside experts. At the same time, the global body of Christ must be engaged in collective discernment and mutual correction in such areas. We need the eyes of others to

see what is defective, dangerous or compromised in the ways we have related our faith in Christ to the culture in which we live. The challenging question is how we can avoid hegemonic outsider imposition, and yet have healthy dialogue with the outside world.

7. In some urban, affluent and individualistic societies we see secular cultures emerge, where adherence to traditional or structured religion seems to evaporate. This does not mean that the search for meaning-making ceases. But people in such societies are not likely to enter easily into institutional Christian settings as these do not fit well with their quest for individualized authenticity. In such settings traditional evangelical expectations about the act and process of conversion are challenged. Becoming followers of Jesus will normally not happen instantly, but implies a lengthy process of receiving and integrating Christian faith and spirituality in meaningful ways. This means that Christians must live missionally alongside such seekers in friendly, non-threatening ways in genuine service, dialogue and encounters.

8. We affirm the gospel's claim and power to transform any person, culture or religion and we recognise that such transformation is required also, or especially, in our own cultures. Conversion to Christ involves a radical new commitment to him and a break with the past, but in the New Testament that break is expressed in terms of, on the one hand, a turning away from idols (false gods), and on the other hand, ethical change ('you must no longer *live* as the Gentiles do'). In the latter

sense, conversion is also a lifelong process of turning all of life (including its cultural forms) towards Christ, through the convicting and convincing work of the Holy Spirit.

9. We recognise that culture is a complex reality like economics, politics, or religion. Yet we also affirm that these realities do not have a final grip on us. The question for Christians is: are we willing to cross the borders that divide us in the kingdom, joining the cloud of witnesses who have crossed over—are we willing to walk in the footsteps of Abraham, Ruth, Paul, and the Syro-Phoenecian woman?

#### D. The World Of Sin And Redemption

1. We live as broken and sinful people in a broken, sinful world. Our conference touched on several major areas where that brokenness intrudes:

- the negative effects of globalisation (alongside its acknowledged benefits);
- continuing global poverty and economic injustice;
- the challenges of population growth and the huge urban centres;
- the destruction of the natural environment and human-generated climate change that is already affecting the world's poorest;
- the scourge of HIV-AIDS;
- the cultures of violence that pervade society from domestic to international levels;
- the threat of nuclear disaster;
- the dangers of terrorism and its underlying causes;

- the stoking of ethnic and religious dividedness.

Comments on some of these are included below—not as profound theological reflections, but simply to acknowledge that any theology of mission must take such global realities into account in discerning what it means to address the whole gospel to the whole world. When we talk about ‘the world’, we cannot think only numerically about ‘all the people who live in the world’. We must think contextually about all that is in the world that impacts the lives of individuals, the social structures that shape them, and the physical environment upon which they depend.

2. Most non-Christians would acknowledge the brokenness described above, and many are involved in efforts to mend it—from secular NGOs to local neighbourhood associations. However, as Christians we bring two elements to our analyses and our solutions that are not there in all such efforts. On the one hand, we bring a radical biblical understanding of human sin and rebellion against God, in collusion with forces of spiritual and satanic powers. ‘The world’ is an interlocking web of systems and structures that perpetuate the effects of our fallenness and sin. And on the other hand, we bring the gospel—the good news of redemption, accomplished by God through the cross and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. We have hope, not in the eventual success of what we can do to fix the world, but in the accomplished victory of God through Christ, guaranteeing the new creation in which all that is broken will be made anew.

3. The church as the people of the cre-

ator and redeemer God, therefore, also lives with the ambiguity that we ourselves are fallen people who share in, and often contribute to, the brokenness of the world; and yet we are redeemed to live redemptively within the world. We bear witness to the accomplished *fact* of redemption (in the message of the cross); we bear witness to the ongoing redemptive *power* of God through his Spirit constantly at work in our own day; we bear witness to the *hope* of ultimate redemption of all creation.

4. The church, therefore, does not *become* political when it enters the arena of what the world defines as 'politics'. The church already *is* a political entity in the world. It stands as an alternative—as the gathered people of God—proclaiming and living gospel life to the world of violence and death in all its facets and dimensions. As such, the church challenges the powers that govern the many types of injustice, violence and poverty in our world, both seen and unseen. We highlight some of these:

5. *Globalization*—by 'globalization' we refer to the intensified level of interconnection that we experience today. It brings with it both benefits and problems. On the one hand, there has been increased potential for job creation in many countries, increased communication and a greater possibility for understanding the rich diversity of cultures and peoples around the world. On the other hand, asymmetric relations of power undermine the promise of transcultural understanding. Powerful nations make decisions which affect less powerful nations who have no say in the decision-making process. Trans-

national corporations (TNCs) 'patent' nature, negatively impacting possibilities of subsistence at the local level, and damaging God's creation in the process. While some of the world's poor have benefited from globalization the poorest of the poor are now even more destitute.

The simple affirmation, 'Jesus is Lord', points to the idolatry of any one nation, trans-national corporation, school of thought, or church that presumes to speak or act on behalf of the whole world.

As faithful disciples of Jesus, we affirm the need for the church to be present among those who suffer, are exploited and oppressed. The presence of the people of God as peacemakers and truth-tellers, advocates and prophets is inherent to the church's missiological calling.

The church is called to model a different kind of global community that emphasizes contentment and generosity, and is not driven by ongoing consumption. As Paul said to Timothy, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain' (1 Tim. 6:6). Christians must confess our complicity in practices and attitudes of exploitation of other human beings and of nature, and we recognize the constant need for prayer and upbuilding one another in the spiritual battle against our tendency to be lords of others.

6. *Consumerism*—Consumerism is a core cultural expression within our world today, especially in the west, saturating every aspect of individual lives and the communities in which we live. It is a meaning-making ideology which locates meaning in self-absorbed gratification, making mater-

ial 'goods' objects of veneration and worship. Consumption is no longer linked to sustaining life but is itself the reason for living: supposedly the more one acquires, the greater the quality of one's life. It is meaning-making in the sense that personal identity is found in the act of consumption. Consumerism is the impulse of self-creation and therefore, it is the sin of the Garden of Eden and a rejection of our createdness. To consume is not bad in itself (we do so every time we eat); it becomes bad when it takes the form of a pervasive cultural idol. All other idols become subject to the comprehensive belief system of consumerism, which comes complete with obligations to acquisition, capitalism, religiosity and sacrifice.

We must name and unmask consumerism for the idolatry that it is—as Paul does twice in calling greed idolatry. It is critical for consumerism's own success that it remain invisible as an idolatry with many features in common with religions. The secular world wants religions to look colourful in their robes and rituals, but there is a real but hidden power of consumerist 'religion' underlying the destructive brutality of some forms of commercialism and exploitation—even if it would not be defined as 'a religion' by accepted standards.

Consumerism has greatly affected our calling to be witnesses and has led us to think of people and creation in terms of consumable products or mere numbers. As Christians we confess our participation in the idolatry of consumerism and the enthronement of self at the centre of our human existence and social orders. With the biblical

prophets we cry out against the oppression and the injustice caused by this idolatry and affirm that 'human life does not consist in the abundance of possessions' (Luke 12:15).

7. *Violence*—from domestic violence to the violence of wars, we confess our own complicity and failure to address the whole gospel to such brutal disorders. We affirm and lift up as models those persons and communities who are working for peace and bearing witness to the redemptive concreteness of God's love amidst the evils of human trafficking, of the arms and drug trades, of the growing threat of nuclear disaster, of terrorism and its multiple roots and causes, and of intractable civil wars. Special attention should also be paid to the astronomical expense of military build-up, totalling \$1.464 trillion USD in 2008 (<http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2009/05>).

We also recognize the violence of sickness and disease, especially the pandemic of HIV-AIDS, that ravages families, communities and entire nations. We repent of actions and attitudes of prejudice, apathy, lack of compassion, and double standards in relation to sexuality, recognizing the suffering of millions who are affected directly and indirectly by this disease, many through no fault of their own. But we also recognize that the spread of HIV-AIDS is strongly (though not exclusively) correlated to forms of sexual activity that sadden our Creator, including multiple heterosexual partnerships. As part of our Christian witness to the world of HIV-AIDS we affirm the necessity of advocacy and education at individual, communal and national levels. We further affirm the

need for counselling and instruction for pastors and their congregations affected by the HIV-AIDS pandemic, urging them to challenge male domination, to be courageous in making clear the Bible's teaching on sexual behaviour and consistent in living by it themselves, to encourage gender justice and to stand firm in the Christian practices of love, patience and compassion.

8. *Poverty*—in God's world of plenty and God-given human creativity, 20 per cent of the world's population consumes 80% of the world's resources. Meanwhile one third of the world's population can barely feed and clothe itself adequately and one sixth is daily on the verge of death. Poverty is not the result of lack of resources but a product of personal and institutionalized injustice and greed, ethnic prejudice and consumerism.

In God's grace, the followers of Christ are being shaped into a community of mutual concern and responsibility for the well-being of the whole world and particularly for the most vulnerable. This calling demands more careful and critical consumption, creative production, prophetic denunciation, advocacy for and mobilization of the victims of world injustice. While we stand with the Micah Challenge in holding our governments accountable to its commitments to reduce poverty, we also dedicate ourselves to 'making greed history' in our own lives, churches, communities, countries and world. We must face up to the scandalous fact that the majority of the poorest of the world's poor live in countries that are predominantly Christian. *And the wealthiest of the world's wealthy also live in a country that calls itself Christian.*

What does this say about horrendous inequality within the worldwide body of Christ?

## Epilogue

'The whole world' is a big place and a big topic! While we have merely scratched the surface of some vast and complex issues, we trust it is clear that if the whole church is to take the whole gospel to the whole world it needs to think in more than merely quantitative terms. We conclude our theological reflections with five main commitments:

1. A commitment to proclaim in word and deed that care for creation is a gospel issue. If Christians around the globe understand it as such the witness of the church will be more biblically faithful and fruitful.
2. A commitment to open ourselves up to dialogue and friendship with those of other cultures, understanding evangelism as witness and discipleship and that in such friendships and mutual respect others will come to see Christ in us.
3. A commitment to be aware of consumerism as an idolatry, especially in the Western world, where it rarely goes unchecked by individual Christians or the church and therefore the need for confession and repentance;
4. A commitment to share and participate in grass-roots efforts of peace and reconciliation in a world of so many types of violence, because evangelism is also the church proclaiming and living gospel life in the world of violence and death.
5. A commitment to be shaped into a

community of mutual concern and responsibility for the well-being of the whole world and particularly for the most vulnerable.

As Christians called to live out our discipleship in a world of brokenness we confess that we have been complicit in that brokenness but also that we are empowered by God's Spirit to partici-

pate in its redemption. Such participation includes saying 'no' to consumerism as an idolatrous way of life, being present with those who suffer, and caring for God's creation, so that our lives, churches and communities reflect the implications of our confession that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

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# The World in the Bible

Christopher J.H. Wright

**KEY WORDS:** *World, earth, creation, nations, judgment, salvation, new creation*

THE IDEA OF 'GAINING the whole world' while 'losing your own soul' crossed my mind as I struggled to work through a concordance search on the biblical words translated 'world' and related words and concepts. It was a most illuminating exercise, however. The first and most startling thing that struck me (and it is very easily visible in any search on 'the world' as an English translation), was the immediate contrast between the 'flavour' of most of the references to 'the world' in the Psalms, and that of most of the occurrences of 'the world' in John's gospel and first epistle. It is stark, and immediately opens up for us the essential double sense of the word in the Bible as a whole.

In the Psalms, the world is mainly the created earth and all that is in it—human, animal, mineral and vegetable. The whole world in all those senses was brought into existence by God (33:6-9), is owned by God (24:1), ruled by God (33:10-11), and observed by

God both in loving provision and in moral judgment (33:13-15). It is the world that God will judge—but that is a matter of rejoicing to all creation, for it means God acting to put things right (9:8; 96:11-13).

In John, the world certainly includes the entire created universe, but having made that clear right up front in his opening verses, the predominant use of the word by John speaks of the sin and rebellion of the world, its opposition to God and its hosting of satanic powers. The world stands in need of salvation—and that indeed is what God has brought about through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But the world as a place of inveterate resistance to God will ultimately be defeated.

And that contrast between Psalms and John merely illustrates a fundamental ambivalence in the biblical presentation of the world. It is simultaneously the wonderfully good creation of God and the horrendously wicked theatre of human and satanic rebellion against God. As we reflect on what it means to bring 'the whole gospel to the whole world', this is a duality that we must keep in mind. For it is this tension

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between the positive and negative conceptions of ‘the world’—both equally biblical—that drives so many dimensions of our missional engagement in and with the world.

## I Vocabulary and Broad Concepts

Rarely if ever is there a single word in Hebrew or Greek that corresponds to a single English word, and this is very true for ‘the world’—understandably so, since in English and most cognate languages, it is a complex and flexible word too. A brief survey of some of the major biblical vocabulary will be a useful starting point for grasping the overall biblical teaching.

### 1 The Old Testament

*Heavens and earth:* This expression, familiar from the opening five words of the Hebrew Bible, combines heaven and earth in order to include the whole created universe—all that exists that is not God. It speaks of the world as belonging to God, along with everything else. This double phrase, functioning as a hendiadys, is most often used to express the over-arching universality of God’s creation, and therefore of the creator God himself. God is creator of all (Gen. 14:19, 22), owner and ruler of all (Deut. 10:14), and transcendently unique—there is no other god in the universe to compare with him (Deut. 4:39; Josh 2:11).

*‘erets:* This is the commonest of all the relevant words in the Old Testament, since it can refer to the land (i.e. normally the land of Israel but sometimes other national territories), or the earth as a whole. Sometimes in its

place is used *ha’adamah*—which means the soil, or the habitable surface of the earth. But *‘erets* is the word more connected with what we tend to mean by ‘the world’—the whole planet earth—though *‘erets* is translated ‘world’ only twenty times in the NIV. Normally it is translated ‘earth’ or ‘land’.

*Tebel:* Whereas *‘erets* occurs about 2,500 times, and is translated ‘earth’ in about 20 per cent of its occurrences, this word *tebel* is much less frequent (about 36 times), and is almost always translated ‘world’. Its commonest occurrence is in poetic contexts like the Psalms, often in parallelism with *‘erets*, with its second most frequent use in Isaiah—mostly in eschatological contexts. It seems to speak of the *ordered* world of God’s creation along with its human population (Psalms—e.g. 24:1; 33:8; 50:12; 96:10; 98:7), or the human world as a whole standing under the judgment of God (Isaiah, anticipating John’s use of *kosmos*, e.g. Is. 13:11; 14:26; 24:4).

### 2 The New Testament

*Kosmos:* This is the world or universe considered as an ordered whole. It can mean the world in the general sense (the planet, all the nations), but especially in John and Paul it has the more negative sense of the world as ordered in opposition to God, and thus something to be resisted by God’s people. But at the same time, God loves the *kosmos* and Christ has come ‘into’ it in order that it might be saved/redeemed.

*Aion:* This means ‘age’, but it can refer to the world considered from a temporal point of view—i.e. either the world of ‘this age’, or ‘the world/age to come’.

*Ge*: This corresponds most often to the Hebrew *'erets*, the earth as the place of human habitation, the world of lands and territories and peoples, or the land as distinct from the sea and the sky.

*Oikoumene*: This means the inhabited known world, usually regarded as more or less equivalent to the Roman Empire—as when Caesar decreed that the whole world (*oikoumene*) should be counted and taxed.

*Ktisis*: This means 'creation', and can have the verbal sense of 'God's creation of the world', or the more static sense of the whole of God's creation. In the latter sense, it can then refer either to the existing creation in which we now live and within which history takes place under God's control as the arena of the work of the gospel, or to the new creation that is being born within the womb of the old.

*Ta panta*: Literally 'all things'; this is an expression used by Paul, sometimes combined with 'in heaven and earth' but sometimes on its own, to signify the whole of God's creation, visible and invisible, material and spiritual. He most enjoys using it in connection with the missional plan of God and the cosmic work of Christ.

Having surveyed the range of vocabulary, we can anticipate the discussion below by summarizing several broad senses that 'the world' or 'the whole world' has in the Bible. The Bible speaks of the world:

- first, as the physical creation (the world in which we live);
- secondly, as the whole human race, (the world of nations);
- thirdly, as the place of rebellion and opposition to God (the world of sin and judgment, the world of all

the resulting suffering, poverty and pain);

- fourthly, as the object of God's love and mission of redemption in history;
- fifthly, as the new creation (the world to come).

## II The Whole World in the Plan of God

### 1. The World of God's Creation

There is no need to replicate here the thrust of Peter Harris's paper that follows. And I have also written extensively myself on the topic of the land and the earth in biblical ethics, and on creation care as a legitimate part of Christian mission.<sup>1</sup> It is still worth reminding ourselves, however, of just how extensive is the Bible's engagement with the world of creation.

Acknowledgement of YHWH as the creator of *heaven and earth*—that is, as the universal God of all—is found on the lips of many (apart from the narrator of Genesis 1-2): Melchizedek (Gen. 14:19, 22); Abraham (Gen. 24:3); Moses (Deut. 4:39); David (1 Chr. 29:11); Nehemiah (Neh. 9:6); Psalmists (Pss. 8; 19:1-4; 33:6-9; 89:11); and prophets (Is. 40:21-31; Jer. 10:12 = 51:15).

As mentioned above, the Psalms

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<sup>1</sup> See Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham and Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 103-145; and *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham and Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 397-420.

rejoice in God's relationship with the earth ('*erets* and *tebel* often combined). It belongs to him, because he founded it (Pss. 24:1; 50:12; 89:11). It shares his quality of reliability (Pss. 93:1; 96:10; 104:5). But he precedes it in his eternal being and wisdom (Ps. 90:2; Prov. 8:23, 26). The personification of divine wisdom in Proverbs 8 portrays the wisdom of God 'rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind' (Prov. 8:31).

In the synoptic gospels, creation can be simply a time marker for all of recorded history, or prior to it (Mt. 24:21; 25:34). The same temporal use is found elsewhere, to signify something that happened before the creation of the world (e.g. our election, the Father's love for the Son, or the significance of Christ's death; Eph. 1:4; Jn. 17:24; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8), or all the time since creation (Heb. 4:3; 9:26). Creation can also be the theological starting point for ethical orientation (on the issue of marriage and divorce, Mk. 10:6). But the created world is also the arena for missional and eschatological action, since the gospel 'will be preached in the whole [inhabited] world' (*oikoumene*) before the end comes (Mt. 24:14), and (according to the longer ending of Mark) is to be preached to all creation (*ktisis*; Mk. 16:15)

Paul shares the Old Testament understanding of creation, and could preach it without even quoting the biblical text in a pagan context (Acts 17:24, using *kosmos*, but adding the more Hebraic 'heaven and earth'). The insight of the Psalmist that creation reveals truth about God (his glory, Ps. 19:1-4; his righteousness, Ps. 50:6; his power, Ps. 93:3-4), becomes, in Paul's

hands, the basis for declaring all humanity to be without excuse. We know essential truths about God simply by living within his created world (Rom. 1:20). And Paul turns the Psalmist's recognition that there is nowhere in creation we can be lost from God's presence (Ps. 139:7-12), into the assurance that there is nothing in creation (*ktisis*) that can separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:39)

However, in line with the way he so thoroughly identifies Jesus Christ with his scriptural monotheism, he associates Christ strongly with creation. In one place he quotes the well-known Jewish formula about God as creator of 'all things'—i.e. the whole universe: 'from him and through him and to him are all things (*ta panta*)' (Rom. 11:36). But in another he adjusts the phraseology, aligns it to the *shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4, and comes up with the amazing double formula that identifies Jesus as Lord with God the Father and creator.

'...for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things (*ta panta*) came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things (*ta panta*) came and through whom we live' (1 Cor. 8:6). Paul's biblical doctrine of creation has become totally Christocentric.

Or to put it another way, which is missiologically important, one of the ways that the New Testament affirms the deity of Jesus Christ is by linking him with (rather identifying him as) God the creator. All that the Old Testament affirmed about YHWH in this respect, the New Testament affirms about Jesus. Paul has 'christified' Old Testament monotheism. The uniqueness and universality of Christ, then, is

not simply a Christian claim in which we support our champion or declare our love for him. It is the profound conviction that in Jesus of Nazareth, the living God of biblical faith—creator (and also ruler, judge and saviour) of all the world—has walked among us and claims our trust and allegiance.

There are several key truths embedded in the range of texts surveyed above which are of fundamental importance in sustaining a solidly biblical worldview in relation to our world. These include:

- That creation is ontologically distinct from God, yet entirely dependent on God;
- That creation is good, by God's declaration, and as such continues to reveal truth about God its creator;
- That creation is sacred, because it is at every level related to God, but it is not divine and should not be worshipped as God;
- That creation exists to bring glory and praise to God the creator, and continuously does so;
- That creation is the object of God's constant presence, love and provision;
- That creation is included in God's plan of redemption through the cross of Christ and will ultimately be brought to full cosmic unity in him.

In more dynamic terms, when thinking of 'the whole world' as meaning the whole universe of God's creation, the Bible tells us that God owns the world, rules the world, reveals himself through the world, watches all that happens in the world, and loves the world. Or again, the world belongs to God, submits to God, points to God, is accountable to God, and needs God.

Now human beings are creatures. We are unique creatures, of course, in that we have been created in the image of God to have dominion over the rest of creation by serving and keeping the earth. But we remain *part* of the creation, part of the world God made. We therefore share in every dimension of that list of relationships between God and the earth. This must impact what it means to think about 'the whole world', as we move forward to using the term to apply to all people.

All humanity, every person, has these things in common, along with all the rest of creation.

- They belong to God—however much they have surrendered that ownership to usurped lords.
- They live under God's sovereignty—however much they resist it. History is still governed by God, as is all creation.
- They were created to bring glory to God and give him thanks and praise—though they persistently fail to do so.
- They know God to some degree simply by living in the world that reveals him—however much they have suppressed that knowledge in darkness and perversion.
- They are accountable to God who watches all they do and understands not only the actions but also the motives of every human being.
- They are loved by God, even when (especially when) they reject his love, or ignore the daily proofs of it, or indeed treat God as the enemy.

Such biblical truths must have an impact on our understanding of mission, and are important to bear in mind as we move to our next section.

## 2. The World of Humanity

Very many of the references to 'the earth' or 'the world' have in mind the human population of the earth. Sometimes it means simply everybody who lives on the earth in a general sense (e.g. 1 Sam. 17:46; Pss. 24:1; 33:8; 49:1; Is. 12:5; Zeph 1:8; Mt. 5:14; 24:14; 26:13; Rom. 1:8; 10:18; Col. 1:6; Acts 17:26; Rev. 3:10).

But more often there is an awareness of the cultural and political realities of human life in the world.

*Linguistic-cultural:* The description of humanity after the flood in Genesis 10 speaks of the varieties of tribes, nations, languages and territories. This appears to be entirely natural and what God planned and expected. It is only the attempt to forge all this variety into a unified human project arrogantly raising itself to heaven that leads to the *confusion* of languages and the implicit strife among nations that has plagued the world ever since. Ethnic and linguistic diversity are not in themselves sinful (though they are problematic for the gospel, as Paul acknowledges, 1 Cor. 14:10); on the contrary they will be a continuing feature of the redeemed humanity. The picture of the new creation in Revelation picks up precisely the trio of terms from Genesis 10 (tribes, languages and nations) and pictures people from all of them gathered in the redeemed humanity, praising their saviour God. The mission of God is what takes the world of nations from Genesis 10-11 to Revelation 21-22.

And half way between Genesis and Revelation (as we might say), stands Pentecost—the anticipation of that eschatological redemption of human

languages (and cultures). For when Luke tells us that people 'from every nation under heaven' (both Jews and Gentile proselytes) were in Jerusalem that day, he would have known then as well as we do now that his statement was not literally true—no matter how long the list of nations that follows. But was the statement merely rhetorical hyperbole? At one level, yes—it was a remarkably international crowd. But knowing Luke's saturation in the scriptures and his understanding of the great sweep of God's promise to Abraham, through Israel, to all nations on earth, his phrase surely has an intended eschatological resonance too. What happened in Jerusalem on that day of Pentecost was a prophetic signpost pointing to the day when indeed people 'from every nation under heaven' (to use Luke's phrase) will declare the praises of God in their own languages.

So, from a missional point of view, there is every biblical justification for taking the phrase 'the whole world' to imply the anticipation that every linguistic, ethnic and cultural component of the human family will be included in the scope of the proclamation of the gospel and in distinctive embodiments of the gospel's transformation.

*Political—territorial:* Many references speak of the nations of the earth, or the kings of the world, thinking of them as centres of political and territorial power and authority. The election of Israel as a nation from out of the midst of all the nations of the earth is the most telling example of this usage (Ex. 19:4-6; Deut. 7:6; 1 Kgs.8:53). God's work in and for Old Testament Israel would be a source of wonder in the whole world of nations (Ex. 34:10;

Deut. 4:32-39; 28:10). Jerusalem did not have to wait until the day of Pentecost to become an international magnet. It was a cosmopolitan city even in Solomon's day.

The Deuteronomic historian anticipates Luke in his rhetorical hyperbole, enthusing that 'men of *all nations* came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by *all the kings of the world*, who had heard of his wisdom' (1 Kgs. 4:34). However, the author's greater concern, from the mouth of Solomon himself, was that such praise should be for YHWH, not for Solomon, as he anticipated foreigners from all over the world having their prayers answered by the God whose name dwelt in the temple in Jerusalem—'so that *all the peoples of the earth* may know your name and fear you' and 'so that *all the peoples of the earth* may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other' (1 Kgs. 8:43, 60; my italics).

These are astonishingly missional prayers, and not the only place the narrative expresses such universality (cf. 2 Kgs. 19:19). The Psalmist turned the same thought into his own breath-taking prayer: 'May all the kings of the earth praise you, O LORD' (Ps. 138:4). They should, for after all, 'the kings of the earth belong to God' (Ps. 47:9).

Sadly, Israel's own historical life and behaviour declined, not least from the moment they decided to be 'like all the nations' (1 Sam. 8:5, 20) and have a king. It was an option that was fundamentally idolatrous, that God would finally have to disallow. 'You say, "We want to be like the nations, like *the peoples of the world* who serve wood and stone." But what you have in mind will never happen' (Ezek. 20:32, my ital-

ics). For a long time, however, it did happen, and in going that way, Israel fell in line with the typical behaviour of the nations around them.

So the world of nations is at one level simply the manifestation of human ethnic and linguistic diversity—and that is a positive thing intended by God. And yet of course nations also become the focus of political arrogance as human authorities usurp the place of divine power and make absurd claims for themselves. In such posturing, the fingerprints of Satan are all too evident—as Jesus immediately discerned, when 'the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world (*kosmos*) and their splendour' (Matt. 4:8).

Such behaviour is the mark of the world—both in the exercise of such oppressive political authority (Lk. 22:25), and in the everyday world in which 'all the nations of the world (*kosmos*) run after' the bodily needs of food and clothing, things for which disciples can trust God (Lk. 12:30, literal translation).

That brings us to the largest category of all in the biblical picture of the world.

### 3. The World of Sin and Judgment

The rebellion, disobedience and fall of humanity had dire consequences for the earth as a whole. God's curse rests on 'the ground' (3:17, '*adamah*, rather than '*erets*'), and the whole earth ends up filled with violence and corruption, leading to the flood that wipes out 'everything on earth' (*erets*, Gen. 6 *passim*).

The conviction that the whole world (not just Israel) stands under the judgment of YHWH the God of Israel emerges surprisingly early in Israel's poetry (e.g. 1 Sam. 2:10—'the LORD will judge the ends of the earth' [*'erets*]). But it reaches a crescendo in the universal declarations of God's judgment that we find in Isaiah. Jeremiah and some other prophets follow suit (though we need to distinguish where possible texts which use *'erets* to refer to the land of Israel, and those where the intention is clearly to refer to the whole earth or the world of all nations).

The universality of Isaiah's declaration of God's judgment could not be clearer.

I will punish the world (*tebel*) for its evil,  
the wicked for their sins.

I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty  
and will humble the pride of the ruthless.

I will make man scarcer than pure gold,  
more rare than the gold of Ophir.

Therefore I will make the heavens tremble;

and the earth (*'erets*) will shake  
from its place

at the wrath of the LORD Almighty,  
in the day of his burning anger  
(Is. 13:11-13).

This is the plan determined for the whole world (*'erets*);

this is the hand stretched out  
over all nations (Is. 14:26).

The earth (*'erets*) dries up and withers,

the world (*tebel*) languishes and withers,

the exalted of the earth languish.  
The earth is defiled by its people;  
they have disobeyed the laws,  
violated the statutes  
and broken the everlasting  
covenant (24:4-5; cf. also  
34:1-2).

Comparable oracles of judgment, seen as judgment on the world and all nations, not only Israel, are found in Jeremiah 4:23-28; 10:10; 25:15-26, 29-32; and in Zephaniah 1:2-3, 18; 3:8.

All this provides the background for the predominantly negative tone that 'the world' has in the New Testament. The positive truths already noted about God's creation remain true in the New Testament, of course. But if you even randomly look up 'the world' in the New Testament, it is more than likely that it will be talking about the world of human and satanic sin and rebellion, of struggle, temptation and conflict. This is the world in which we have to live, but out of which God has redeemed us through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the world that must ultimately pass away under God's wrath. This is not the world of God's good creation, as he made it to be. This is the world of human creation, as we in our fallenness, rebellion and collusion with Satan have made it be.

### John

John starts positively, as we saw, attributing the whole creation (*panta*) to the work of Christ 'the Word' (Jn. 1:3). And we remain positive with the language of incarnation—the Word has come 'into the world' (*kosmos*; Jn. 1:9-10)—a note that is repeated to the end of the book, as Jesus brings light and life and truth into the world (Jn.



3:19; 6:33; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46-47; 18:37). However, once the opposition to Jesus has consolidated its intentions to be rid of him, the intensity of references to the world are almost entirely to its hatred of God, Jesus and the disciples, its subjection to Satan, and the need for the disciples to recognize its dangers and reject it.

John uses the word *kosmos* 72 times, and more than 40 of those occur in chapters 13-17, describing Jesus' final conversations with his disciples and prayer to his Father, and almost all of this barrage of references to 'the world' are negative.

The theme is, if anything, amplified further in 1 John, where *kosmos* occurs 22 times and all negative, except for the words of hope that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (2:2), because he had come into the world to be its saviour (4:9, 14) and therefore our victory over the world is guaranteed (5:4-5). James brings a similar note (Jas. 1:27; 4:4).

### Paul

Paul uses *kosmos* 47 times (and *aion* 31 times). As we have seen, Paul can certainly use *kosmos* to speak of the whole of God's good creation (though he tends more often to use *ta panta* and/or 'heaven and earth' for that). He can also speak of the world of all humanity in general terms, and, as we shall soon see, he affirms God's saving intention for the whole world very strongly.

Nevertheless, the majority of Paul's uses of *kosmos* speak of it as the place of sin, rebellion and the judgment of God (e.g. Rom. 3:6, 19; 5:12-13; 1 Cor. 11:32); or as the place of satanic deception and idolatrous philosophies (e.g. 2

Cor. 4:4 [*aion*]; Gal. 4:3; Col. 2:8, 20; Eph. 6:12); or as the context of human corrupt culture from which Christians have been rescued, and must therefore resist as something seductive but transient in the light of the cross (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:20-28; 2:12; 7:31-34; Gal. 6:14; Eph. 2:2, 12; 2 Tim. 4:10 9, [*aion*]).

Perhaps it is because the word *kosmos* had such broadly negative connotations for Paul (even though he could use it to mean the whole creation), he never speaks of a 'new *kosmos*', but only of the 'new *ktisis*', new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal. 6:15). That word takes the reader back more clearly to the Genesis creation narratives and the hope of 'new heaven and earth' that the Old Testament projects into the New (Is. 65:17-25).

### 4. The World of God's Salvation

As Peter Harris's paper points out, the earliest covenant actually so-called in the Bible is not made with Noah alone, but with all life on earth. There is a universality about God's promise of sustenance for the earth as a whole. This is sometimes called 'the cosmic covenant', and there are echoes of it in other parts of the Old Testament, and it is reflected in other ancient Near Eastern texts.<sup>2</sup> We live on the earth that is simultaneously cursed and

<sup>2</sup> For a full discussion of the wider ancient near eastern background to the concept of a 'cosmic covenant', see, Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 132-137, and the bibliography there cited, particularly: Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1992).

covenanted. And we know from the end of the story which of those conditions will win (Rev. 21-22—‘no more curse’, 22:3). This longing for God’s redemptive intervention to lift the curse (cf. Gen. 5:28-29) leads to an eschatology of hope for the world, considered both as the nations of humanity and as the creation itself.

*All nations:* It is the world of nations that is specified as the target of God’s great agenda of redemptive blessing, his covenant promise to Abraham that all nations on earth will be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3, and its repetition in 18:18; 22:18; 26:4-5; 28:14).

The missional implications of this are incalculable throughout the rest of the whole Bible. So at this point we ought to summarize what the Bible has to say about God’s great plan for all nations—the plan of salvation that spans the whole of history and stretches to the ends of the earth until the end of the world (using the phrase in the spatial and the temporal senses that are both part of its meaning in the Bible). However, I have tried to do this very thoroughly in *The Mission of God*, in chapters 14-15, and will not repeat it all here.

Suffice it to say that the nations of the world are included within the scope of God’s salvation in the most comprehensive ways. God’s plan was always universal—that is, intended for the whole world. The election of Old Testament Israel was instrumental for that purpose. It is a totally false and misleading reading of the Bible to imagine that God had a Plan A (Israel), which failed, so he replaced that with Plan B (the Christian church). The Bible never talks of the *replacement* of Israel with the church, but rather of the

*expansion* of Israel to include the Gentiles.

The absorption of people from every nation into the Israel of God, and into Zion, is not a *post-facto* rationalization of the missionary thrust of early Christianity, but the explicit intention of the election of Israel in the first place, clarified and amplified in dozens of texts in every part of the canon. The nations, according to the Old Testament, would be blessed with God’s salvation (Is. 19:18-25), registered in God’s city (Ps. 87), called by God’s name (Amos 9:12), accepted in God’s house (Is. 56:6-7), and incorporated into God’s people (Zech. 2:10-11; 9:7). And that’s only the tip of the iceberg of texts that I have surveyed in *The Mission of God*.

Paul is doing no more than drawing out the implications of this Old Testament universality when he speaks of Abraham as ‘heir of the world *kosmos*’ (Rom. 4:13). And he sees very clearly the connection between what God was doing in and through *Israel* (even in his sovereign purpose that could include and move beyond their hard-hearted rejection of Jesus the Messiah), and God’s ultimate purpose for the whole *world*. ‘If their transgression means riches for the world [*kosmos*], and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!... For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world [*kosmos*] what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?’ (Rom. 11:12, 14).

Accordingly, the message of God’s saving intention is to be proclaimed not in Israel only, but in all the world. The idea of ‘gospel’, that is, the belief that there is *good news* to be proclaimed by authorized messengers to all nations

on earth, is an Old Testament concept with universal scope (Is. 12:4-5; Ps. 96:1-3; Is. 52:7-10, etc). The New Testament tells us what that good news is: God's saving love has led him to enter into the world in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the world of sinners and bring the blessings of life, light and salvation (Jn. 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 1:15).

*All creation:* For Paul, however, the universality of the gospel's promise and hope did not stop with the ingathering of the nations—as promised in the covenant with Abraham. It extended to the whole creation. Christ is not only agent of the *creation* of the world (a view Paul shared, of course, with John, Jn. 1:3; and Hebrews, Heb. 1:2-3). Christ is also the one through whom the whole of creation will be *redeemed*.

The overarching plan of God is ultimately 'to bring all things (*ta panta*) in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ' (Eph. 1:10). This vision of cosmic integration (which, in the letter to the Ephesians, then issues in ethnic reconciliation in chapters 2 and 3; ecclesial unity, ethical integrity, and marital union, in chapters 4-6), is expounded even more eloquently in Colossians 1:15-20.

<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation (*ktisis*). <sup>16</sup>For by him all things (*ta panta*) were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things (*ta panta*) were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things (*ta panta*), and in him all things (*ta panta*) hold together. <sup>18</sup>And he is the

head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things (*ta panta*), whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

The five-fold repetition of *ta panta*, and its explicit definition as meaning the whole universe of God's creation (*ktisis*), is emphatic and powerful. The whole world, meaning the whole created order, was created by Christ and for Christ, is sustained by Christ, and has been reconciled to God by Christ, through his death on the cross. No wonder, as Paul concludes in verse 23, this is good news—the gospel that is preached 'in all creation under heaven' (which I think is the right translation of *en pasei ktisei hypo ton ouranon*, rather than 'to every creature under heaven' [NIV]). The gospel that is good news for the whole creation is to be preached in the whole creation.

## 5. The World to Come

It remains only to point to the Bible's great hope of new creation. As in earlier sections, this too can be seen in terms of the creation itself, and then also in terms of the redeemed humanity that will inhabit the 'new heaven and new earth'.

*New creation:* God's redeeming work is not a plan to obliterate the universe and start all over again. It is rather a plan to purge, purify and renew the whole creation. 'Behold, I am creating

new heavens and a new earth', God declares, in a passage that needs to be read in full (Is. 65:17-25). It is an inspiring vision that portrays God's new creation as a place that will be filled with joy, satisfaction and fulfilment of life and work, free from grief and frustration, and environmentally harmonious and safe.

This Old Testament passage provides the foundation for the way the New Testament portrays the destiny of creation through the redeeming work of Christ. Far from rejecting creation, Paul sees the resurrection body of Jesus as God's great 'Yes' to the creation, and the guarantee of the resurrection of our bodies for life in the new creation—that is already being brought to birth in the groaning womb of the old (Rom. 8:18-25). The closing picture of the Bible is not one of us floating off to some other heavenly home, but of God himself coming down to announce the arrival of the new creation, in which righteousness will dwell (2 Pet. 3:10-13), because God himself will dwell there with his people (Rev. 21:1-4).

*Redeemed humanity:* But who and what will be there in that new creation? The concluding two chapters of the Bible tell us not only that there will be people from every language, tribe and nation of humanity—now enjoying the healing power of God's presence (Rev. 22:2)—but also that they will bring into the new creation (the city of God, the world to come), the accumulated treasures of their civilizations and cultures. That, at least, is how I read the remarkable and repeated affirmation about the kings of the earth bringing their wealth and glory into the city of God (Rev. 21:24-27). Some take these

texts to be merely metaphors for the submission of all human authority to the Lordship of God in Christ. But I think they mean what they say. The world of humanity, of nations and civilizations—so shot through with sin and pride, with violence and greed, in the world as we now know it—will be purged of all those things, so that that which truly reflects the image of God in humanity will remain, for the glory of God and our everlasting enrichment. 'The world to come', as it is sometimes called, will not be a blank sheet, with all that humanity has accomplished in fulfilment of the creation mandate simply crumpled up and tossed in a cosmic incinerator. Rather it will take that accomplishment, purged and disinfected of all the poison and corruption of our fallenness, as the starting point of an unimaginable future—an eternity of new creation and new creativity, totally glorifying to God and satisfying to us, to be enjoyed forever by both in intimate and unspoiled communion.

### III Concluding Reflections

Whatever may have been in the mind of those who framed the famous triplet—'the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world'—it is clear from our biblical survey that we cannot confine the final phrase to a purely quantitative meaning (all human beings on the planet). All five meanings of 'the world' outlined above need to have their distinct impact on our missional reflection and practice.

Lausanne 1974 called evangelicals to realize that they could no longer contemplate or practise 'evangelization' as something aimed at maximizing the number of individuals who could be

reached and invited to respond to the gospel. That truly biblical objective had to be combined with the equally biblical demand to pay attention to the social, economic and political realities in which those individuals lived. The gospel also addresses and challenges our contexts as well as our persons. To these two great focal points must now be added the third biblical concern—the whole world of God's creation. Mission that is biblically integrated must share in the integrated mission of God that extends his love and redemptive action to the whole world in that sense too. The gospel is good news for individual persons *and* for society *and* for creation.

We are perhaps more familiar with the second of our themes above, especially in the wake of 1974, since we are well aware that the human race exists in a vast diversity of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and political arrangements. So

the task of engaging the gospel with all of these human realities, and seeing how the gospel works its transformative power within them, remains as relevant and urgent as ever. Contextualization is as old as the Bible itself, and as new as every contemporary cultural ebb and flow.

And finally, grouping the last three themes together, our missional activity will always find its most challenging and creative tensions in addressing the constant ambiguity of the fact that we live in a world that is good by God's creative power and declaration, and simultaneously evil by human and satanic corruption and rebellion. Discerning the difference and the boundaries remains a task that requires deep biblical reflection, careful research and analysis, and constant dependence on the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## **Cross and Covenant**

### **Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission**

R. Larry Shelton

The cross lies at the heart of Christian faith and yet in a fast-changing cultural context many Christians are struggling to make sense of the atonement and how best to communicate its meaning. Larry Shelton grasps this bull by the horns and sets forth what he considers to be both a solidly biblical and missionally relevant account of Christ's atoning work. At the core of Shelton's thesis is the claim that covenant relationship has to form the centre of our theological reflections on the cross. Moving through both Old and New Testaments, Shelton argues that all the diverse metaphors for atonement can be held together by the organizing notion of 'covenant relationship'. Then, tracing the history of theologies of the cross from the second century through to the contemporary world, he sets forth a Trinitarian, relational, and contemporary model of the atonement that parts company with penal substitutionary accounts.

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# Towards a Missiology of Caring for Creation

Peter Harris

**KEYWORDS:** *Salvation, justice, welfare, eschatology, community, transformation, redemption*

Over recent years far more attention has been given to the creation within an understanding of the redeeming purposes of God. It is fair to say that an effective consensus has been reached among evangelical theologians that God's redemption in Christ extends beyond the person, and beyond the human community, to the creation itself. Given the force of passages such as Romans 8:19-21,<sup>1</sup> the only surprise is that we should have taken so long to escape the unbiblical constraints that enlightenment humanism has imposed on a more authentically rounded gospel.

<sup>19</sup>The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that

the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Colossians 1:19, 20 makes it equally plain:

<sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

A number of interesting accounts of the long-lived success of an anthropocentric rather than Christocentric perspective on salvation have been advanced. We could mention Mary Grey's analysis<sup>2</sup> in which she quotes Thomas Berry,<sup>3</sup> suggesting that 'a turn away from the earth' occurred during the Black Death in the middle of the fourteenth century. Between 1347 and 1349 around 33 per cent of the popula-

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1 Biblical quotations are from NIV.

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2 Mary Grey, *Earth-keeping: Pastoral Theology in a Climate of Globalisation*, Inaugural Lecture, University of Wales, Lampeter 2001.

3 Thomas Berry, *The Great Work* (Bell Tower, New York, 1999).

tion of Europe died at a time in pre-scientific Europe when no one knew of bacteria or germs. So, Berry claims, 'They could only conclude that humans had become so depraved that God was punishing the world. The best thing to do was intensify devotion and seek redemption out of the world.'

In reaction to this other-worldly devotion Grey argues that the way was then paved for more strictly horizontal and human explanations of life. Richard Lovelace, the Princeton church historian, sees other causes at work.

The formula that insists that the gospel should deal with 'spiritual matters' and not meddle with political or social affairs, the familiar Fundamentalist argument for passive support of the status quo, emerged before the Civil War as a conservative evangelical defence of resistance toward or postponement of abolition. The seriousness of the break in evangelical ranks on this issue can hardly be overestimated. The results have included the necessity of fighting one of the bloodiest wars in history in order to accomplish what English churchmen did with prayer and argument, a persistent failure to deal with racism since the Civil War, and a retreat from all social applications of the gospel except a few relating to personal morality such as 'temperance.'<sup>4</sup>

I wonder how many of those who argue that the whole of the mission

agenda is fulfilled by personal evangelism know that, according to one godly historian at least, the idea emerged to defend slavery!

Another common analysis goes along the lines proposed by Jonathan Wilson.

As science proved more and more capable of analyzing and controlling parts of the material world and as this analysis and control promised to increase, theology began to lose its control over the plausibility structures of Western society—those ways of thinking and living that are the source of meaning in a particular culture. As science gained plausibility and credibility, theology retreated from the material world and from the doctrine of creation.<sup>5</sup>

## I Recovery of Creation Thinking

Whatever the causes of the humanist diversion, there has been a widespread recovery of creation thinking in evangelical theology and biblical studies. Writers such as Colin Gunton, James Houston, Vinoth Ramachandra, Chris Wright, Loren Wilkinson and NT Wright are only a few of those who have contributed to this re-working of perspectives in the last two decades and the pace of study is quickening.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Wilson, Unpublished lecture, Vancouver School of Theology.

<sup>6</sup> As I go to press Hilary Marlow's important new book *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) has just come into my hands.

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1979), 376.

For example, in *Christ and Creation*<sup>7</sup> Gunton looked at Mark's presentation of Jesus Christ at the beginning of his gospel and noted the systematic declaration of his lordship through one episode after another. Disease and politics, religion and the personal life, all are drawn into the realm of Christ's dominion. The series is completed by Mark's account of the stilling of the storm, where the disciples' question, 'Who is this that the wind and the waves obey him?'<sup>8</sup> is answered implicitly by an understanding that Jesus is the Lord of creation. More traditionally we have been interested only in the fate of the disciples in the boat, and not in Jesus' relationship to weather. In the same way we have read the first covenant in Genesis 9 along the lines of the NIV's inserted title, 'God's covenant with Noah', despite the text telling us seven times that this is also a covenant between God and 'every living creature...the earth...all life on the earth'.

Now we come to the essential next challenge. If we have begun to do better justice to both the scriptures and to the world in which we live by realising that indeed God does care eternally for his own creation, we have only recently started to translate that theological realisation into a working missiology,<sup>9</sup>

and there are very few signs that the evangelical church world-wide has begun to put that missiology into practice with any confidence or professionalism. Perhaps this is simply a casualty of the noted disconnect between theology and missiology *per se*.<sup>10</sup> ? Are we having difficulty throwing off our habitual anthropocentrism, or more charitably perhaps, is there simply more theoretical work to be done before we are sure that our limited mission resources should be applied to the care of the non-human creation?

Either way, it is my fervent hope that this consultation can be part of an urgent answer to the question. It is always urgent that our lives and work conform to the true character of Jesus Christ our Lord. However, there is a particular urgency to this issue because all over the world the groaning of creation is truly acute, and the poorest human communities are those which are most impacted by the rapid degradation of the biosphere. If we really believe in a Creator God who has compassion on all he has made,<sup>11</sup> why do our mission priorities indicate that we care so little?

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7 Colin E Gunton, *Christ and Creation* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993).

8 Mark 4: 41.

9 Chris Wright, *The Mission of God*, (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006) gives six reasons for the inclusion of environmental work in mission; Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra also argue eloquently in *The Message of Mission* (Nottingham, Inter-Varsity Press, 2003).

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10 Paul Hiebert *Missiological Education for a Global Era* (cited in Brian M Howell, 'Globalization, Ethnicity and Cultural Authenticity', *Christian Scholars Review* XXXV:3 Spring 2006, 318) says theological education has created 'a theology divorced from human realities and a missiology that lacks theological foundations'. I would suggest 'creation realities' would be a more accurate and important term although the point is important.

11 Psalm 145:9.



## II Creation Care and Christian Thinking

A brief review of how 'environmental issues' or more properly 'creation care' have been placed within the spectrum of Christian views is necessary in order to illuminate a way forward. The following is by no means an exhaustive list but it does show some of the principal approaches that have been advanced in a variety of traditions. For those wishing for a more sociological reading of the current situation, and fewer options, Wardeker and others<sup>12</sup> have identified only three particular streams in their analysis of US Christian attitudes towards climate change. Each would claim to be authentically evangelical but they vary widely and resist synthesis.

The wider range of historic attitudes, together with a semi-serious label for each, looks something like this:

- 1) Fundamentalist eschatology: We shouldn't care for creation at all. As Henry Ward Beecher wrote about D.L Moody, 'He thinks it is no use to attempt to work for this world. In his opinion it is blasted—a wreck bound to sink—and the only thing that is worth doing is to get as many of the crew off as you can, and let her go.'
- 2) Instrumentalist: Because society cares about the environment, and it is important to be relevant,
- 3) Pragmatic: Because we cannot evangelise without creating stable prior social conditions, and establishing those depends upon a stable environment, therefore we need to do a minimum of environmental reparation. Put baldly, as social unrest is uncongenial for evangelism, and hungry people can't hear the gospel, we had better do something to improve their lives.
- 4) Compassionate: We should care because of the poor. This is the approach now being advocated by most of the evangelical relief and development organisations as they now come to terms with the impact of climate change as a major driver of poverty, displacement, and acute social stress.
- 5) Enlightened self interest: We need to think about environmental sustainability because our own well-being depends upon it. This is the approach of many Christians in the wealthy world, and it is often accompanied by the conviction that their healthy economies will be the solution to relieving poverty worldwide. So it can be seen as going further than a mere concern to protect

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12 J.A Wardekker, et al., *Ethics and public perception of climate change: Exploring the Christian voices in the US public debate*. (Global Environmental Change, 2009, <doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2009.07.008>

- a privileged lifestyle.
- 6) Liberal: To care for the earth is an integral part of the calling to be human in God's image, and the emergence of this new humanity will bring hope for creation. The onus is on ethics and human effort, and typically very little of God's perspective, or the possibility of his presence, is invoked.<sup>13</sup>
  - 7) The Cultural Mandate: Because God told Adam to care for the garden, and that command has never been revoked, so we have received this duty as an ethical imperative. Put bluntly, we should care for creation because God has told us to.
  - 8) Reformed: Because Christ is the Lord of Creation so all of life is to be transformed by our relationship with him, including our relationship to the environment.
  - 9) Orthodox: Because our fundamental calling is to worship with all creation, we cannot be indifferent to its well-being.<sup>14</sup>

### III Creation Care and Missiology

We might have sympathies with some of the elements in several of these approaches. However, I would argue

that entirely adequate justification for considering creation care as a normal element of an authentically biblical mission agenda can be found in either of two well-known missiological frameworks. The first is that which stresses the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, and the second sees mission as the church's proclamation of the Lordship of Christ. Either of these current evangelical missiologies quite naturally provides a foundation for the urgently needed integration of the care of creation into our thinking, and more importantly, gives us a solid basis for action. I take it as a given that both understandings of 'proclamation' see it as necessarily achieved through word and deed. Although that is a moot point for some, the credibility gap that the Christian church in many parts of the world has suffered in consequence of a disparity between its words and its life should give us all pause for thought. Furthermore, we cannot deny the biblical record of how the church witnessed to its Lord, and it should persuade us that words alone will always fail to do justice to a true presentation of either the Kingdom of God, or of Jesus Christ, the saviour and redeemer of the world.

A defence of a disconnected gospel for isolated individuals is even more difficult in times that have brought about a far better understanding of our human connections. Scientific research is constantly identifying new relationships of cause and effect in the biosphere of which we have been unaware. The rapid development of information technology demonstrates the networked ways in which our global culture is now operating as a complex entity. The Trinitarian theology of Jürgen Moltmann, Colin Gunton,

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13 See for example the most, and only, 'religious' word in the WCC Ecumenical Water Network newsletter, October 2007—'inspiring'.

14 'O thou who coverest thy high places with the waters, Who settest the sand as a bound to the sea And dost uphold all things: The sun sings your praises, The moon gives you glory, Every creature offers a hymn to thee, His author and creator, for ever.' From the Lenten Triodion quoted in Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Oxford: A.R. Mowbray, 1979).

James Torrance and many others, has encouraged us to understand better the fundamentally relational nature of created reality. It is very clear that the old isolated individualism of enlightenment humanism had its missiological equivalent in a version of the gospel that was reduced to proclaiming a merely personal salvation without community or environmental consequences. It was a manifestation in the church of what Bill McKibben has identified in post-modern society as 'hyper-individualism'.<sup>15</sup> To state it in environmental terms, the DNA of a consumer and individualistic society has so penetrated our message as to genetically modify it, giving us a GM gospel.

It is even possible to suggest that, in western culture at least, the retreat into the realm of our own personal needs has been a reaction to a realisation of inter-connectedness that has become intolerable: our media make us aware of ever more global needs and tragedies and we cannot cope. Front page reports of scientific studies inform us that the air we breathe has been polluted by factories half way across the world, whose chemical emissions are found in the very tissues of our bodies. We discover that the same trading agreements and agricultural techniques which have brought us unimagined comfort have impoverished whole sub-continent and ruined their earth, air and water. Even western nature enthusiasts find the warblers they love to protect in northern woodlands do not return in spring

because of Sahelian drought or disappearing South American forests. Do we care about the environment and so favour bio-fuels? We learn that for the most part they are responsible for deforestation, loss of agricultural land, and soaring food prices for the poor. Such knowledge and complexity is difficult to bear and it is understandable that the western church, and western society itself, retreats to a narrowly personal set of concerns in response.

Yet at the same time, further insights from the fields of anthropology and sociology, allied to the rise of non-western theological leadership over the last century, have brought the global church to a more biblical recognition that if we are saved, we will come to Christ *within* our cultures and that the multi-cultural church arises as cultures are transformed and redeemed according to Kingdom thinking and values. There is no 'Kingdom culture' that can be applied wholesale across the world.<sup>16</sup> So a further blow has been delivered to any idea of personal salvation in isolation from our social context or what Brian Howell argues should be called '*traditions of knowledge*'.<sup>17</sup>

Remembering Psalm 67 with its rolling progression of blessing from the personal to the community, from our culture to our politics, should have kept us better on track. The descrip-

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<sup>15</sup> Bill McKibben, *Deep Economics*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 95-128.

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<sup>16</sup> 'All churches are culture churches—including our own.' Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis books, 1996), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Howell, 'Globalization, Ethnicity and Cultural Authenticity', 320.

tion in 1 Peter 3:9, 10 of the church as a new people being built into a social and cultural reality would have alerted us to the fact that the personal genie would always get out of its box into wider relationships. Since Carl Henry's *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* in 1947 we have seen a widespread recovery of the true and biblical dimensions of social concern within our missiology. However, we have another clearly biblical step to take as we are confronted by the rapid degradation of our living planet.

#### IV Reading Scripture in the Light of Creation Care

The Bible is like a seed-bed in arid land whose incredible potential flowers only when the rain arrives. So it is perhaps reasonable that the dormant biblical seeds of creation concern came to fruition only when the growing awareness of ecological crisis in wider society took Christians back to a re-reading of scripture. New circumstances obliged us to re-consider our more familiar interpretations as they always should. When the scandal of slavery dawned on the evangelical conscience two hundred years ago a similar process of re-evaluation took place, and the cycle of ensuing change looks very similar to that which we are now witnessing as we come to terms with climate change in a theological and then missiological context.

So we need to complete our reading of the texts such as Psalm 67 by going beyond their social and political good news of blessing, to the blessing of the harvest and the land itself which ends the psalm. Many of our most cherished

passages speak clearly of the participation of the earth itself in God's purposes, but only recently have we seen their prophetic power or relevance. Hosea 4:1-3, written three millenia before the words marine crisis meant much, is one of the most topical and striking.

<sup>1</sup>Hear the word of the LORD, you  
Israelites,  
because the LORD has a charge  
to bring  
against you who live in the land:  
There is no faithfulness, no love,  
no acknowledgment of God in the  
land.

<sup>2</sup>There is only cursing, lying and  
murder,  
stealing and adultery;  
they break all bounds,  
and bloodshed follows blood-  
shed.

<sup>3</sup>Because of this the land mourns  
and all who live in it waste away;  
the beasts of the field and the  
birds of the air  
and the fish of the sea are dying.

Having done that biblical work, we then need to face the challenge of seeing what these passages mean for the work of global mission.

#### V Negative Forces

In order to go forward I think we have to acknowledge candidly some of the drivers of our current reluctance to include environmental concern in our understanding of mission. I hope I may be forgiven for simply sharing the impressions I have gained over the last decade on the basis that they have been assembled on five continents and during visits to an average of a dozen coun-

tries, rich and poor, each year. Such travelling has made me aware of the overwhelming presence of a missiology that is exclusively focused on personal salvation, often associated with 'prosperity teaching'. As it is frequently North American in origin, it needs to be acknowledged that the North American church is uniquely suspicious both of science and of environmental alarm calls, for particular reasons linked to its own history.<sup>18</sup>

There is a further brake on environmental mission that also needs to be recognised, and perhaps this paper will lead to further work which could help remove it. Evangelicals continue to express views that differ considerably about how the effects of personal conversion can be expected to bring about a transformation in wider areas of human life. We do believe the experience of the new Christian is sufficiently radical for us to use the term 'born again'. But once born, how much are we going to grow up and change? Conversion of life is not a familiar evangelical concept these days, and our distinctive belief in personal conversion has made some of us wary of expanding the scope of the experience. So it is tempting to question how much change we can expect to bring to the world through our lives and witness. Can we hope for much impact on society, or will Christians simply suffer like everyone else within the structures of an intractably rebellious world? Can cultures be changed or redeemed, or

should we simply abandon them, participate as little as we can, and wait for heaven?

At the very least our current situation is paradoxical and somewhat contradictory. Pentecostals and neo-charismatics are often accused of having an over-realised eschatology. Their critics charge them with taking promises of transformation that were only intended for the end times, then unreasonably expecting them to be fulfilled here and now. However, as Richard Lovelace has pointed out, all though the history of church revivals there has generally been a corresponding and transformational renewal across the communities where they have taken place.

Even so, while twentieth century Pentecostal revivals clearly led to an extraordinary renewal and growth of the church world-wide, for the most part, they have more notably given rise to personal, rather than social, transformation as a consequence. Nations such as Kenya and Brazil, where there are now millions of believers, remain among the most troubled and corrupt on earth, and are incidentally the locus of some of the planet's most rapid and catastrophic environmental crises. Wonsuk Ma,<sup>19</sup> Rikk Watts, and Tri Robinson are among those from Pentecostal or charismatic traditions who have pointed out that evidence of any environmental concern has been even more absent from their churches than from that of almost any other grouping. Perhaps this is not surprising if even

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<sup>18</sup> See Peter Harris, *Kingfisher's Fire* (Oxford: Monarch, 2008), 157-169 for a fuller discussion.

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<sup>19</sup> Wonsuk Ma, *Transformation* 24:3 & 4, (July & October 2007), 222-230.

the eschatological significance of the gospel for the wider creation has been neglected by us all, let alone our consideration of the significance for all people that God determines for them ‘the times set for them and the exact places where they should live’.<sup>20</sup> It is easy to forget that time and place are created entities.

We may have varying conclusions about the possibilities for society and the earth which converted people can bring about. However, it is only coherent to answer the question of whether some measure of restoration for the creation itself is a legitimate sign of the coming Kingdom of God in the same terms as we answer questions about human physical healing. Most Christians believe that healing ministry is a normal component of the mission of the God’s people on earth. We believe that, whether we think it comes about through medicine practised by compassionate believers, or simply in response to faithful prayer. Most Christians quite naturally understand that it expresses and demonstrates God’s saving and redemptive love in Christ.

Biblically and theologically there is every reason for extending our understanding of God’s same healing and redemptive intentions to the wider creation. In our own times, when the coming Kingdom has been announced in Jesus but has not yet fully come, it has nevertheless begun to be manifest in a wide variety of ways in the life of his people. So it is yet another sign of Christ’s Lordship that creation itself can find a measure of restoration. Sim-

ilarly the same hope in Jesus that marks the personal and social lives of his people can become visible in their environmental life—in the landscapes they restore, the habitats and species they conserve, the way they care for creation by mitigating and limiting climate change, and thereby remembering the poor. This comes to the church as an authentic mission calling, and expresses the love of Christ in exactly the same way as the preaching of good news of salvation to those who are cut off from God, or the same way as relief of people’s physical suffering.

## VI Extending Missiologies

So in one sense, although it would represent a major psychological shift for most western Christians to lose the ‘people only’ habit of mind that many have gained when thinking of mission, no major theological transformation is required. It is more a question of extending our current missiologies to encompass their full biblical scope so we remember the wider creation. After all, the creation sustains us daily and our forgetting that reality is enough of a problem already. So, for the most part, it means changing an anthropocentric mindset that, out of mere habit, stops short of considering creation.

Soon enough it will trickle down into popular Christian culture. Let me give an example of how straightforwardly and naturally it could appear. The singer David Ruis told me that if these ideas had come to him earlier, his song that begins, ‘Let your glory fall in this room. Let it go forth from here to the nations’. would have gone, ‘Let it go forth from here to all creation’. instead.

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<sup>20</sup> Acts 17:26.

I suggest that even those who fear we will forego our doctrinal hold on the vital importance of personal salvation have nothing further to lose by such a biblical *demarche*. If that were to be a problem, then it is already out there as a result of the global outpouring of evangelical compassion which has led to the emergence of so many fine ministries all over the world in recent decades. The evidence suggests that there has been no watering down of evangelism or loving witness to Christ in consequence; instead there is a more authentic and powerful expression of what Christian love can mean when action accompanies words. I wish to acknowledge this fear all the same, and stress again that I believe passionately in the possibility of personal salvation.

I also recognise that it is only reasonable to expect the law of unintended consequences to play into the re-forming of the mission agenda as it does into any new situation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer pointed out that the legacy of Luther was far from what he intended when he launched his reforming manifesto.<sup>21</sup> Chinese Premier Zhuo Enlai was asked about the impact of the French Revolution of 1789 and apparently responded 'It is too early to tell...' I suspect that a missiology that embraces creation rather than ignoring it, that stresses the goodness of God's creative purposes within the context of the fall, rather than believing that the

consequences of the fall are so drastic that we should invest nothing here and now, may lead to an unfamiliar set of drawbacks and down-sides. An over-pessimistic detachment from the created world, and a guilty instinct about life's joys are familiar territory for evangelicals. Those we know well enough—a re-kindled enthusiasm for the arts, for food and drink, for beauty and for life itself, we don't.

### VII Practical Challenges

So, hopeful that caring for creation will indeed become second nature for evangelicals, and a normal part of our global mission agenda, what practical challenges do we face? The first is lack of resources. Until now Christian funding has not been applied to work which has no apparent human relevance. Therefore, the few Christian initiatives in the field have been heavily dependent for support on donors who merely tolerate rather than enthuse about the belief commitments of the organisations they are supporting.<sup>22</sup> There has been little recognition of the distinctive contribution they can make and little reflection by Christian organisations about exactly how distinctive their approach must be. These are early days.

That leads to the second constraint: a lack of case studies. This is simply an area of work into which we have been

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<sup>21</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM, 1953) 123: 'One wonders why Luther's action had to be followed by consequences that were the exact opposite of what he intended...'

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<sup>22</sup> Interestingly the *exception française* makes itself felt here also. While the majority of French philanthropists are Christian believers, they overwhelmingly support charities which are secular in nature. In different ways this is equally problematic.

late arriving, and where often our impact has been limited: the wider church has yet to mainstream these concerns although western society is rapidly doing so, and the environmental movement itself has recognised the major mistake they made in attempting to hold a monopoly on issues that were of concern to everyone.<sup>23</sup> So examples of environmental or conservation initiatives that truly bear the marks of a Christian approach are few and far between. They do exist, but they take some finding.

As the Lausanne Theology working group met in Beirut it was encouraging to have Riad Kassis' case study from A Rocha's work in the Bekaa Valley to illustrate the message of this paper, because this is where the missiological and theological learning needs to be done now. We are knee-deep in Declarations and skin-deep in wisdom and application. It is my hope and plea that as we contribute to the Lausanne process, we will focus on an agenda for action rather than contenting ourselves with adding to the innumerable expressions of well-meaning but ultimately toothless concerns that have emerged over the last quarter century from so many Christian fora.

As this is a consultation paper it is only right that I point out that there is certainly another paradox to be recognised if our goal is to be achieved. Mark Noll has reproached evangelicals for their instinctive pragmatism and lack

of 'sober analysis'.<sup>24</sup> It is the genius of evangelicals that their relationship with Christ propels them into urgent action, 'feeding the hungry, living simply, and banning the bomb', as Noll puts it. Yet it can also be our weakness if, as Steve Beck<sup>25</sup> has pointed out in the context of our philanthropy, we need to be soft-hearted and hard headed, whereas the reverse is often true. Just as primary health care and gerontology remain the Cinderella of medical priorities because they are principally focused on preventing suffering rather than relieving it, so environmental work is going to be necessarily upstream. It works at the roots of things, the often complex causes of far later, but entirely foreseeable, human and biological crises. It is much easier to get concerned for starving rural populations than for sudden colony collapse in populations of bees—but probably far more strategic to work on the latter. Such work is sophisticated and its impacts are often seen only long-term. This has little appeal for those who prefer their responses emotionally charged, and will give little satisfaction to the impatient.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, there is a shortage of Christian people with the appropriate technical skills; even those who have them

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<sup>23</sup> See Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, *The Death of Environmentalism*, ([www.thebreakthrough.org/PDF/Death\\_of\\_Environmentalism.pdf](http://www.thebreakthrough.org/PDF/Death_of_Environmentalism.pdf), 2004).

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<sup>24</sup> Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Steve Beck is former CEO of the Christian philanthropy consultants, Geneva Global.

<sup>26</sup> See the late Archbishop Dom Helder Câmara's famous remark: 'When I feed the poor they call me a saint. When I ask why so many people are poor they call me a communist.'



have not normally received much encouragement from their church leadership to consider their work as a ministry, or to reflect biblically on their professional development. Think for a moment of how someone going off to work in Indian villages will be heard by their home church in the west compared to their interest in the work of an entomologist who works in his laboratory up the road on viruses in bees.<sup>27</sup> So many of those with biological interests are challenged early in their studies to take medical rather than environmental courses; it has not helped that the careers that followed from the former are generally far more lucrative than those developed from the latter.

### VIII Conclusion

I wish to end by pointing out why the apparently academic nature of some of the arguments above could have very major implications. Perhaps all good theology and missiology are like that. Simply put, we are in front of a global situation that presents as either a huge opportunity or as a seriously scary set of probabilities. If the Christian church world-wide understands that its relationship with God's creation is an integral part of its worship, work and witness, then there will be immediate hope for some of the most environmentally vulnerable and important areas

on earth. If, however, we continue to be as damaging a presence as the rest of human society, then, as I will explain more fully below, there is probably little we can do to arrest the rapid degradation that is proving so devastating for them all. This sobering analysis is one that is shared by Christians and others alike—as the Texas philosopher Max Oelschlaeger has said about the eco-crisis: 'The church may be, in fact, our last best chance.'<sup>28</sup>

The earth's treasure of biodiversity—all of which has been created by God's wisdom, as Psalm 104 reminds us, is concentrated on around 2 per cent of the planet's surface. Although it has been widely acknowledged for some time that human behaviour and choices are the determining factor for their survival, until recently no-one had mapped who lived in these places—the so-called biodiversity hotspots—and what they believe. When A Rocha completed the mapping it was startling to discover that quite frequently it was evangelical populations who were the most significant. Had we mapped according to even wider denominational criteria the picture would have been even more striking. We have yet to undertake a 'decision makers' map—but when one considers the beliefs of board members who influence the decisions of the multi-nationals that also have a massive impact in such areas, it is easy to imagine that many would be found in church on Sunday also.

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<sup>27</sup> Another consequence of our neglect of the doctrine of creation is that science itself, just like the arts, remains deeply problematic to the evangelical church in many parts of the world, but particularly North America. See the heartbreaking testimony of the astrophysicist, Joan Centrella, in *Real Scientists, Real Faith* (Oxford: Monarch, 2009).

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<sup>28</sup> Max Oelshlaeger, *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1994).

Then it is possible to consider the wide areas of the earth that are not hotspots, but which are subject to Christian decision making. If one just takes North America as an example, a high proportion of farmers in Texas are Baptists, and an equally high percentage of those who work the land in Manitoba are Mennonites. I always ask when we meet if they have ever been challenged to think that God is interested in how they farm their land, and not simply in how they treat their workers; so far I have not met one who has been challenged in this way. Unless that changes, we can continue to expect that, for the most part, soil erosion, chemically loaded run-off and the treatment of animals as machines to convert agricultural inputs into money, will continue to be as much of a feature of land farmed by believers in Christ as it of land farmed by those who believe in the primacy of the dollar. Baptist facilities will make an equal contribution to climate change as those owned by the bank down the street. The only difference is that the latter are at least consistent with their values.

Hence the alarm of secular commentators as they observe the indiffer-

ence of the church to what is happening to our environment—an earth-hostile gospel is going to be literally toxic across large areas of the earth's surface. Hence also the hope that the gospel can bring when it is faithful to the purposes of God for his creation—it can change us so we are people who fulfil God's intentions, to serve the creation 'and take care of it'.<sup>29</sup> If a fully biblical gospel that encompasses the care of creation takes hold of the hearts and minds of the church, it can be lived and proclaimed with integrity in the world.

We are all called to be part of the ministry of Christ's reconciliation of 'all things' to God himself, and we have much to learn as we begin to put that calling into practice. We can be confident, however, that the work we undertake in response to God's call will please our loving Creator, bless the creation, and give true meaning to the message that Jesus is Lord.

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<sup>29</sup> Genesis 2:15 There has been a lot of discussion of the Hebrew word *'abad* translated by the NIV as 'work'—but suffice it to say it probably goes beyond serving the garden to serving the Creator and worshipping him through that work.

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# The Global Public Square

Vinoth Ramachandra

**KEY WORDS:** *Democracy, mission, justice, consumerism, globalization, economic, theology*

THE WORLD MISSIONARY Conference that met in Edinburgh in 1910 recognized the 'world' as a single unit, united not merely scientifically (one human species living on planet Earth) and *technologically* ('organically knit by the nerves of electric cable and telegraph wire')<sup>1</sup> but theologically (created and redeemed through the one Christ). At the same time, however, the world was divided into two halves: the 'Christian' world identified with the Western and Latin American nations; and the rest, the 'non-Christian' world.<sup>2</sup> Mission was understood as 'foreign missions', the steady expansion of the for-

mer sphere at the expense of the latter. The conference speakers and respondents were overwhelmingly of the stock of white European and American males who dominated the ecclesiastical and missionary centres of power. No native African spoke for African Christianity, nor were there many representatives from indigenous churches outside the European world.

The driving force behind the conference was the brilliant John Mott, General Secretary of the YMCAs, who opened the conference by stating that 'The next ten years will in all probability constitute a turning-point in human history... if they are rightly used, they may be among the most glorious in Christian history',<sup>3</sup> and concluded it with the stirring exhortation: 'Our best days are ahead of us because of a larger body of experience now happily placed at the disposal of Christendom... Therefore, with rich talents like these which we bear forth, surely our best

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1 W. H. Temple Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 6.

2 Cf. Brian Stanley, 'Defining the Boundaries of Christendom: The Two Worlds of the World Missionary Conference, 1910' in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol.30, no.4, (October 2006), 171-176.

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3 John Mott in *The World Missionary Conference, 1910, The History and Records of the Conference Together with Addresses delivered at the Evening Meetings* (London and Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, New York and Toronto: Fleming H. Revell & Co. 1910), 108.

days are ahead for every one of us, even the most distinguished person in our great company.’<sup>4</sup>

In a book published the following year, and entitled *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation*, Mott asserted confidently:

Now steam and electricity have brought the world together. The Church of God is in the ascendant. She has within her control the power, the wealth, and the learning of the world. She is like a strong and well-equipped army in the presence of the foe. The only thing she needs is the Spirit of her Leader and a willingness to obey his summons to go forward. The victory may not be easy, but it is sure.<sup>5</sup>

Mott was ironically prescient. The next ten years *did* constitute ‘a turning-point in human history’, but not in the way he envisaged. Millions of the finest young specimens of Western civilization perished in the horrific and senseless carnage that the most advanced European nations unleashed on each other and on their colonies. Enlightenment notions of progress which had so insidiously subverted the Western missionary movement, collapsed. The Secretary of the Edinburgh conference and the Chair of the International Missionary Council which had been set up to implement the Edinburgh vision was Joe Oldham. In the

following years, Oldham reflected on the lessons of the times and concluded that the understanding of ‘missionary success’ that had inspired the Edinburgh conference had been seriously flawed. It was as if the ‘Spirit of her Leader’ (Mott’s words above) had drifted away from the biblical testimony and been co-opted by the modernist Spirit of the Age. The experience of the war convinced Oldham that the ‘Christian nations’ needed to be evangelized too and that Western Christianity, while still sending thousands of missionaries overseas, ‘had all but lost its credibility and its moral authority for engaging in such an enterprise’.<sup>6</sup>

The Edinburgh 1910 delegates were not wholly blind to the evils of Western Christendom. The Commission VII Report on *Missions and Government* drew attention to the massive atrocities committed by the Belgian rulers in the Congo, including the use of forced labour; it called for the cessation of practices that were a source of considerable revenue to the British government such as the traffic in opium and the sale of hard liquor to native populations. It was critical of the British government for showing great deference to Islamic traditions in Africa while ignoring the restrictions experienced by Christian converts. But what was missing was a systematic attempt to look critically at European society and Empire from the perspective of the gospel itself, let alone those ‘non-Christian’ peoples whose lands were classified on a scale ranging from ‘low

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4 Mott, *The World Missionary Conference*, 348.

5 John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation* (New York: YMCA, 1911), 130-131, quoted in Charles West, *Power, Truth and Community in Modern Culture* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 117-8.

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6 Keith Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J.H. Oldham* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), 135.

civilization, but independent' to 'high civilization, but under Christian rule or influence'.<sup>7</sup> Lacking both a political theology and a prophetic voice, the conference mirrored the self-confidence of the heyday of empire.

Mott's 'steam and electricity', Gairdner's 'electric cable and telegraph wire'—these were the late nineteenth-century technological underpinnings of the globalization of commerce, cultural and scientific exchange, military aggression and missionary activity. The 1870-1914 world was highly globalized; territorial states exercised only weak control over their economies. In the period 1919 to 1980 the world de-globalized, thus allowing the territorial states to gain greater control over their national economies.<sup>8</sup> This era was also characterised by Fordism, with its large manufacturing units and mass trade unions. The re-globalization of the world economy has taken place since the mid-1980s as a result both of far-reaching innovations in communications technology and the resurgence of a neoliberal economic ideology in the US and Great Britain. This resurgence has sought to promote, with much hypocrisy and double standards, a single, global market economy in which barriers to the free flow of capital, goods and services are removed.

## I The Janus-Face of Globalisation

Globalisation has become shorthand for the increasingly inter-connected nature of our lives, as individuals and as nations. What happens in Wall Street sends shock waves around the world, just as what goes on in the mountains of Afghanistan shut down Wall Street on 11 September 2001. Like every other historical process in a fallen world, globalisation shares both in the goodness of human creation and the distortion of creation by sin and evil. For every benevolent aspect, there is a malevolent side that threatens to overwhelm the good. It is thus a Janus-faced entity, a paradoxical phenomenon that reflects the paradoxical nature of the human condition. Asymmetric relations of power, coupled with the tendency of sinful human beings to use power not for the common good but for selfish interests, undermine the promise of globalisation to promote transcultural understanding, equity and welfare.

For example, the liberalisation of trade between nations has great potential for developing the creativity of the poor and providing opportunities for the poor. On the other hand, unequal power relations between nations and divergent internal policies sabotage this potential. So-called 'free trade' treaties are always rigged in favour of rich nations which demand that the poor remove all their agricultural subsidies and open their markets to the heavily subsidized agribusinesses of the rich world. Moreover, the unemployed in rich nations are usually protected by social welfare. Their counterparts in poor nations are not. For the

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7 *The World Missionary Conference, 1910, Missions and Governments, Report of Commission VII* (London and Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, New York and Toronto: Fleming H. Revell & Co. 1910), 88.

8 Cf. Meghnad Desai, *Marx's Revenge* (London: Verso, 2004).

latter, loss of competitiveness often means literal starvation. Most of the luxury consumer goods and electronic items that fuelled the recent 'credit bubble' in the West were manufactured by women working in unsafe and exploitative work environments in countries such as China, Bangladesh and Vietnam. The H1N1 viral pandemic sweeping the world even as I write is a direct consequence of the intensive 'animal production' methods that Mexico develops to feed the insatiable appetite for spare ribs on the part of US consumers.

The much-vaunted 'global village' (prophesied by Marshall McLuhan as a result of television) has all the drawbacks of village life as well as its benefits. The Internet offers a cornucopia of information for those who seek it and have the financial means and technical know-how to access it. But, equally, it supports the universal feature of all villages, gossip. It creates numerous meeting places for the unstructured exchange of messages which can be entertaining, superstitious, scandalous, or malign. The system itself does not help anyone to pick out the true messages from the false. At the same time, the global nature of these conversations makes the situation worse than in a village, where at least you might encounter and perhaps be forced to listen to some people who had different opinions and obsessions. The Internet also makes it easy for large numbers of previously isolated extremists to find each other and talk only among themselves. So, while the democratic potential is considerable, so is the potential for incivility and the fomenting of violence.

Enthusiasm for power-at-a-dis-

tance, encouraged by the new communication technologies, has always been seductive. None of us is immune. It is so easy to forget that what is 'freedom' for me may be experienced differently by others elsewhere. The moral theologian Oliver O'Donovan gives an everyday example:

When I have entered my credit card number and double-clicked on the 'confirm' box, some packer somewhere has to act on my order, some driver struggle through the traffic on the motorway, some postman find my front door. For me, as for the slave-owners of the early modern colonies, it is all too easy to overlook those on whom the gratifying of my desires depends, and to succumb to the illusion that the tips of my fingers on keyboard and mouse have freed them from the constraints of place, too!<sup>9</sup>

Those who insist on seeing globalisation as solely the product of European colonialism and late twentieth-century American cultural imperialism miss its historical complexity. And yet there is a genuine novelty in our contemporary situation. It was less than five decades ago that we first saw images of the earth, a greenish-blue orb, and woke up to the possibility of its life-sustaining properties being destroyed by human actions. The space-time compression of the world brought about by technology is a reflexive process. Paradoxically, at the very time when people can imagine the

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<sup>9</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2005), 260.

world as one, they are confronted with the problem of proximity, with 'otherness'. Our knowledge of how others perceive us bends back to shape our actions, relations, and identities.

Sociologists of religion have long traced the impact of such reflexivity on the growth of the 'heretical imperative' of individual choice, the undermining of traditional authorities and the fragmenting of religious communities. 'For the first time in history', writes the Middle East scholar Richard Bulliet, 'Muslims from every land and condition—a preacher in Harlem, a terrorist from Mombasa, a political party leader in Kuala Lumpur, a feminist in Marrakesh—can access a worldwide audience as easily as traditional authorities like a Shaikh al-Azhar in Cairo, an ayatollah in Najaf, or a royally appointed mufti in Riyadh.'<sup>10</sup> Bulliet goes on to observe that the discrediting of the old authorities by the modernizing regimes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the creation of mass literacy by these same governments, led many Muslim youth alienated from traditional leaders to believe that they were free to choose whatever brand of Islam best suited their circumstances. Conservative Muslims still declare that Islam can be authoritatively defined only by qadis, muftis, and the ulama. But others contend that Islam is whatever they believe it to be on the basis of the teachings of the charismatic leader whose writings, audiotapes, and videotapes they find most appealing.

## II Democratising Globalisation

Citizenship in the modern world carries the notion of belonging to a well-defined, territorially bounded political community. Participation in civic life is motivated by a sense of affinity with one's compatriots under conditions of self-determination, political equality and public accountability. In the theory of liberal democracy, all who are affected by the decisions of the state, whether in legislation or public policy, must have a say in the decision-making process, either directly in public referendum or through elected representatives in a state legislature.

Globalisation problematizes these inherited concepts. Those who are most affected by the decisions and transactions made in one nation-state may be citizens of another. We belong to what the British political theorist David Held calls 'overlapping communities of fate' where the trajectories of all countries are deeply enmeshed with each other. There are novel relations of interdependence that transgress nation-state boundaries. These relations, if unacknowledged, can become systematic over time and coalesce into global structures of injustice.

Melissa Williams observes:

What is appealing about the language of communities of fate is its connotation that the ethically significant relationships that exist among human beings are not all of their conscious choosing. There are forces not of our own making that bind us to one another, like it or not... These webs of relationship have a history, but they also extend into the foreseeable future... The

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<sup>10</sup> Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 147.

language of fate, for all its pitfalls, captures this sense that the condition of political action is a world that has been shaped by forces other than intentional agency.<sup>11</sup>

Thus the very process of democratic governance raises doubts about the legitimacy and relevance of the nation-state. What is the relevant constituency, for example, in discussions about the use of non-renewable resources, or the disposal of nuclear waste, or tackling global terrorism? To whom do decision-makers have to justify their decisions? To whom should they be accountable? All the key ideas of democracy—the nature of a constituency, the meaning of representation, the scope of political participation, and the relevance of the nation-state as the guarantor of the rights, duties and welfare of subjects—need to be reconceived on a global canvas.

The basis of all political community is a shared imagining. Through their words and actions, citizens attempt to persuade their fellows that the connections between them are real, that their actions have real consequences, and that these consequences can be brought under some form of rule aimed at a common good. In a deliberative democracy, those who are affected adversely by the actions of others must be given reasons they can accept as to why they have suffered in this way and how their adversity can be redressed.

‘The scope of our interconnectedness’, notes Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, ‘defines the radius of responsibility and concern.’<sup>12</sup> Once we become aware of how our lifestyles influence the well-being and freedom of others, we must assume moral responsibility for the unintended and invisible consequences of our individual and collective actions.

However, new structures that can ‘give flesh’ to a genuinely planetary politics are not yet in sight, though the currency of a ‘global civil society’ or a ‘transnational public sphere’ has become widespread. Can the new relationships of globalisation become sites of new forms of *active citizenship*? In other words, can they be brought under conscious human agency aimed at rendering the relationships transparent, just and mutually accountable? As Seyla Benhabib points out: ‘We are like travellers navigating an unknown terrain with the help of old maps, drawn at a different time and in response to different needs. While the terrain we are travelling on, the world society of states, has changed, our normative map has not.’<sup>13</sup>

It matters significantly who gets to participate in such deliberations in the emerging ‘global public square’. The world today needs multilayered, multi-level governance for different kinds of political challenges at different levels, local, national, regional, and global.

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**11** Melissa S. Williams, ‘Nonterritorial Boundaries of Citizenship’ in Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro and Danilo Petranovic (eds.), *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 245.

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**12** Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 121.

**13** Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6.



The question is whether such governance arrangements will be genuinely democratic, or whether they will simply reflect the existing asymmetries of power which privilege some political and economic actors over others.

International trade, for instance, needs a framework of just rules. The World Trade Organization has the power to decide whether or not we should buy or ban beef boosted by hormones, genetically engineered food, wood from endangered forests, goods made under conditions of near slavery, and so on. For all its weaknesses the WTO offers a better hope for the low-income nations than a system in which bilateral deals are struck between the strong and the weak. Every country has one vote in theory, but in practice there are secret deals that rich countries make with each other to protect their own interests. American and European corporate lobby groups outnumber organizations from Third World countries by as much as six to one. Moreover, Third World countries often send incompetent bureaucrats to argue their case, whereas the rich nations can send high-priced legal experts. Thus the disparity in bargaining power is enormous.

In the aftermath to the horrors of the Second World War, new political institutions such as the UN, the EU and the International Criminal Court have been created. From changes in the laws of war to the emergence of international environmental and human rights regimes new political narratives are being told to counter the dominant narrative of the sovereign nation-state. However, the arrogance of the great powers has undermined the authority of international law and its enforce-

ment, and many nations that have signed up to the UN Declaration of Human Rights flagrantly ignore it. There is a massive gulf between the rhetoric of human rights and the practice, and between official promises and their fulfilment. Even progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, which set down *minimum* standards to be achieved by 2015 in relation to poverty reduction, health, educational provision, the combating of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and environmental sustainability, has been pathetically slow and will likely be missed by a very wide margin.

Political theorists and international jurists argue among themselves as to how the rule of law and social justice can be promoted on an international scale. Cosmopolitan thinkers such as David Held argue for a Global Covenant that will link the security and human rights agendas and bring them together into a coherent international framework.<sup>14</sup> Held sees this as the elaboration of social democracy beyond the level of the nation-state to regional and global levels. Some core public goods have to be provided globally if they are to be provided at all. From the establishment of fairer trade rules and financial stability to the fight against hunger and environmental degradation, the emphasis is on finding durable modes of international collaboration.

While Christians may be rightly sceptical about the practicality of a Global Covenant, they can still, I sug-

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<sup>14</sup> David Held, *Global Covenant: The Social Democratic Alternative to the Washington Consensus* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

gest, support Held's ambition to reconceive social democracy to include five essential goals:

- the promotion of the rule of law at the international level;
- greater transparency, accountability and democracy in global governance;
- a deeper commitment to social justice in the pursuit of a more equitable distribution of life chances;
- the protection and reinvention of community at diverse levels;
- the regulation of the global economy through public management of global trade and financial flows and engagement of leading stakeholders in corporate governance.

Others lay stress, not on international institutions and rules imposed top-down but on the accumulation of cross-border 'best practices' and the domestic incorporation of regulations and procedures first applied or proposed somewhere else. Anne-Marie Slaughter<sup>15</sup> sees this producing a global legal system established not by the World Court in the Hague, but by national courts working together around the world. She argues that a world of collaborative networks that acknowledge state sovereignty while facilitating greater inter-state cooperation is not only more desirable, but more likely to succeed.

In terms of global governance, new networks are emerging which raise issues that have been neglected by governments or treaties that are not being

implemented. They help to facilitate a global public discourse on such matters. There are already more than a hundred functioning global policy networks.<sup>16</sup> Some examples are the World Commission on Dams which unites IGOs such as the World Bank, corporations, governments, and environmental NGOs; the International Coalitions to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers; and Transparency International, which focuses on exposing and reforming corruption in governments and corporations.

When the issue of landmines came to a stalemate in the UN because of the intransigence of the US administration, The International Campaign to Ban Landmines, winner of a Nobel Prize for Peace, bypassed the UN to bring about a multilateral treaty. However, the successful treaty would never have been ratified without the key role played by Canada and its foreign minister. 'Global campaigning is unlikely to bring positive results unless at least some state actors (and preferably those in the West) endorse the agenda of the NGOs.'<sup>17</sup> For the foreseeable future, national governments are indispensable for global governance; but governments have to enlist the active involvement of civil society actors both

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<sup>15</sup> Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

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<sup>16</sup> These examples are taken from John Coleman S.J., 'Global Governance, the State, and Multinational Corporations' in John A. Coleman, S.J and William F. Ryan, SJ (Eds.) *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis and Ottawa, Ca: Novalis, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Daphne Josselin and William Wallace, cited in Coleman and Ryan, *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought*, 245.

within and beyond their borders.

One consequence of the globalisation of communications is that the experience of injustice in one part of the world is mobilized in a political campaign elsewhere. The globalisation of local conflicts, whether in Palestine or Chechnya, serves powerful propaganda purposes. Thus the battle to reduce the attractiveness of 'terrorist groups' to peoples suffering gross injustice is to convince the latter that there are legal and peaceful ways of addressing such grievances. Where there is no confidence in public institutions and processes, the defeat of 'terrorism' becomes almost impossible.

Globally, no single power can act as policeman, judge, jury and executioner (as the Bush administration tried to do in the aftermath of 9/11). The 'separation of powers' which many modern states have accepted at a national level needs to be translated onto the international arena. Internationally sanctioned military action, understood as a form of international law enforcement, must be developed to arrest suspects, dismantle terror networks and deal effectively with aggressive 'rogue' states. 'Terrorists' and all those who commit what has come to be called in recent years 'crimes against humanity' have to be brought, without delay, before an international criminal court system that commands transnational support and can deliver justice transparently.

### III Global Economic Justice

On a visit to Bangalore one freezing winter, I watched construction workers as they erected an office tower that would house one of the famous compa-

nies in the global computer industry. The workers were inadequately clothed and their accommodation took the form of flimsy canvas tents. I found myself musing: what will this company do for these workers, most of whom have been drawn as casual labour from surrounding villages? Will they slap copyright laws on their software products so that the children of these workers, even if fortunate enough to go to school, could never afford them? And what does the concept of 'intellectual property rights' mean when it is the general public (both in the rich world and the poor) whose taxes often subsidize these corporations, their research and their global operations?

The Western media is enamoured with the so-called 'new India' of glamour and wealth. Local Indian media follow suit, with TV channels reporting around-the-clock on how the Mumbai stock exchange is faring, despite the fact that less than five per cent of Indians own stocks. The media largely fail to report stories of the brutal suppression of peaceful protest by India's poor in the capital, or the forcible annexation of rural lands by wealthy corporations. Two million children under the age of five die every year in India, that is one every fifteen seconds, but this hardly registers on the conscience of the Indian social elites and the media.

What is true of India is true for every other society on earth. The media is obsessed with so-called celebrities; and the education system, advertising world, the political process and the criminal justice system are all biased towards the rich and the powerful.

The biblical narrative, in stark contrast, speaks of God not simply as a God of justice but One whose demand

for justice takes the concrete form of solidarity with the 'widow, the orphan, and the resident foreigner'. The widows, the orphans, the resident foreigners, and the impoverished were the *vulnerable people*, those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. They were those who were pushed to the wall in times of economic hardship. The rich and the powerful walked all over them, trampled them down.

Rendering justice to such people is often described as 'lifting them up'. The biblical prophets and psalmists do not give us a theory of justice (or any other theory) that requires alleviating the plight of the downtrodden. But, whenever they speak of God's justice, when they urge their hearers to practise justice, when they protest to God about the absence of justice, they simply take it for granted that justice requires lifting up those at the bottom.

'Seek justice, rescue the oppressed,  
defend the orphan, plead for the widow' (Is. 1:17).

And, addressing the wider world of nations and their rulers:

'Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute,  
rescue the weak and the needy;  
deliver them from the hand of the wicked' (Ps. 82:3-4).

Elsewhere,

'Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute;  
speak out, judge righteously,  
defend the rights of the poor and needy' (Prov. 31:8,9).

One of the main features of the

Washington Consensus was an extraordinary emphasis on the integration of economies into the international marketplace. The plight of rural populations was ignored, thereby not only fostering a massive influx to already-overcrowded cities, but also promoting an approach to economic development totally contrary to that pursued historically by both Western and East Asian nations.<sup>18</sup>

The pluralism of a global normative order has to extend to the realm of economics as well as cultural and religious traditions. For a country to develop in a sustainable way, its priority should be internal economic integration—the development of its internal human capital, its technological infrastructure and robust national market institutions, as well as the safeguarding of its natural capital. While the wider development of civil society is indispensable to national development, there is no single, pre-ordained model that every society must follow.

In any case, there are two structural constraints on the development of a truly global economic system. The first is that there is no international labour market. Despite economists' arguments that there would be huge welfare gains if the free migration of people were allowed, the trend is in the opposite direction. Capital and consumer goods can cross borders more easily than people, including political refugees. So draconian has the regime of control become that it is ever more

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ha-Joong Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective* (London: Anthem Press, 2002).

difficult even to enter a country legally. The second obstacle is financial, the disjuncture between countries that can borrow internationally in their own currencies and the majority that cannot. Full financial globalisation can occur only with a single global currency and a single recognized central bank. This is not likely to happen for political reasons, if no other.

The Irish ecumenical theologian John D'Arcy May makes an eloquent plea for constraints on the impact of globalisation on vulnerable peoples and their traditions:

The peoples of the Amazon jungles or the Pacific islands are the 'little ones' of the human family, economically insignificant in the context of one-sided, Western-driven globalization but, analogous to the many species and languages continually being destroyed by it, uniquely—indeed, in Levinas's sense, infinitely—valuable in themselves over and above any ecological 'usefulness' or religious 'relevance'. This is not to say that such people can or should be 'left in their natural state' in artificial reserves or anthropological theme parks; this would be as condescending as the exploitative attitude of the colonialists. Indigenous peoples, too, have the right to develop economically and enjoy the benefits of modernisation—and to make the mistakes that such rapid assimilation inevitably entails; but they also have a right to the necessary space to do this in their own ways and in their own time. If anyone has sometimes granted them this space, it has been the missionary religions

at their best. But the fate of such peoples under the pressures of globalisation remains one of the great moral dilemmas of our time.<sup>19</sup>

Since the Reagan-Thatcher era, the conditions of economic globalisation have encouraged the worst forms of capitalism to flourish worldwide. Namely, speculative financial flows across borders that are unrelated to either production or trade; sweat-shop factories and companies that 'externalize' the damage they inflict on the environment; mergers and acquisitions that lead to oligopolies that push small businesses out of the market; megamalls that bankrupt neighbourhood shops; small farmers forced off the land by giant agribusinesses; American-type massive pay differentials in companies, and business practices that sacrifice loyal workers for bigger profits.

At the same time that Western countries are claiming to extend democracy and the rule of law around the world, they are turning a blind eye to a financial system that is operating largely outside any framework of law and governance. With the use of tax havens and other elements of a 'shadow' financial network, vast sums of illicit money are being transferred daily throughout the global economy virtually undetected. This money is generated by three kinds of activities: bribery and theft; organized crime; and

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<sup>19</sup> John D'Arcy May, 'Cosmic Religion and Metacosmic Soteriology', in *Encounters With the Word: Essays to Honour Aloysius Pieris*, S.J., eds. Robert Cruz, Marshall Fernando and Asanga Tilakaratne (Colombo: EISD, 2004), 351.

corporate accounting activities such as tax evasion and falsified pricing in international trade. Through the combination of low or no taxes, little financial reporting requirements, well-defended secrecy and lax regulation, tax havens have grown to the point where they control an estimated \$6 trillion in assets. The Cayman Islands, the Bahamas, Lichtenstein and the Isle of Jersey have long been notorious in this regard, but banks in Singapore and Dubai have the lowest levels of transparency. Compare the \$50 to \$80 billion a year that flows as overseas development 'aid' to poor countries with the \$500 billion to \$800 billion that the World Bank estimates is being sent illegally out of these same poor countries. For every \$1 given across the table, the West has been receiving \$10 back under the table.<sup>20</sup>

'This outflow of illicit money,' write Raymond Baker and Eva Joly, 'is the most damaging economic condition in the developing world. It drains hard currency reserves, increases inflation, reduces tax collection, widens income gaps, forestalls investment, stifles competition, and undercuts free trade. Until development experts account for total capital going into and coming out of recipient countries, aid will continue to be offset by a much larger counterforce of fleeing capital.'<sup>21</sup>

## IV Global Consumer Religion

The cultural narrative of global capi-

talism has transformed consumption into a global religion. Hegemony is exercised through the control and colonisation of desire. Products come replete with new meanings, values, human exemplars, 'brand communities' and rituals. Their images are omnipresent, from billboards and TV commercials to every sporting event and cultural festival. Mega-malls and theme parks have become the new sacred spaces in our cities, surrounding consumption with quasi-religious experiences (e.g. by simulating natural landscapes in a mall, or piping New Age music and offering 'relaxation techniques' to weary shoppers).

As consumerism turns into religion, so religion becomes another form of consumerism. Asian religious temples are now marketed for tourist consumption, and traditional religious practices such as yoga, pilgrimage and meditation have been transformed into sources of commercial wealth. Commodification and privatization have made deep inroads into churches and theological institutions. Worship becomes entertainment, evaluated by 'how it makes me feel', and sermons can be downloaded from the Internet ready-for-use by busy pastors. If you do not like the worship and the preaching, you can simply shop around for a richer experience. Pastors and theological seminary principals are under severe pressure to come up with a 'product' that is more attractive than their competitors next door. Marketing and management skills have become important components of every Christian leader's pastoral tool-kit. 'It is a sad day for the church', writes Mark Chan from Singapore, 'when competition for greater "market share" characterizes inter-

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<sup>20</sup> Raymond Baker and Eva Joly, 'Illicit Money: Can It Be Stopped?', *New York Review of Books*, Dec 3-16, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Baker and Joly, 'Illicit Money', 62.

church relations. Rather than uniting to achieve the agenda of the Kingdom of God, concern has shifted to the building of little kingdoms, with each seeking to out-do the other. This amounts to a capitulation of the church to the culture of capitalism, consumerist entertainment and escapism.<sup>22</sup>

There are limits to human activity that follow from seeing the world as *the creation of God*. Economic growth, trade, investment and productivity are not ends in themselves but means towards human flourishing and, ultimately, glorifying God. Market-thinking must not be allowed to encroach, in tyrannical fashion, on all the activities that give meaning to human life. (Even our most intimate relationships are being corroded by the tyranny of commercial values—for instance, think of how love and sex are judged by the criteria of consumerism, namely novelty, variety and disposability). When God himself respects the otherness of what he has made and delights in its creative diversity, we seem hell-bent on turning all animals and plants into ‘bio-machines’ re-designed and shaped by genetic manipulation for the commercial profit of a few. Forests, water, seeds, the food chain, even the human genome itself are in danger of becoming commodities, representing the ultimate triumph of consumer society.

Consumerism actively inflames, exploits and manipulates personal

desires. Authentic worship, coupled with the spiritual disciplines of the church, re-orientes our desires. We learn to die, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to the overpowering appetites that a consumerist culture over-stimulates 24 hours-a-day so that the vision of the God of justice may capture our hearts. Over a hundred years ago, the Russian theologian Nicholas Berdyaev commented: ‘There are two symbols, bread and money; and there are two mysteries, the eucharistic mystery of bread and the Satanic mystery of money. We are faced with the great task to overthrow the rule of money and to establish in its place the rule of bread.’<sup>23</sup>

## V Global Warming

The climate system unites us, rich and poor, men and women, black and white. A relatively stable planetary climate over the past 15,000 years is what has enabled not only mammalian life, but settled agriculture and human civilizations, to flourish. The climate reminds us that we belong to one world—we are all dependent on the ‘carbon cycle’. We are neighbours to one another, wherever we happen to live. What anthropogenic global warming, then, represents is simply the theft of the global ‘commons’ by the rich world. The rich pollute the atmosphere and ‘commons’, stealing from the rest of humankind their means of survival, let alone their wellbeing. The atmosphere and the oceans have become the

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Chan, ‘The Cross Between the Golden Arches and Mickey Mouse’, in Simon Chan (ed.), *Truth to Proclaim: The Gospel in Church & Society* (Singapore: Trinity Theological College, 2002), 132-33.

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Michael Mayne, *The Enduring Melody* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006), 144.

medium by which wealthy corporations, governments and individuals transfer their harmful activities to other regions and peoples.

Global warming is thus a social justice issue. Those peoples who suffer most as a result of it are the ones least responsible for it. Indeed, one-sixth of the world population is so poor that they produce no significant carbon emissions at all.

The Janus-face of globalisation is well illustrated by climate change. On the one hand, it dramatically exposes the limitations of the rhetoric of 'national sovereignty'. On the other hand, the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, set up under the auspices of the UN, brings together over 2,000 climate scientists from all parts of the world in collaborative research and to advise the UN on how to respond effectively to a global threat that can only be countered on a global scale.

However, despite climate change dominating the media, the reality is that most Western nations have failed to reduce emissions and to make a meaningful transition to low-carbon living. And the rich elites of India, China and other so-called developing nations are slavishly mimicking the lifestyles of their counterparts in Western Europe and North America. We have lived with twenty years of IPCC assessment reports, more than sixteen years of UNFCCC negotiations, more than a decade of activities inspired by Kyoto, but emissions of greenhouse gases continue to rise by more than 20 per cent globally since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio.

As an overall indicator of wealth, of human and ecological well-being, GDP (or GNP) is utterly inadequate. There

are goods and services which matter greatly to us which cannot be assigned a market price, such as plants, forests and other ecosystems on which we depend and places of aesthetic and spiritual value to communities. As for those goods and services which have a market price, the price rarely tells the consumer what the true costs are. If wealth and social well-being are taken as equivalent, it is possible that GDP can increase for a time, even while the country becomes poorer and social well-being declines. We cannot evade asking ethical questions about the *means* we use to create wealth; as well as about the *nature* of the goods and services we create and how are they distributed. These questions take us beyond economics to the core values and worldviews of our societies.

Climate change raises questions about human life and destiny, about our relationship to the planet and to each other, about selfishness and the common good, about the dangers of a technological mind-set in our attitude to the world, about our values, hopes and goals, and about our obligations for the present and the future. These are moral and spiritual questions. Maurice Strong, the organizer of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, has said that

We cannot expect to make the fundamental changes needed in our economic life unless they are based on the highest and best of our moral, spiritual and ethical traditions, a reverence for life, a respect for each other, and a commitment to responsible stewardship of the earth. The transition to a sustainable society must be undergirded



by a moral, ethical and spiritual revolution which places these values at the centre of our individual and social lives.<sup>24</sup>

But this is easier said than done. We have seen that a value-free consumerism is the dominant ideology today, globally—but supremely exemplified in the US. The ‘buy now, pay later’ mentality fostered by the advertising industry, the banks, even the educational system is so pervasive; what would it take to reverse it? Even religion has been largely reshaped by this consumerist mind-set. Debt slavery is promoted as freedom, self-interest as rationality. If exchange values are the only values in town, from where do we learn a different understanding of being human?

Moreover, concepts such as ‘sustainability’, ‘accountability’ and ‘stewardship’ are being bandied about today. They have a natural home within a theocentric worldview. Within an eco-centric or an anthropocentric worldview, however, why should we care for human beings who are yet unborn? What is it that endows them with rights or us with responsibilities towards them? If Nature is all that is, and human beings are as significant as slime moulds where nature is concerned, why care about what happens to future humans? If *Homo Sapiens* ends up destroying itself, the earth will throw up new life forms that will survive at higher temperatures. In other words, the question I am posing is

whether either ‘deep ecology’ or the militant atheism that insists on telling us that evolution is a godless process and that is all there is to the world, can coherently sustain our moral intuitions in the face of the challenge of global warming and climate change?

## VI Re-orienting Theology and Mission

I suggest that these are the kind of questions Christians are called to raise in the global public square even as we work alongside people of other faiths, secular or religious, in addressing the pressing issues of democratising globalisation, defending human rights, combating economic injustice and environmental degradation. Raising such questions about the nature of human flourishing and its theological underpinnings serves to unmask the surrogate gods of state and marketplace and gives a distinctive, prophetic edge to our witness.

Just as our forebears in 1910 were so mesmerised by the prospect of evangelizing the world with the aid of governments and new technologies that their pragmatism overwhelmed their spiritual discernment, so we, whether in the North or South, face the same dangers today. The dominance of the economic dimension in contemporary affairs means that whole nations are categorized under such misleading labels as ‘developed and developing’, ‘market economies and emerging markets’, and so on, which are the equivalent of Commission VII’s deployment of ‘low’ and ‘high’ civilizations. The same modernist obsession with quantification, techniques and classifica-

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted by G.T. Prance, ‘Environmentalism’ in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 236.

tion in reflecting on our missionary calling must be resisted.

David Kerr and Kenneth Ross, in a review of *Edinburgh 1910*, remind us that despite their many mistakes and limitations, the delegates who gathered in Edinburgh in 1910 did something which proved to be truly historic:

They caught a vision of something which did not then exist: a 'world church' with deep roots and vigorous expression widely apparent on every continent... the good news of Jesus Christ can take root in every culture across the world and produce fruit in church and society everywhere.<sup>25</sup>

Given that the church is the only truly global community in the world, it is imperative that Christians recover their political imagination and act, not primarily as citizens of their own nations, but as citizens committed to a global common good. The resurrection of Jesus signifies God's intention to redeem the whole earth and her oppressed creatures from the evil domination of principalities and powers. It is God's decisive 'Yes' to our humanity—this embodied, interdependent humanity. We bear witness to this hope by concrete actions on behalf of those poor or voiceless human and non-human creatures whose prospects are threatened today. At the same time, engagement in public discourse calls for both a deep immersion in the bibli-

cal narrative and Christian traditions as well as the ability to persuade others, without manipulation or coercion, through reasoned arguments, projecting alternative social visions and displaying glimpses of the *eschaton* in the present life of the church.

In our technology- and market-driven environment, the real theological challenges are being faced by our children and by Christians working in secular occupations. Christians who are at the cutting edge of scientific and medical research, or who are engaging with new artistic media thrown up by the communications revolution, or who are caught up in the complex arenas of economic modelling and social policy, are asking questions of a profound theological character that professional theologians need to address. They are the twenty-first century 'missionaries' of the church. And it is they who should be setting the agenda for our theological schools.

We must resist the deadening 'clericalism' of the church and its theological institutions. What the global church needs are creative theologians who can help artists, economists, entrepreneurs, doctors and other so-called 'lay' men and women to think through in Christian perspective their 'secular' callings. Is it too late to envision a theological fraternity in every city that encompasses such folk and their work? If the church is to be true to its calling, theology needs to be taken out of our seminary classrooms, even our church buildings, and into the boardrooms, urban council meetings, research laboratories and national newspapers. But this has to be a theology formed through listening to the whole Body of Christ, not a parochial

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<sup>25</sup> Kenneth R. Ross and David A. Kerr, 'The Commissions After a Century' in David A. Kerr & Kenneth R. Ross (eds.), *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Then and Now* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2009), 314.

theology that simply reflects the culture in which it arises.

Christians should not 'bracket' their Christianity, as if their moral and religious convictions are constitutive of their identity and the principal grounds on which they enter political deliberations and make political choices. This also applies to people from other religious faiths and traditions. But, Christians are also painfully aware of their own fallenness as human beings and the possibility that their scriptural readings and tradition-based arguments are mistaken. There is no infallible, unchanging magisterium. All that is available to the church at a given stage in history is a collective meditation on the Word of God in the light of past and present Christian experience and the best available secular knowl-

edge pertaining to the issue under deliberation. The absence of any corroborating knowledge, stemming from the cumulative wisdom of human historical experience, should make Christians wary of making political judgments based on their reading of Scripture alone.

Christians are resident aliens (*paroikoi*, 1 Pet. 2:11), never fully at home in any political order nor in any local church. They refuse to be co-opted by their nation-states, business corporations or ethnic communities to promote agendas hostile to God's kingdom; rather, they practise a *critical* loyalty, deeply engaged with the concerns of their world but questioning all things from the perspective of a world-that-is-to-come.

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# Can Christians Belong to More than One Religious Tradition?

Kang-San Tan

**KEYWORDS:** *Inclusivism, exclusivism, dual belonging, assessibilism, multi-culturalism, globalization, multi-religious belonging, syncretism*

## I Perspectives on Non-Christian Religions

This paper seeks to explore the notion of multi-religious belonging and evaluate whether it is theologically possible for a Christian to follow Christ while retaining some form of identification with one's previous religion such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or Chinese religions. Instead of a total rejection of past faiths, is it possible for a Christian, without falling into syncretism, to belong to more than one religious tradition?

Traditionally, categories of a theology toward other religions are grouped in the threefold typologies of pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism. This categorization was criticized for its sharp distinction between positions on the non-Christian religions, and for its failure to take into account the complexities between various proponents of religious encounter. For example, many Evangelicals will be exclusivist

in their position on the finality of Jesus for salvation but will be open to incorporating the insights from other religions for life and faith. New models are still being proposed and debated with no real consensus on this evolving debate on the theories of religion.

## 1 Pluralism

John Hick, Paul Knitter, Raimundo Panikkar, Stanley Samartha, and others have championed the relativist positions which are untenable for Evangelicals holding to exclusivist claims of Jesus. Gavin D'Costa and Mark Heim have presented scathing critiques on the pluralist positions, namely, that pluralists deny others the right to alternative positions, which is a contradiction to the pluralist position. Once conversions and truth-validations are made illegitimate within religious conversations, then the rigour and quality of dialogues diminish radically into mere religious chatter.

Important critiques from Evangelicals on the relativistic positions focus on the problem of criteria for evaluating truth claims, the requirements to first sacrifice any faith positions, and a

reductionism of the diversity of religions into a monolithic faith.<sup>1</sup>

These types of pluralism, tracing their roots from liberal modernism, fail in relation to their own goals of respect to all religions and of allowing plurality of discourse. In addition, they move beyond the 'controlling beliefs of orthodox Christianity'.<sup>2</sup>

While these relativistic positions have gained acceptance in Western academia, such positions are seldom reflected on the field of religious encounter between firm religionists (for example, among Muslim theologians) in Asia or Africa. Even Buddhists who are open to other religious insights will eventually still insist on the more adequate path of Dharma for achieving enlightenment.

## 2 Exclusivist Perspectives

Recent evangelical positions on non-Christian religions straddle between inclusivists such as Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, Mark Heim and exclusivists such as Gerald McDermott, Timothy Tennent, Ajith Fernando and Don Carson. Gerald McDermott argues from scripture and the writings of Jonathan Edwards that Evangelicals will discover new insights when we engage with the teachings of other reli-

gions. As long as we retain our commitment to the Bible, such engagements with non-Christian truths are necessarily shaped and coloured through a distinctively evangelical lens. McDermott presents biblical arguments that God wants Gentiles to know him, people outside the Jewish and Christian churches have known him, and God's people can learn from those outside the Jewish and Christian churches.<sup>3</sup> Evangelicals can learn from other religions not only truths arising from creation and general revelation but also new insights found in these religious traditions.

Timothy Tennent, Associate Professor of Mission at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, recognizes that no longer can religious conversations be entered with Christians positing themselves at the head of the table, controlling the agenda and conclusions. Rather, Christians today need to sit at the roundtable and engage in dialogue with competing faiths. Tennent demonstrates what such roundtable discussions may look like through interactions with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.<sup>4</sup>

Tennent presents the analogy used by A.G. Hogg about a man looking up at the moon, whose view is obscured by clouds. He needs to shift his position in an open field in order to gaze at the radiance of the moon. He lists two potential errors in exclusivism: first, a

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1 See works by Vinoth Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflicts? Christian integrity in a multicultural world* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), Christopher Wright, *Thinking Clearly About the Uniqueness of Christ* (East Sussex: Monarch, 1997), and Ajith Fernando, *Sharing the truth in Love: How to relate to people of other faiths* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 2001).

2 Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 12, 18.

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3 Gerald McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

4 Timothy Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 232.

failure to fully appreciate God's activity in the pre-Christian heart; and second, an unwillingness to engage honestly with the objections from non-Christian religions. Tennent then presents himself as an 'engaged exclusivist', ie, one who is committed to the uniqueness of Christ but also one who is more open toward general revelation and is serious about engaging the religions from a missiological perspective.

Evangelicals such as Harold Netland, Amos Yong and Terrance Tiessen and others are exploring new models for engaging with non-Christian religions. Amos Yong has pointed out that exclusivism is primarily a soteriological category, helpful for clarifying the question of the unevangelized, but not so adequate for developing a theology of non-Christian religions.<sup>5</sup> In dealing with the question of who can be saved, Tiessen proposed the following five categories:

1. Ecclesiocentrism: salvation coextensive with the church;
2. Agnosticism: Scripture is silent on this issue of who can be saved;
3. Assessibilism: Hopeful (not simply agnostic) about the possibility of salvation beyond church boundaries. Non-Christians can be saved although non-Christian religions may not be regarded as instruments for salvation.
4. Religious instrumentalism: God's salvation is available through non-Christian religions, a form of inclusivism.
5. Relativism: Many ways of salva-

tions as part of God's divine program.<sup>6</sup>

While remaining rooted in the evangelical camp, Tiessen proposed assessibilism as a new position for engaging with non-Christian religions. In an excellent chapter on 'Is Assessibilism a new idea?' he surveyed and argued that early church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, and other Protestant writers such as Lesslie Newbigin and J.N.D. Anderson fall into this category of writers who both affirm the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the means of salvation while at the same time are more open in acknowledging God's works among non-Christian religions.

## II Can Christians Belong to More than One Religious Traditions?

Multicultural identity is a growing reality in a global world. As a Malaysian Chinese, my identity is shaped by my ethnicity (as a Chinese) as well as my country of birth (as a Malaysian). As my wife is a Singaporean Chinese, our Canadian-born daughter grew up with contested loyalty and a sense of belonging to these three countries, with Britain (where we now live) as a growing contender! Is it possible to extend this hyphenated identity formation to the religious arena?

Multi-religious belonging is a phenomenon of individuals who identify themselves as followers of more than

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<sup>5</sup> Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a pneumatological theology of religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 26-27.

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<sup>6</sup> Terrance Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing salvation in Christ and world religion* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004) 33-35.

one religious tradition. Globalisation and multicultural realities have resulted in a new generation of Christians shaped by more than one religious tradition. People of faiths may find themselves in dual or multi-religious backgrounds due to inter-religious marriages of their parents, exposures to multi religious traditions or conversions to another faith. In the West, the phenomenon of multi-religious belonging occurs when a growing number of Christians are attracted to Asian religions. While some became Buddhists or Hindus, others decide to retain their Christian belonging while at the same time seeking to incorporate elements of Asian religions to their lives and practices. In mission contexts, there is a growing phenomenon of 'insider movements' or devotees of Jesus from Islam and Hinduism.

Previously, Christian theology has tended to treat non-Christian religions as tight and separate religious systems. Such a treatment is increasingly problematic as it does not reflect the multi-religious realities in Asia whereby influences and cross fertilisation of religious beliefs are daily faith experiences. In particular, there is a need to take into account the experiences and struggles of Christian converts from Asian religions, namely, the converts' own relationship with their previous faiths. Often converts will reject their past faiths in the process of conversion to Christianity. However, some would argue that it is unrealistic to expect new converts to terminate previous faith suddenly and radically. The tensions of liminality and inter-identity of dual belonging are hurriedly glossed over rather than given due space for analysis and synthesis.

Due to globalization and dynamic cultural changes, diaspora Christians (for example, Chinese Christians), continually struggle to make sense of ongoing religious and cultural diffusion, for 'Hybridity is not only about fusion and synthesis, but also about ambivalence and incommensurability, about the contestations and interrogations that go hand in hand with heterogeneity, diversity and multiplicity we have to deal with as we live together-in-difference.'<sup>7</sup>

Over time (after second or third generations), some Asian Christians may begin to rediscover their past religious roots and may readopt aspects of their past religious traditions. Of course, multi-religious belonging is common among Asian religions such as Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Shamanism and Shintoism.

### III Models of multi-religious belongings

A religious community is 'any group of persons that would, severally and collectively, acknowledge themselves to be members of a certain community that is recognizably religious'.<sup>8</sup> Strictly speaking, multi-religious belonging is not necessarily a new phenomenon as there were Christians such as Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktanada), Bede Griffith and Krishna Mohun Banerjea maintaining dual belonging; there were also Hindus such as Ram Mohan Roy

<sup>7</sup> Ien Ang, quoted in KK Yeo, *Musing with Confucian and Paul: Toward a Chinese Christian theology* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2008), 51.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 3.

(1772-1833), Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884), and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) who expressed some personal devotion to Christ without joining the institutional church or leaving Hinduism. Nevertheless, its growing popularity in the West and as an academic study is normally located in the modern context of globalisation, contemporary individualism and the emergence of a supermarket of religious choices. Globalisation brought about closer interaction and assimilation between people of different religious traditions.

In addition, religious pluralism as an ideology has created a new situation whereby individuals are no longer choosing 'which religion but *how many* religions he or she may belong to'.<sup>9</sup> Scholars writing on this discourse used various terms such as multiple religious belongings, multi-religious belongings, dual (or double) belongings or hyphenated religious identity. Although these terms may overlap and are sometimes used inter-changeably, there are at least three ways of understanding the phenomenon of multi-religious belonging.

### 1 Multiple Religious Belonging: A Radical Pluralism

The first model of multiple religious belonging traces its origin from a *pluralist* paradigm of religion that *radically* raises interreligious discourse to a new level of religious identification and belonging. For Catherine Cornille, multiple religious belonging entails a

twofold movement: first, a conscious (not 'anonymous') identification with more than one religious community, and second, being recognised by those communities as a member. Specifically, this definition excludes new age thinking that picks and chooses various religious beliefs and practices based on individual tastes and preferences. In fact, sociologists of religion have noted this group as 'believing without belonging'.<sup>10</sup>

If applied strictly, such a definition may also exclude those who consciously identify with *only one* religious community (rather than dual or more) even though they may implicitly draw their inspiration from several religious texts, symbols and communities. Such individuals may not fulfill the criteria of identification with and acceptance by a specific religious community. Peter Phan defines multiple religious belonging or hyphenated religious identity as referring

to the fact that some Christians believe that it is possible and even necessary not only to accept in theory this or that doctrine or practice of other religions and to incorporate them, perhaps in a modified form, into Christianity but also to adopt and live the beliefs, moral rules, rituals, and monastic practices of religious traditions other than those of Christianity, perhaps even in the midst of the community of the devotees of other religions.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Catherine Cornille, *Many mansions? Multiple religious belonging and Christian identity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 2.

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<sup>10</sup> See Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 61.



Theologically, such a possibility can be envisaged through those theologies that acknowledge a common essence in various religious traditions as different expressions of the same ultimate.<sup>12</sup> For Phan, non-Christian religions are not just part of divine providence or merely a preparation for Christianity, but he recognises these religions as vehicles of salvation.<sup>13</sup>

Jacques Dupuis builds on the concept of 'complementarity and convergence' that requires a 'mutual enrichment and transformation' between religions rather than a fulfillment theory of Christianity bringing completion to other religions that is one-sided.<sup>14</sup> Not only Christianity is a fulfillment of other religions, but other religions can bring transformation to Christianity.<sup>15</sup> At a level of Christian religious practice, this radical category is especially popular among mostly scholars in the West who identify themselves with Christianity but would like to adopt other religions (for example, Buddhism or Hinduism) as part of their religious identity. Instead of integrating two religious systems too quickly, these multiple religious believers claim to be able to maintain the integrity of these religions separately. For exam-

ple, one may remain a Christian and still identify with Zen Buddhism, and participate in religious activities of both communities.

As an Evangelical, I will offer the following criticisms of this position. First, the desirability for multiple religious belonging can be located within a pluralistic theology of religions paradigm—all religions lead to the same divine or ultimate reality. Gavin D'Costa's criticisms of John Hicks' and Paul Knitter's works as essentially based on enlightenment modernity are instructive for our discussion. D'Costa argues that 'the enlightenment, in granting a type of equality to all religions, ended up denying public truth to any and all of them'.<sup>16</sup>

Second, the attempt to maintain two or more religious systems can be sustained only as a liminal stage. As a religious system, the inevitable outcome has to be either a perennial form of religious relativism/syncretism or a founding of a new religious sect. Examples are Bahaim (combination of multiple religions) or Sikhism (combination of Hinduism and Islam). Pluralists present themselves as 'honest brokers to disputing parties, while concealing the fact that they represent yet another party which invites the disputants to leave their parties to join the pluralist one'.<sup>17</sup>

My third criticism relates to the nature and dynamics of belonging to a religious community, with the assumption that one needs to identify with

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12 For example, see Raimon Panikkar, 'On Christian identity', in Catherine Cornille ed. *Many Mansions? Multiple religious belonging and Christian identity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 121-144.

13 Phan, *Being*, 65-66.

14 See Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 326; and 'Christianity and religions' in Cornille, ed. *Many Mansions?*, 61-75.

15 Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation by Integration* (London: SCM Press, 2009).

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16 Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 2000), 2.

17 D'Costa, *The Meeting*, 2.

basic ethos, doctrines, and worldviews of the community of choice. Belonging must be closely linked to *acceptance* by that religious community, without which, one's claim is based on a false premise.

## 2 Multi-religious Identity: An Internal Reality

Instead of maintaining or combining two external religious systems, there is a second type of multi-religious belonging, one which focuses on the interior. Rather than *multiple* religious identity, Perry-Schmidt Leukel favours the term *multi-religious* identity. For Schmidt-Leukel, the earlier term seems to be akin to having a split personality—of holding two or more religious systems within oneself. Multi-religious identity is having *one unique identity*, but 'one that is formed and developed under the influence of several religious traditions'.<sup>18</sup> Internally, my daughter's identity cannot be half Singaporean and half Malaysian. Identities cannot be compartmentalized but developed, based on historical, social and cultural conditions, including drawing its sources of traditions from various religions. In contrast to the first radical model, the second group may not belong to two or more religious communities simultaneously.

For Christians in Asia, *belonging* to two or more religious communities externally as a conscious choice can be problematic theologically and socially. In terms of Cornille's second criteria of acceptance by a religious community, dual belonging is generally not accept-

able to Christians, Muslims and Hindus in Asia. Nevertheless, it does not mean that it is impossible for a certain form of multi-religious *identity* to be nurtured among Christians. For *multi-religious* (in contrast to multiple religious) belonging, the emphasis tends to be on multi or dual belonging *within* oneself rather than a conscious maintenance of two or more religious systems or external identification with two or more religious communities (socially) at the same time.

If the first category of multiple religious belonging finds its sources (not exclusively) in a pluralist theology of religion, one suspects that this second type of internal multi-religious identity draws its theological inspiration within an inclusivist framework. While holding on to the centrality of Jesus, an openness to the revelation and efficacy of other religious truths allow practitioners of Christianity to develop a new identity that is not exclusively from the Christian tradition. Normally, such an individual

has one dominant religious affiliation and a second one which is secondary to the first but one on which the person draw is a continuous manner. The second religion may provide teachings, beliefs, and/or religious practices/customs. The degree to which the relationship between the dominant and the secondary is asymmetrical can vary.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Gideon Goosen, 'Edith Stein: An example of dual religious belonging?' *Australian EJournal of Theology* [online] 5, 2005. Available from <[http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt\\_5/goosen.htm](http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_5/goosen.htm)>, 1. [10 July 2008]

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<sup>18</sup> Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation*, 46-48.

### 3 Dual Belonging: A Contextual and Mission Approach

There is a third group of practitioners of multi-religious belonging that is growing under a very separate circumstance in the Non-Western world, typically out of mission conditions. Claude Geffre distinguishes 'multiple religious belonging,' which is a postmodern form of syncretism, from 'double belonging,' which is the fruit of inculturation.<sup>20</sup> There is a growing amount of literature discussing insider movements, messianic movements, devotees of Jesus and churchless Christianity.<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Lewis defines 'insider movement' as follows:

An 'insider movement' is any movement to faith in Christ where (a) the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks and where (b) believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, remain inside their socio-religious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.<sup>22</sup>

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**20** Claude Geffre, 'Double belonging and the originality of Christianity as a religion' in Cornille, ed. *Many Mansions?*, 93-105.

**21** See for example, Timothy Tennent, 'The challenge of churchless christianity', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* Vol. 29, No. 4: 171-177; and Herbert Hoefler, *Churchless Christianity* (Pasadena: William Carey, 2001).

**22** Rebecca Lewis, 'Promoting movements to Christ within natural communities', *International Journal of Frontier Mission* [online] 24:2. 2007, 75. Available from <[http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/24\\_2\\_PDFs/24\\_2\\_Lewis.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/24_2_PDFs/24_2_Lewis.pdf)> [1 August 2008]

Missiologists, such as Ralph Winter, compare insider movements with the transitions in early Gentile mission.

It is just as unreasonable for a Hindu to be dragged completely out of his culture in the process of becoming a follower of Christ as it would have been if Paul the Apostle had insisted that a Greek become a Jew in the process of following Christ...In the New Testament there was no law against a Greek becoming a Jew. However, Paul was very insistent that that kind of a cultural conversion was not necessary in becoming a follower of Christ.<sup>23</sup>

It may be helpful to delineate key differences between the radical model of multiple religious belonging and our current contextualisation model of dual belonging. First, rather than a pluralist appreciation of other religions, dual belonging stems from a growing recognition that Muslims and Hindus need not leave behind their past identities and cultures. Second, promoters of insider movements seek to avoid negative connotations of 'Western Christianity' labels such as imperialism, anti-nationalism and foreign influences. For Asian converts to Christianity, Jesus could be the centre for their faith but they will identify culturally and socially with their past religious belonging to Islam or Hinduism. Third, unlike the first radical proposal of com-

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**23** Ralph Winter, 'To the new ASM: Greetings from the West', *Asian Missiology*, Vol.2/No.1: (2008), 201. Available from <[http://asianmissiology.org/vol2no1/12\\_mistakes.pdf](http://asianmissiology.org/vol2no1/12_mistakes.pdf)> [1st July 2008]

bining two or more religious systems, many of the proponents of insider movements include conservative Christian mission groups who are firmly in the exclusivist camp, with regards to their theology of religions. Fourth, while the first two models tend to consist of *individuals* without a single identifiable community, insider movements tend to consist of *mass movements* of Hindus or Muslims toward Christianity.

Thus far, we have distinguished different ways of understanding the notion of multi-religious or dual belonging. Minimally, we need to be aware of their distinct models and theological presuppositions before making reductionist conclusions on the validity of the phenomenon as a whole. Each model traces its origins out of different sets of conditions, through different theological justifications and consequently, demands a more sophisticated and nuanced response. Therefore, one could argue that theological assessments surrounding the phenomenon of multi-religious belonging, for example, to the issue of syncretism, need to be contextual and cannot be settled through a single system of analysis.

#### IV Some Methodological Considerations, with special reference to Insider Movements

Before discussing the issue of syncretism, it will be helpful to make a brief comment regarding an appropriate methodology for studying multi-religious belonging. Taking the evangelical tradition as an example, any assessment on other religions (one

may infer, including the theological possibility of dual belonging) will, at some point, take the biblical witness seriously; i.e., it will be one that engages with biblical and systematic theology.<sup>24</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop a dual belonging biblical theology of religion. However, in my survey on 'Theology of Religion', I have suggested that traditional evangelical categories need contextual reformulation that take non-Christian religious systems on their own terms.<sup>25</sup> In addition, I have developed a theology of the kingdom and a theology of creation as paradigms for religious encounter.<sup>26</sup> I follow Peter Beyerhaus' tripolar position that religions could have God, humanity and demonic influences.

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<sup>24</sup> See for examples, Donald Carson, *The Gaggling of God: Christianity confronts pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 131-133; Harold Netland, 'Thinking theologically about religious diversity in the west', *A Journal for the Theology of Culture*. (2005), 19-35, and John Ridgway, 'Insider movements in the Gospels and Acts', *International Journal of Frontier Mission* [online] 24:2. (2007), 77-86. Available from <[http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/24\\_2\\_PDFs/24\\_2\\_Lewis.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/24_2_PDFs/24_2_Lewis.pdf)> [1 August 2008].

<sup>25</sup> Kang San Tan, 'Theology of Religions' in John Corrie, ed. *Dictionary of Mission Theology* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007), 384-388.

<sup>26</sup> Kang San Tan, 'The power of the kingdom in encountering Buddhist worldviews' in David Lim and Steve Spaulding, eds., *Sharing Jesus holistically with the Buddhist world* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005), 13-51, and Kang San Tan, 'Genesis 1-11 and Buddhist scriptures' in Paul De Neui and David Lim, eds., *Communicating Christ in the Buddhist world* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2006), 25-46.

There are aspects of non-Christian religions which need to be rejected due to their demonic sources or incompatibility with Scripture, just as there are aspects that need affirmation and re-appropriation as part of God's truth. An integrated missiological approach will take Scripture, Christian tradition (community of faiths) and the non-Christian cultural contexts as three sources for theological reflections, giving priority ultimately to the Christian Scripture.

Of methodological importance, in order to form theological perspectives, we need an accurate understanding of the lived experiences of these dual believers. Missiologists approach other religions from a critical realism perspective that considers all truths as God's truth (subject to biblical evaluation). With regards to multi-religious belonging, Jacques Dupuis cautions that 'theology ought to abstain from a priori pronouncements, arrived at by way of deduction from accepted principles and traditional positions'.<sup>27</sup>

Methodologically, before arriving at a theological assessment, it may be useful to employ the *phenomenological method of inquiry* so that Christian theological perspectives are informed accurately by the wide range of studies on the phenomena of multi-religious belonging. Otherwise, Christian theological assessment can easily fall into the dangers of absolutism, syncretism and relativism. We are interested to understand the phenomenon as well as making theological judgment; and we are interested in both the truth according to Christian scripture and the

meaning of dual belonging according to these practitioners.

One example of such an interdisciplinary approach is found in, '*Jesus Imandars and Christ Bhaktas*. A Qualitative and Theological Study of Syncretism and Identity in Global Christianity', a doctoral study presented at the University of Copenhagen by Jonas Petter Adelin Jorgensen. Jorgensen studied two groups of insider movements: Muslim background believers *Īsā imandars*, that is, 'those faithful to Jesus', and Hindu background believers *Khrīst bhaktas*, that is 'devotees of Christ'. Both groups are self-consciously not Christians, although their religious faith shares a deep family resemblance to the larger Christian community. The religious lives of the *imandars* and *bhaktas* are found to be a mixture between Christian theological ideas and forms from other religious traditions (Islam and Hinduism respectively).

Instead of branding these groups as syncretistic, Jørgensen argues that the practice of the *imandars* and *bhaktas* could be viewed as new and creative manifestations of Christianity in a global age. The study concluded that theologically, the *imandars* and *bhaktas* identified Jesus Christ as central and essential, although their dual identification with Islam and Hinduism is based on a rather free interpretation of culture and symbols revolving around this fundamental relation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Jonas Petter Adelin Jorgensen, *Jesus Imandars and Christ Bhaktas. A qualitative and theological study of syncretism and identity in global Christianity*, PhD thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2006. Available from <<http://isis.ku.dk/kurser/blob.aspx?feltid=160364>> [13 May 2008]

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<sup>27</sup> Dupuis, 'Christianity and religions' in Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions?*, 61-75.

## V Is Dual Belonging syncretistic?

For conservative Christians, the problem of syncretism is a major stumbling block for accepting dual religious belonging. The uniqueness of Jesus, the authority of scripture and core beliefs represent non-negotiable elements in authenticating the church as a distinct religious community in the world. Theologically, syncretism is seen as the mixture of elements from another alien source (or religion) which compromises the purity of the gospel. Within mainstream Catholic theology, in addition to the finality of Jesus Christ, the Declaration, *Dominus Iesus*,<sup>29</sup> emphasises the necessity of the Church for salvation and rejects salvific roles of some prayers and rituals in other religions.

It is necessary to keep these two truths together, namely, the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all mankind and the necessity of the Church for this salvation. (para 20)

Indeed, some prayers and rituals of the other religions may assume a role of preparation for the Gospel, in that they are occasions or pedagogical helps in which the human heart is prompted to be open to the action of God. One cannot attribute

to these, however, a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments. (para 21)

## 1 Complexity of Culture and Religion

Generally, for both Protestant and Catholic positions, there is a greater acceptance for assimilation of cultural elements and a greater distrust against those elements deemed as religious. Due to the difficulty in separating culture from religion, some would argue that there is a general tendency among Christians to reject most aspects of non-Christian cultures as religious. Through gains in mission education on concepts such as contextualisation and indigenous Christianity, evangelical Christianity is open to culture but generally negative towards religion. However, the biblical testimony contains both a rejection of the religions and cultures of Israel's neighbours as well as borrowings and learning from these cultures.<sup>30</sup>

Although culture and religion may be perceived as belonging to different spheres, both cultural and religious dimensions overlap significantly and both are important resources in the formation of an Asian identity. If one is to assume some form of continuity with one's previous religious beliefs and traditions, and if those positive elements of religious beliefs are to be retained,

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<sup>29</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration, 'Dominus Iesus' on The Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church (August 6, 2000) ([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus\\_iesus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus_iesus_en.html) [accessed 5th August, 2008])

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<sup>30</sup> Christopher Wright, *Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Leicester: IVP, 2006), 441, and Scherer and Bevans, *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 3* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 201.

then, a certain form of double belonging is inevitable. Within the interiority of this double belonging, a synthesis of a new form of indigenous Christianity may emerge whereby Muslim-background and Hindu-background believers could identify with Christ without leaving their previous religious affiliations.

Our problem for discerning what is syncretistic is found not only in the close connection between culture and religion, but also in the very nature of Christian faith. The transcultural nature of Christian transmission means that Christianity in Asia is shaped by a Western gospel, indicating the difficulty in delineating an essence of Christianity in its pure form. This does not mean that one cannot detect family resemblances to what is authentic Christianity from cults and syncretistic religions. However, we must be cautious against the temptation of judging indigenous expressions of Christianity that look foreign as being syncretistic.

Another consideration in our discussion regarding syncretism is the different understanding of belonging and boundaries for Asians. For example, belonging to a religion has a thoroughly different meaning for a Chinese and a Christian. Chinese people are free to worship in a number of temples regardless of their Taoist or Buddhist (Mahayana, Theravada or Tibetan) origins. In Malaysia, it is not uncommon to find Hindus and Buddhists visiting Catholic churches during special festivals. Neither are they required to give allegiance to and sign membership with one local community.

Similarly, Jan Van Bragt showed the blurred boundaries among Japanese as

they negotiate the role and place of Shintoism and Buddhism in their communal, family and personal lives. Winston Davis highlights the contrast: 'Whereas in the West it was heresy (or pluralism, as it is called today) which seemed to threaten the unity of Christendom, in Japan it was monopraxis (emphasis on a single religious practice) that posed the greatest spiritual menace to the traditional integration of society.'<sup>31</sup>

## 2 Contributions from Anthropological Insights

Given the above complexity of dual belonging and the inseparable link between religion and culture, does this mean that there will be no basis for discernment against syncretism? Anthropological insights have shown that all religions were the result of prolonged syncretistic processes.<sup>32</sup> Yong suggested the role of insiders and outsiders in discerning what is syncretistic. In his discussion regarding critical contextualization of culture, Paul Hiebert suggested that the Bible, the work of the Holy Spirit and the local community as a hermeneutical community can be used as checks against syncretism.<sup>33</sup> Another anthropologist,

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<sup>31</sup> Winston Davis, quoted in Van Bragt, 'Multiple religious belonging in Japan' in Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions?*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> See Amos Yong, 'Syncretism' in *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical foundations* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 373-376, and Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation*, 67-89.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 91-92.

Charles Kraft makes a distinction between *Christian* (with a capital 'C') as those with true faith from *christian* (with a small 'c').

Adapting Charles Kraft's four kinds of form-meaning, we can tentatively suggest in broad terms possible forms of appropriate dual belonging.<sup>34</sup> The first type of response is 'Forms local, meaning local', whereby the insider movements generally follow Islamic forms of religion that are combined with local meaning resulting in an Islamic-Christian sect, followers of Isa within the Islamic tradition. So, insider movements from Muslim background believers may listen to the Christian message, read the Christian scriptures but remain essentially Muslim with regards to dominant worldviews and theological outlooks.

The second type is 'Forms foreign, meaning local' whereby Christian religious forms may be adopted but interpreted in largely Islamic concepts and meanings. Christian worship, fasting, religious observances and rituals may be adopted but its meaning remains largely local or Islamic. For Kraft, this is a form of Christo-pagan syncretism. For our case, we may term it as Christo-Muslim syncretism.

The third type is 'Forms foreign, meaning foreign'. Through a domination of Western Christianity, converts from Islam appropriate Christian/Western worship, music, doctrines, buildings, plus western meanings. According to Kraft, this is 'Dominant Syncretism'!

The fourth and final type is 'Forms

local, meaning Christian,' resulting in an 'Appropriate Church' whereby the church consists of largely local Islamic forms to which are attached Christian meanings. The meanings come neither from the sending nor receiving societies but primarily through a contextual interpretation of the Christian Scripture.

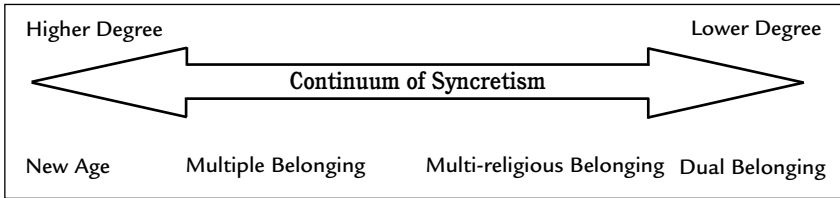
With regard to dual belongers, non-Christian scriptures such as the Quran or Tao Te Ching enable inter-textual readings of the Christian scriptures. Increasingly, new and imaginative Christian identities could be nurtured as Muslim background believers read the Bible alongside the Quran, and as Chinese Christians reinterpret Confucian texts through Christian theological critiques. KK Yeo, Professor of New Testament at Garreth-Evangelical Seminary, in *Musing with Confucius and Paul*, demonstrated how an evangelical Chinese Christian identity can be constructed without capitulating into dominant Western Christian ideals. Yeo's intertextual Pauline-Confucian studies, while demonstrating a hybrid identity, become a quest for an authentic Chinese Christian ideal.

In the final analysis, in contrast to a comparative study, Christian theology will need to engage more seriously with the total revelation of God, as found in the Bible, as well as theological perspectives within the Christian community. For example, what kind of new Christology and new ecclesiology are developed out of these three models of multi-religious belonging? Until we have more developed theologies coming out from these contexts, ongoing dialogue and continued creative thinking serve towards a missiological appreciation of these new movements.

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Marknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 375-379.





## VI Towards A Critical Appreciation of Dual Belonging

The argument for *multiple* religious belonging, one that seeks to maintain two or more external religious systems, is problematic philosophically, socially and theologically. At the social level, it seems that there will be insurmountable problems as to how one can assert a dual identity deriving from two or more separate religious communities. However, at a phenomenological level, we are now witnessing groups and individuals who seem to live in more than one religious world. This is so particularly for those who come from Asian religious traditions. If religions are also worldviews, one could also extend the case of dual belonging among Western Christians when Christianity combines with secularism and postmodernism. To what extent does the emergent church movement in the West reflect a similar kind of dual belongingness?

I have not conducted a detailed theological analysis of the three models of multi-religious belonging but have indicated how anthropological tools and resources can contribute toward greater clarity on the question of syncretism in multi-religious belonging. Though tentative, a missiological framework could be suggested. While recognizing the ambiguities alongside the continuum from multiple religious belonging (external combination of two

religious systems), multi-religious belonging (within oneself) to dual belonging of one's past religious heritage, the diagram above illustrates both the dangers of syncretism and possibilities for enrichment when dual belonging is anticipated.

So, to the question whether it is theologically possible for a Christian to follow Christ while retaining some form of identification with one's previous religion such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or Chinese religions, one must say a tentative and qualified yes. The answer seems to depend on what kind of multi-religious belonging we are talking about. Certainly, a positive yes for dual belonging but a tentative yes if we are referring to multi-religious belonging. Evangelicals will need to reject multiple religious belonging as a liberal modernist approach that is untenable with biblical faith. However, Asian Christians need not reject everything of past religious beliefs, as long as they are compatible with Christian scripture.

Just as Augustine learned from Neoplatonism, Thomas Aquinas learned from Aristotle, and John Calvin learned from Renaissance humanism, then it can be argued that Asian evangelicals may be able to learn from the Buddha and other great religious thinkers and traditions things that can help them more clearly understand God's revelation in Christ.

Asian Christian spirituality can recognize and affirm those elements that are 'good, true, and holy' within one's past religious faith whether it be Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam. However, regardless of one's answer or inclination, dual believers will need to reflect continually and exercise discernment, through the help of scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the local community of dual believers. In the process of critical reflection, there will be elements within one's previous religious beliefs and practices that can be retained and there will be other elements within one's past religious beliefs and practices which need to be rejected. Identification with one's past religion requires the convert to hold in tension those elements of continuity and discontinuity.

Over time, an intrareligious dialogue between insider movements and the established church traditions (past and present) as *equal partners* will further shape the development of insider movement's theology, and provide necessary corrections against excesses. Meanwhile, we approach the new phenomenon of dual belonging not as a final product or outcome but a dynamic process of negotiating identities between Christianity and past religious belongings; and between an emerging indigenous form of Christianity and

apostolic faith whereby 'distinctiveness of a Christian way of life is not so much formed *by* the boundary as *at* it'.<sup>35</sup>

Dual belonging allows different perspectives to flourish within one and the same person; it encourages inculturation and promotes understanding between two religions. In interreligious dialogue, a dual believer is able to enter into past religious belief systems and draw insights which may not be available to an 'outside' observer or partner. In a sense, both *etic* and *emic* perspectives may be appropriated. This is particularly promising when the local community of a dual believer, such as Muslim background believers, becomes a hermeneutical community.

One can only pray and hope that the emergence of such indigenous Christian communities that straddles between the Temple and the Mosque presents unprecedented promise for the development of authentic Asian Christian identity and contributes toward the reconciliation of religious communities worldwide. Dual believers may then contribute to the project of self-theologising and development of indigenous Christian communities.

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35 Kathryn Tanner, as quoted in Jørgensen, *Jesus Imandars*, 40.

## Case Studies

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### *Peacemaking amidst urban violence in Brazil*

#### C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell (Brazil)

It all started with a flirt between two teenagers on a dusty street of Londrina, Brazil. It ended with one person dead, another death-listed and an entire family on the run.

Londrina is the third largest city of the southern part of Brazil and ranks first in its state (Paraná) for quality of life. It is so well organized that if you arrive at our airport and take a taxi to a hotel across town, you will not even see a slum. The poor shanty towns are well hidden and kept at the outskirts of town so that you must 'want' to see them in order to get there.

Violence in Brazil at the dawn of this new century is different from what it was 35 years ago. Drug trade and drug-related violence have taken over the cities, even the most developed

ones. It is a violence that affects all social and economic levels of society, adding death and fear to the already impoverished and destitute within Latin America and around the globe.

In order for the church to be the church in the 21st century, it must learn ways to be good news amidst such violence. At the local level, what do peacemaking and conflict-resolution between drug lords look like? What alternatives do individual Christians and Christian communities have in urban or mountainous regions such as those governed by the drug traffic? How do we read the biblical texts within these contexts?

Three very different voices come to play in this reflection on the Christian witness to the world of violence: the

Warner Brothers film, 'The Matrix'; John Alexander, founder of Church of the Sojourner, San Francisco, USA; and Willie James Jennings, African-American theologian.

'The Matrix' can be a very useful tool to use when working with youth involved with gangs and drug cartels. The themes of 'what is really real' and 'being on the winning team' open the door for discussions about belonging, about family and people-hood, and about Jesus.

In our context, the world of violence is so apparent, so real in every aspect of life that it poses as ultimate reality. Such a world suggests that there are primarily two ways to deal with the violence. Borrowing from Jennings, we can either try to escape this world of violence or we can try to eradicate it.

In Latin America we have tried both, sometimes offering 'spiritual' benefits as a way of escape, or literally running from the violence, such as the family mentioned at the very beginning of this study. According to Amnesty International, Colombia has the highest number of displaced people in the western hemisphere (nearly five million) and is quickly rising to the top of the global ranks as well. These are people who have had to flee their homes due to the drug wars and violence against basic human rights. Most are extremely poor campesinos, Afro-Colombians, and indigenous groups.

There have also been many attempts at eradication, ranging from macro-level US bombing of entire mountain slopes, to local level police raids, to the shooting of a teenager. Such attempts might try to eradicate drugs, but rarely do they not involve other forms of violence. Some churches

also work at eradication, either preaching a 'just say no' policy and sponsoring retreats and workshops on the evils of drugs. Most Christians are ill-equipped and do not know what to do when faced with this world of violence.

In the New Testament texts, the gospel imperatives of peacemaking and reconciliation have one very essential requirement: being joined to Jesus. It is only because we have been called by Jesus and reconciled to the Father, through Jesus, that we are enabled to seek out a third way, an alternative to the world's options of escape and eradication. Jennings calls Jesus' way that of encounter.

Jesus breaks into the false realities that the world of violence has set up. He does not simply draw us a picture or point us toward what he wants, toward a new heaven and a new earth. Rather, Jesus enacts this in his life, making it possible for us to be joined to this living in what is really real, to living in the kingdom of God.

In Luke chapter 5 Jesus calls Simon Peter, James, John and Levi, the tax-collector. At the end of each narrative it says, 'They left everything and followed him'. The twelve apostles are named in chapter 6 and we read about their mission in chapter 9. The twelve and their master do not conform to any one mould within society at that time. They will not be zealots or Pharisees, leaders or peasants. Jesus refuses to have himself or his followers' identities determined by the world around them. Leaving everything and following, that is, being joined to Jesus meant having Jesus reset the agenda, the tactics and the strategies for encounter with the world. Peacemaking and reconciliation also demand that Jesus set

the agenda and the strategies, with the understanding that he has also given his disciples the power and the authority to live this encounter (Lk. 9:1-2, 24:49).

In the world of violence how we understand ourselves and our community is usually determined along national, political or economic lines. In the drug trade one's belonging is determined by whether a person is aligned with one cartel or another. In Londrina, rival gangs vie for control of different regions of the city and young teenagers are offered a sense of belonging, security, and hope if they agree to join one group or another. They have few alternatives.

There is an amazing change that takes place in the apostles' lives in the first four chapters of the book of Acts. The stories narrate, if you will, a conversion of the disciples to this way of encountering the world of violence. Even after they had been called, seen and witnessed all that Jesus had done, they ask, upon seeing the resurrected Christ, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:6). Jesus' reply seems calm and collected on the printed page, but actually, he probably took Peter by the shoulders and shook him strongly saying something like 'Man, don't you get it? Our rules are different! You're part of a new gang now!'

Yet, by the time we get to Acts chapter 4 the disciples have understood—they 'got it'. It is clear from their sermons, from their words before the Council and their life in community that being called and joined to Jesus inaugurates a new type of self-understanding, both for the person and the gathered community. If once they were

zealots, tax collectors, Pharisees or peasants, now in Jesus, they encounter that world with the words of Jesus, 'Peace be with you'.

Peacemaking as encounter is anything but passive. It demands presence in the world, discipline and boldness. In one of the most beautiful prayers in the New Testament (Acts 4:24ff.) the transformation of the apostles is made evident. In their prayer for boldness it is clear that they no longer belong to the categories of this world but are members of a new gang, who with boldness and the power of the Holy Spirit are enabled to encounter the world with the reconciliation of God.

At the local, street level, the gospel imperative of peacemaking in the world of drugs is most evident among those Christians who see their ministry and their community as being joined to a new gang. John Alexander used the language of 'new gang' early in the 1970s in San Francisco as he worked to rescue people from street violence and to bring them to Jesus' kingdom. In order to reach out to youth who are threatened by the violence of the streets, various ministries today also use the language of gangs and belonging to bring these youth to a new gang. Often this is done through sports or art or music. The children in Londrina, especially those in the world of poverty and injustice, have very few alternatives. They have to be given a sense of belonging and worth, thus having their identities transformed by the good news of the gospel.

My friend, Marcio, does this by opening his home to those on the street. His garage is now a workshop for teaching different arts, sports, even soap-making. It is through these regu-

lar, daily activities that peacemaking takes place; it is in these ways that the world of violence is stripped of its façade and its falseness is overcome by the truth of the gospel.

Our church has a girls' choir in that same part of town from which the family had to flee. The teenager who flirted with the brother of a drug lord was friends with the girls in our choir. Two years ago, within a matter of hours, three members of the church had to load up a small truck with the meagre belongings of an entire family (elderly grandmother, mother, aunt, uncle and five children, ages 2-17) and move them to another place for fear they would be murdered if they stayed. It was our hope and prayer that at this new place they would be brought into a new community and begin to learn a new sense

of peace and of belonging. The girls' choir is a new gang for about 40 children between ages 7 and 19. It is peacemaking in practice, giving them tools not only for music, but for a new life with one another and with God.

In Romans 5:1ff. Paul talks about the peace we have with God through Jesus Christ. Through this peace we stand in grace and are given the hope of sharing in God's glory. This grace in which we stand is our new gang. It is the peace given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ and with which we are called to encounter the world of violence. It is a sense of belonging to a new people, a new gang, that is different and takes precedence above any other loyalty, whether of family or country, gang or cartel.

## *The gospel amidst ethnic violence in Burundi*

Emmanuel Ndikumana (Burundi)

### 1. Burundi: Beautiful but in pain

Burundi is known as the 'Heart of Africa', not only because of its location near the centre of Africa, but also because the country itself is shaped like a heart. It has been described as the Switzerland of Africa because of its beautiful lakes and Mountains. Together with Rwanda and Uganda, it is known in the history of Christian missions as the locus of the historic East African Revival of the 1930s and 1940s. Together with its 'twin',

Rwanda, Burundi was considered one of the world's most evangelized countries; the very model of successful evangelism with more than ninety-three percent of its population considering themselves to be Christians.

Despite the apparent successful evangelism, however, the country has been experiencing recurring bloody ethnic violence for decades, resulting in widespread poverty, the spread of HIV-AIDS, and other problems. This case study illustrates, through the writer's personal story and experience

in the context of ethnic violence and social injustices, the limits of a gospel that tries to address spiritual and individual needs without paying equal attention to political, social and economic structures.

## 2. Ethnic Violence

May and June 1972 are dark months in the collective memory of many Burundians. A revolt—some talk about a coup attempt—by Hutu insurgents was crushed in blood by Tutsis and followed by massive killings that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, mainly among the Hutus. My own father, grandfather and all my adult uncles were victims of these pogroms. Deeply seated fear, hatred, mistrust and feelings of revenge characterized the relationship between Hutus and Tutsis and have been shaping Burundi political, social and economic structures ever since.

Even though everyone knew that things were wrong, people did not want to talk about it. Any reference to Hutu or Tutsi was considered divisive and subversive and, therefore, a serious and reprehensible offence. People were not allowed to mourn for their beloved ones. No one ever told me who killed my siblings or why. My mother and grandmother would not talk about it in anyone's hearing. The imposed silence controlled by fear was very destructive. Fearing the truth might be known one day, perpetrators did everything in their power to cover it up. Although the survivors would have wished to know the truth about their killed relatives, they had to remain silent as long as the perpetrators controlled the state machine.

Consequently, hundreds of thousands of orphans grew up knowing their fathers had been killed but incapable of knowing who killed them, for what reason or even where they were buried. When experiencing ill treatment or in the village, they were told that they were 'traitors' children. Unequal and unfair treatment at school (for those who were lucky enough to attend one) and unequal job opportunities for equal or even higher qualifications were daily unquestionable realities, a constant reminder that some were Hutus and others Tutsis.

## 3. A Thriving Church Despite Injustice

Faith is very important in the midst of such despair. It is to believers an anchor that stabilizes the lives shipwrecking in the storm of uncertainties. It gives hope for a better life; if not in this life, at least in a better world—heaven. One can even hope to meet his or her beloved there.<sup>1</sup> Hope can be what a painkiller is to an aching body or a revitalizer to a weakened one. When badly administered however, hope can act as a sleeping drug; rare are the oppressive regimes that can forbid its use.

The church was already thriving before the 1972 massacres. Contrary to what one might have expected, these massacres did not stop churches from growing. If anything, they boosted them. My own denomination

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<sup>1</sup> The last word for some of those who were lucky enough to say goodbye to their beloved ones before going to be slaughtered was: 'see you in heaven'.

grew so quickly that it became the largest among all the Protestant denominations. It spread all over the country, drawing its membership from both Hutus and Tutsis. Interestingly, its makeup and structures mirrored those of the larger society. For example, although its membership was predominantly Hutu, its leadership remained predominantly Tutsi<sup>2</sup> as it was in both politics and administration. Besides, not only was the church leadership predominantly Tutsi but also nearly all the senior leaders came from the southern region of the country (Bururi) as indeed did most senior political and administrative leaders.

Some of us did not notice such unbalanced roles and power distribution and those who did never dared to question it. To do so would have been interpreted as being inhabited by a spirit of rebellion and division. Given the politically explosive context, anyone believed to be possessed by such a spirit would have been dangerous not only to the church but also to the political establishment. Not many church authorities would therefore hesitate to collaborate with political authorities to 'exorcise' such demonic power. In the rare case of denominations whose leadership was predominantly Hutu, it was their duty to prove their innocence to anyone who might suspect them of harbouring pockets of 'rebellion'.

To safeguard the sensitive relationship with the political and administrative authorities, church leaders were

expected to be 'neutral' both in the content of their teaching and in their leadership. Meddling with politics would not be tolerated. Giving to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's (Mt. 22:21) was the expected norm for everyone. Unconditional obedience to government officials by their church members would be one of the proofs that their teachings were not subversive.

Although it was not easy to minister in such a context, many seemed to have adapted well. One was safe as long as one focused on personal salvation and sanctification and the afterlife with no reference to the implications of the gospel here and now, apart from 'interceding for' and submitting to 'all those in authority' (1 Tim. 2:1-2; Rom. 13:1-2). Those who felt something was still missing (such as Pentecostals), could add 'power encounter'. This was another gray and politically neutral area. People delivered from the fear of demonic powers improved their family well-being. They stopped drinking alcohol as well as practising witchcraft. Their economy increased and they could send their children to school if there was one in the area.

These indirect benefits from the gospel were enough to convince authorities about the social contribution of churches although they increased the alert level by offering equal chances to people from both ethnic groups. To minimize these side effects, denominational leaders needed to be wise in the way they appointed supervisors in every area of church life: those who raised no suspicion (essentially Tutsis). It was in the interest of both churches and Hutu Christians that the latter stay away from power.

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<sup>2</sup> It is believed that Hutus make up 85% and Tutsis 14% of the population of Burundi. The remaining 1% is made up of the Twas.



To hold everything together while avoiding the potential frustrations, Christians needed to focus on spiritual benefits of salvation and not on earthly material benefits. A promise of a place for everyone in heaven (Jn. 14:2-3), the certainty of another 'citizenship' in heaven from where we 'eagerly await a Saviour' (Philp. 3:20) and, most importantly, the imminence of his coming (Rev. 3:11) were sources of encouragement to be heavenly minded. When someone living in constant unexpressed fear of death compares the certainties of these promises with the uncertainties of this life, chances are high that he or she will do all it will take not to miss heaven.

#### 4. The Limits of an Individualistic Gospel

As long as the social and political context remained unchallenged, the teaching based on individualistic salvation, personal sanctification and the life to come stood. However, this teaching quickly showed its limits as soon as that context was challenged by the wind of democracy to the disappointment, frustration and confusion of many among those of us who had put all our trust in it as the only gospel. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent pressure from capitalistic Western countries on African nations to 'democratize' themselves, a new constitution that consecrated a multi-party democracy was adopted. The liberalization that ensued turned the world of both areas, that is, politics and church, upside down to such a point that many churches are yet to recover.

Once the possibilities of a better world, while waiting for the one to come, began to show up, ethnic communities began to take precedence over individuals. The old establishment (essentially Tutsi) tried to remake itself by preaching 'change in continuity' while the newly formed political opposition (essentially Hutu) advocated 'a new Burundi'. Once restrictions on freedom of speech and association were lifted, people finally expressed their feelings freely. The promulgated freedom of association meant they were now able to organize themselves in the way they saw fit in either new churches or other political or civil associations. Christians began to split less on doctrinal and ways of Christian expression but more on political allegiances and convictions which in turn followed ethnic identities.

Accustomed to aligning its teaching and practices to the political and social establishment (as long as this was homogenous) the church establishment was trapped, victim of its own teaching and conduct. With Christians now going in different directions, the church not only had no message for them but it also lost its credibility and together with that, the possibility of being a prophetic voice. Some still tried in vain to advocate for political non-involvement based on 1 Peter 2:9; but they found themselves preaching in the wilderness as they were accused of being mere advocates of the status quo.

In the end most church leaders conceded the impossibility and naiveté of the non-involvement policy. They realized that however they tried to shut politics out of church life, politics had inevitably involved itself in church life through the members of the churches

who, logically, were also (official and unofficial) members of political parties.

In June 1993, we finally had presidential and parliamentary elections. A Hutu President was elected for the very first time in the history of the country. To many Hutus, this was a dream becoming a reality, but to many Tutsis it was simply a nightmare. To others still, this was something totally unacceptable. On October 21st, the newly elected president was assassinated in a military coup and the descent to hell began once again. Tens of thousands of Tutsi were killed by Hutus in revenge for the assassinated president. The then Tutsi-dominated army reacted by killing thousands of Hutus. A horrendous ethnic bloody war started and went on for nearly fifteen years.

The social and economic consequences were catastrophic. Hundreds of thousands of Hutus sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, joining those who had left in 1972. Others, mainly Tutsi, sought refuge in displaced camps under army protection. Orphans, widows, elderly and disabled people were in such numbers that the dislocated communities could not handle them. Basic social and economic infrastructures such as schools and health centres were destroyed. The fertile country used to produce enough food for its entire population, but now depended on humanitarian aid to feed the survivors as there were neither enough people nor security to grow food. The downfall was such that Burundi is now ranked the third poorest country on the planet

## 5. Conclusion

This case clearly shows, one hopes, that a high number of converts should not be confused with successful evangelism. The blood of tribalism can still be running deeper than the waters of baptism even after there is a church in every corner. A gospel that limits its claims to individual salvation and personal sanctification with promises for the life to come while neglecting its implications in all the dimensions of this life is at best inefficient and at worst wrong and misleading. Those who, for whatsoever reason, do not allow the gospel of Christ to permeate and engage all the dimensions of life: spiritual, political, social and economic find themselves soon or later unable to live out the very gospel they preach.

The love of God and one's neighbour in the context of violence, particularly ethnic violence, calls for an intentional confrontation with all forms of structural injustices. The gospel that has no power to confront them is not gospel, particularly for the victims of those injustices. The scandalous message of the cross sees wrongs in both the victims and their offenders before offering both of them the possibility to repent and to be reconciled with God and with one another. That is, the gospel which is relevant for countries such as Burundi deeply affected by violence is (and has to be) highly subversive politically, socially and ethnically. One can preach authentically biblical reconciliation in a context of ethnic violence of genocidal dimensions only if he or she is prepared to allow this message to go as far and as deep as the violence has gone: in all areas of life in all its dimensions. The Whole Gospel is for the Whole World.

# *The world threat of nuclear weapons, and the church's role*

Tyler Wigg-Stevenson (USA)

Though a generation has passed since the end of the Cold War, nine nations still possess a total of 23,000 nuclear weapons, 95% of which belong to the U.S. and Russia. The inherent instability of this situation in the geopolitics of the post-Cold War era, compounded by the rise of terrorism as a strategy of global war, radically elevates the likelihood of use of nuclear weapons in the decades to come, with profound consequences for the entire world. This case study explores the nature of the danger and the possible outcomes, with special attention to the explicit effect that nuclear disaster would have on global missions and world evangelism.

## I Overview and Context

Nuclear weapons are the most destructive technology ever invented by humankind. Even a small nuclear fission weapon, such as the first 15 kiloton bomb dropped in 1945 by the United States onto Hiroshima, Japan, has the capacity to cause tens or hundreds of thousands of deaths. At the other end of the spectrum, there is no theoretical limit to the yield of a nuclear fusion weapon—it is bounded only by the ability of the planet to absorb the blast.

Since the dawn of the atomic age, Christians have sought to prevent the nearly unimaginable devastation that such weapons threaten. From a paci-

fist perspective, of course, the condemnation of nuclear weapons is not essentially different from that of any other weapon. But from a Just War perspective, the fact of nuclear weapons' unavoidable indiscriminateness would seem to prohibit them categorically as instruments of war.

Nevertheless, despite a deep antipathy toward the use of nuclear weapons, the totalizing conflict of the Cold War led many Christians—especially in the West—to place their faith (however reluctantly) in the bargain of nuclear deterrence as the only realistic way to ensure global security. Others advocated disarmament, saying that nuclear weapons were simply too dangerous to exist. It is worth observing here that the two positions, though tactically antithetical to one another, are both aimed at a shared goal: preventing nuclear catastrophe.

The decades of theological and ethical debate around nuclear weapons can hardly be summarized or resolved in this space. For the purposes of discussion, however, the point of Christian consensus around the morality of nuclear weapons would seem to revolve around the imperative of their non-use—as opposed to, for example, an absolutist and hermetic commitment to any particular nuclear posture like abolition or a strong deterrent. In terms of policy prescription, then, those postures that contribute to the

non-use of nuclear weapons can thus claim derivative moral authority.

In the present century nuclear weapons cannot be relied upon to do what they were asked to do in the last one—namely, prevent their use. In fact, there is a growing international consensus among security experts that the continued existence of nuclear weapons in the twenty-first century will virtually guarantee their use, whether by accident, terrorism, or state-based conflict.

The reason for this is that as long as some nations insist on the unique security benefits of nuclear weapons, other nations will seek to acquire them. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has constrained the spread of nuclear weapons since 1970, but the confidence of non-nuclear weapons states in this voluntary agreement is crumbling. Their treaty obligation to renounce nuclear programs was bought with the promise of nuclear powers to disarm multilaterally: in other words, global nonproliferation is held together by the *telos* of a nuclear weapons-free world. But the resulting two-tiered system of nuclear haves and have-nots increasingly appears to be a permanent discriminatory norm—a continuation of twentieth century geopolitics that disregards the rise of East Asia and the Indian subcontinent, and the broader concerns of the global South and Majority World. This is not an unreasonable concern: how many citizens of nuclear powers understand their arsenals as a temporary quirk of history—as our treaty obligations have it—rather than a permanent guarantee of military supremacy?

The simple and obvious unfairness of the situation is one thing. However,

the practical crisis for our time is that there is no scenario in which the continued possession of nuclear weapons by some nations will not lead to their proliferation into the hands of many more nations, or non-state/terrorist actors, or both. This situation will in turn lead inexorably and inevitably toward their use.

As we consider this prognosis, the only historical precedent of nuclear attack—Hiroshima and Nagasaki—provides a poor basis for making future predictions. These bombs, however horrific, occurred within the context of a mid-twentieth century global conflagration. The same attacks in the midst of the relative peace of twenty-first century globalization—with the attendant advancements in technology and communication, and in which industrial war between major states is but a memory—defy imagination in terms of their extended consequences.

## II Three Possible Futures

Based on our present context, the following is a representative—though far from exhaustive—set of possible future scenarios.

### 1 Nuclear Terrorism

Terrorist groups are presently attempting to acquire a nuclear weapon or the material to build one from poorly-secured nuclear stockpiles, especially in Russia, which are vulnerable to theft or the black market. Further proliferation of nuclear technologies would make such acquisition almost inevitable. Once a terrorist group has a nuclear weapon, there is no technologically reliable way to

interdict the weapon or prevent its use.

The effects of even a single bomb would be catastrophic almost beyond imagination. Consider a study of the effects of a single nuclear weapon smuggled by shipping container into the port of Long Beach in Southern California: 60,000 immediate deaths; 150,000 radiation victims, most of whom would die with injuries untreated; 320 square miles poisoned by fallout and rendered unlivable for a generation; 6 million evacuees from the surrounding area; one trillion US dollars in immediate damages.

The broader impact of such an attack would also probably include mass panic and exodus from urban centres in the United States and its allies, as well as the immediate cessation of all global commercial traffic in an effort to interdict any other weapons. The most significant consequence of this response would probably be the decimation of wealth-generating economies and the charitable sector alike. For this reason, a nuclear attack—even if the blast and fallout remain relatively localized—would leave no corner of the world untouched, and would probably have a disproportionate effect on the poorest of the poor.

## 2 Regional Nuclear War

The tension between India and Pakistan, exacerbated by the contested territory of Kashmir, brings the threat of rapid escalation of any conflict between these two nuclear powers, at any time. For example, an attack on Delhi from a terrorist group based in Pakistan, if significant enough, could provoke a retaliatory incursion from

Indian forces onto Pakistani territory. Pakistan, utterly outmatched in terms of conventional forces, might well use a tactical nuclear weapon to prevent the invading Indian army from sweeping through the country. The resulting exchange could easily kill millions.

In addition to the immediate human costs, which would be unfathomable in countries with such densely populated urban areas, new weather modelling studies demonstrate that even a 'limited' exchange of fifty nuclear weapons would send massive amounts of soot into the stratosphere. This would initiate a rapid cooling that would shorten the growing season worldwide, resulting in global famine.

It is also worth stating simply here that in such a scenario, the extended effects are unimaginable: the global economic consequences of a devastated India; the reaction of the eastern neighbour, China; the effects on the poorer neighbours in Southeast Asia.

## 3 Global Zero

It is not possible to uninvent nuclear weapons, but because fissile (bomb-grade) material can be made only through a massive industrial effort, it is possible to effect a verifiable ban on the development or possession of these weapons. Politically speaking, a narrowing window of opportunity presently exists to initiate the process of eliminating and abolishing all nuclear weapons worldwide—a state called 'global zero'.

Three expert-level proposals currently exist for how to do this: one from four senior statesmen from the United States, with global endorsements; one from Global Zero, a worldwide initia-

tive of security experts and civil society; and one from an international commission led by the governments of Australia and Japan.

Though there are certain differences between each proposal, the essential recommendations of each plan are the same. The immediate first steps would include cooperative, security-enhancing measures undertaken by the nuclear weapons states and nuclear-capable states, as well as a demonstrated leadership commitment from the United States and Russia, who possess the vast majority of the global nuclear stockpile. The subsequent process would require practical steps to enhance the security of all nations, a global ban on all nuclear testing, attention to inflammatory regional conflicts, the technological and diplomatic implementation of a verification regime

### III Theological Framework

One does not need Christian faith to be morally horrified at the prospect of nuclear conflict. However, the Lausanne Movement's concern for the 'whole gospel' bears significantly and particularly on any Christian considering the nuclear issue. Some key theological loci for further investigation include:

#### 1 Global catholicity

The proliferation of nuclear weapons marks the first historical instance of human technology having a global capacity. In this sense they are the natural offspring of the second World War, and the parent of every complex global problem that looms on our horizon

(e.g., climate change, economic globalization, mass human migration, pandemic disease, etc.). These crises are significant for Christians because they are at once familiar—being direct descendents of Cain's fratricide—and unique, given that the rock that killed Abel is now clutched by billions of hands, and its shadow obscures the entire globe. Such crises also require new modes of thinking: each threatens the vital interests of each and all nations, but none can be addressed adequately with a twentieth-century, zero-sum vision of national welfare. Instead, they require the development of a broader understanding of cooperative security.

The pattern of this present age is characterized by the rise of transnational interests competing for political, economic, and social power. The implicit question to the church in this situation regards the meaning of our orthodox catholicity. What does it mean to be a global institution concerned with a not-yet kingdom in which humans flourish individually and corporately to the glory of God? As we seek to formulate a position and course of action regarding nuclear weapons, therefore, we might regard the issue not as an isolated evil, but rather as one manifestation of a multi-faceted phenomenon that represents the triumph of globalized human technique.

#### 2 Fidelity in suffering

A nuclear incident would introduce massive suffering into the world, potentially disrupting the entire global order for any foreseeable future. And, despite our best efforts and fervent prayers, I believe that a prudential

evaluation points to such an event being likelier to occur than not. The question of how the church might respond in this situation is far from answered, but it could be determinative for our global work and witness.

In the wake of catastrophe, the church must match our words with deeds by caring for the stricken, serving sacrificially to help restore order and build peace, and standing firmly against responses that violate Just War parameters. We must also be prepared for the fact that one of the most profound casualties of nuclear conflict will be foundational systems of order and meaning; in such an environment the church will be uniquely challenged to articulate the gospel, salvation history, or the sovereignty of God in a meaningful way. History is replete with sobering reminders—like the German National Church's ready complicity with the Third Reich, with its devastating effect on the integrity of the faith in Germany—that nominal Christian faith is no reliable predictor of fidelity in the midst of crisis. This awareness should urge us toward preparation as best we can.

### 3 Just War and the foreseeable failure of nuclear deterrence

Assuming that the Just War tradition represents the most permissive framework for a Christian justification of force, a categorical prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons under Just War criteria (discrimination and macro-proportionality) arguably permits their possession only for the purpose of deterrence—a position similar to the 'strictly-conditioned moral acceptance' of deterrence arrived at by the

US Catholic bishops in their 1983 pastoral letter, 'The Challenge of Peace'. But this acceptance depends upon the viability of nuclear deterrence to prevent a greater evil of nuclear attack. If, as this case study suggests, the mechanism required to sustain deterrence (possession of nuclear weapons by some actors) will lead inevitably to the condition (proliferation) in which deterrence fails (possession of nuclear weapons by undeterrable non-state actors), what does this mean for the moral evaluation of this strategy? Should even the possession of nuclear weapons be denied Christian sanction? What should/would this mean in particular national and regional contexts?

### 4 The effects of nuclear weapons

As described above, even one nuclear bomb would result in massive human, environmental, and financial loss. This phenomenon begs for articulation in a framework concerned with the sanctity of life, stewardship of creation, and care for the poor. The elevated threat of nuclear terrorism also calls for a renunciation of nuclear apocalypticism—the biblically unjustifiable conviction that nuclear weapons are God's ordained instruments for the eschaton—and a refocus on the theological ramifications of permitting/being complicit with the release of such sorrow and death into the world.

### IV Role of the church

The nuclear issue has a profound ethical aspect, but because nuclear weapons are the exclusive province of nation-states, it is not one in which the

church may take direct action—unlike, for example, development or relief. Nor can such weapons simply be moralized away. As we chart the faithful course, then, attention must be paid to the roles that the church should play in the nuclear arena. The following five areas might be pursued simultaneously as a framework for developing practical responses.

*Prophetic:* Witnessing to God's sovereignty and salvific work in Jesus Christ through proclamation about nuclear weapons that is biblically faithful to the best of our discernment, regardless of its strategic political impact.

*Judicial:* Participating in public discussion and debate about nuclear weapons and analyzing policy proposals, as one stakeholder whose bottom line is the moral good and human flourishing to the glory of God, rather than any particular political, military, or economic interest.

*Activist:* Employing the unparalleled global infrastructure of churches to promote a position of Christian fidelity on the nuclear question, and disciple congregants as Christian citizens in this regard.

*Pastoral:* Caring pastorally for political and military leaders who exercise authority in nuclear matters, and help-

ing them to exercise Christian faithfulness in their particular contexts.

*Irenic:* Facilitating 'Track II' diplomacy, whether: direct Christian engagement with state powers; opening space for discussions and relationship-building outside of national diplomatic restrictions; or peacebuilding in regional conflicts that are obstacles to nuclear security (e.g., Kashmir, the Middle East, etc.).

## Conclusion

Though the potential threat of nuclear weapons remains far from the lived realities of most Christians worldwide, even one nuclear incident would be a world-historical event, to which no-one could pretend indifference. It would have profound consequences for Christian work and witness worldwide.

Moreover, the best prudential analysis points to the fact that history is moving toward just such an event, though the details are of course unknowable. Regardless of the capacity in which Christians engage the nuclear issue, then, it is critical that engagement happen—lest we find ourselves unprepared and silent in the face of such disaster—so that in this segment of human affairs, like all others, we would seek faithfully to bring honour to the Lord.



# *eVangelism: The gospel and the world of the internet*

Rob Haskell (USA)

Since we are exploring the meaning of 'the world' it seems appropriate to spend some time thinking about the gospel in the world of the Internet. I will discuss several aspects of interactivity related to this technology, such as social media and virtual reality, and argue that a Christian evaluation of them must be done from the standpoint of a biblical understanding of creation.

## I What is Web 2.0?

When the Internet became popularly accessible in the 1990s it was essentially an information provider and the average Internet user was a reader of text. This was 'Web 1.0' and it can be categorized as static. But even in the 90s it was recognized that this was the first stage of something much more interactive.<sup>1</sup> This interactive Internet that we now experience is called 'Web 2.0.'

The first intimations of the interactivity that would soon dominate the web were seen in chat programs such as AOL, ICQ and later MSN Messenger. Next came blogs. These were important because they allowed anyone to have a presence on the web, they provided for interactivity through com-

ments, and they were designed for immediate publication. Another development was collaborative content creation via the wiki platform, most spectacularly implemented by Wikipedia.com. Here content is created and edited by any number of people who have permission to log into a site and edit its text.

Social Networking is the newest and perhaps most important development of Web 2.0, beginning with Friendster.com around 2002, then MySpace, and the now ubiquitous Facebook, which, if it were a country, would be the 4th largest in the world.<sup>2</sup> There are many other social networking sites as well.<sup>3</sup> These usually include a user profile, a mechanism to meet 'friends' (fellow users) and ways of interacting with those other users, be it by chatting, live comments, or tools for sharing photos, videos, links, etc. Social networking is also growing on the mobile platform with such web applications as Twitter. These allow

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<sup>1</sup> D. DiNucci, 'Fragmented Future', *Print* 53 no. 4 (1999): 32. Digital edition: <[http://www.cdinucci.com/Darcy2/articles/Print/Print article7.html](http://www.cdinucci.com/Darcy2/articles/Print/Print%20article7.html)> accessed March 24, 2010.

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<sup>2</sup> Digital Evangelism Issues Contributor, 'Web Trends in 2010', Digital Evangelism Issues, <<http://www.internetevangelismday.com/blog/archives/1112>> accessed March 24, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> For a list of social media sites by region of the world see, Wikipedia contributors, 'Social network service', *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Social\\_network\\_service&oldid=334640674](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Social_network_service&oldid=334640674)> accessed March 24, 2010.

users to interact with each other, but they also interface with social networking websites.

There is no doubt that Web 2.0 is here and has transformed the way in which many use the Internet. There is still a great deal of 'static' information available, but making information available in a digital format is not the real revolution. The most significant innovation is related to interactivity, and especially social sites.

## II Social Networks and Face to Face Reality

It has been common in recent years to express concern about the anonymity of Internet interaction and the possibility of reinventing one's identity online. For example, in 2000 Veith and Stamper worried that,

An individuals' presence on the Internet consists only of a screen name, which need not have any connection with one's real name. The screen name—unlike an actual name—has no social context, presenting no family, with no community ties or obligations. In cyberspace one can function apart from any fixed identity, surfing in total anonymity, where no one knows who you really are.<sup>4</sup>

This can still be an issue today. But social media has introduced new dynamics that may in fact reduce the problem of 'flexible identity'. Social networking sites are expressly built on

existing face to face relationships. Their goal is to connect us to our current and past friends, relatives and acquaintances. Along the way, users are also introduced to friends of friends and may build 'merely virtual' relationships with them. But the nature of the medium dictates that even these virtual relationships will not be anonymous, for they come about in a web of relationships that is firmly anchored in the face to face world. As more and more people go online to find friends and acquaintances, anonymity in relationships may become less of an issue. The trend to social networking shows that Internet users are less interested in anonymity than was thought.

Some may want to insist that pornography is still a large issue related to anonymity, and this is correct. But even this area has felt the impact of social networking. As Internet search guru Bill Tancer explains, there has been a direct relationship between the rise of social media sites and the decrease of web searches for sex. His explanation, quoting a candid if crass college student, is, 'who needs porn when Facebook gives you the opportunity to hook up in the flesh?'<sup>5</sup> While this is itself no doubt problematic, it does illustrate my contention that there is a significant trend away from the Internet as a place of decontextualized interaction towards the Internet as another dimension of our real world social life. Even if this young man does 'hook up' with someone through Facebook, he will know that person and their mutual friends.

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<sup>4</sup> Gene Veith and Christopher Stamper, *Christians in a.Com World*, Focal Point Series (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2000), 128.

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<sup>5</sup> Bill Tancer, *Click* (New York: Hyperion, 2008), 26.

### III Virtual Reality

An important exception to this trend is online communities such as *secondlife.com* that create virtual worlds. These are graphically intensive sites where one can create an identity and use an 'avatar' (a graphically generated character) to move around in the world, interact with others and perform 'virtually' most of the common tasks that humans perform in the face to face world. The trend here is definitely to disconnect from the face to face world and immerse one's self in another, or *second*, life. This raises the question of the status of the virtual world, and the place the church might play in it. In what follows I will use 'virtual reality' to refer to a range of more graphically complex systems of digital simulation, but it is worth noting that many Web 2.0 applications share enough features with virtual reality that my conclusions also apply to 'the regular Internet'.

In his recent book, *SimChurch*, Douglas Estes affirms that virtual communities such as *Secondlife.com* are the way of the future: 'For many people, the virtual world will be the world where they carry on more interactions and conduct more transactions than in the real world. It will be the place where they find love, soothe their feelings, make deals, and worship.'<sup>6</sup>

Estes argues that Christians must move into the virtual world, create virtual churches and establish a virtual Christian presence. The interesting point for our discussion is that Estes

seems happy to allow the virtual world to be its own universe without reference to the face to face environment.

While some might want to critique Estes' agenda by arguing that the virtual realm is not real enough to support meaningful relationships, recent experiments by the EU-funded Precencia project have made a good case for the psychological reality of virtual input. It appears that at some level the human mind does not distinguish between 'real' and virtual, even when a subject is aware that the input is artificial. So, for example, people in a virtual room that is on fire may panic and bolt for the door, or a young man may feel fear when he experiences standing on the edge of a pit.<sup>7</sup> Various experiments showed that, 'people's responses are similar regardless of whether what they are experiencing is real or virtual. The plausibility of the events enhances the sense that what is happening is real.'<sup>8</sup> This is so, even when the quality of the virtual reproduction is not very high. Perhaps none of this should surprise those of us who are accustomed to having emotional reactions to vicarious experiences like reading and television watching, but certainly in virtual reality vicariousness has been taken to a new level.

This insight into the psychological reality of virtual input dovetails with the modern Kantian emphasis on reality as perception, and the possibility of

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<sup>7</sup> Interaction with virtual worlds is accomplished by means of VR gear, such as goggles, gloves and even full body suits, which are programmed to cooperate with the simulation.

<sup>8</sup> ScienceDaily, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/05/090511091727.htm>> accessed March 24, 2010.

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<sup>6</sup> Douglas Estes, *SimChurch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 20.

manipulating experience via artificial input that was latent in that worldview. Modern science may have been driven by the attainment of knowledge for knowledge's sake, but in the post-modern world the goal and impetus of science seems to be moving towards improving human experience. If it turns out that experience is nothing more than perception, science will inevitably turn in that direction.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, a parallel trend is already underway in neurobiology, where the big money pharmaceuticals are shifting more and more to mood alteration drugs.<sup>10</sup> Why spend the energy required to change the world when we can simply change the brain?

But while many embrace virtual reality, there is also significant discomfort with these trends at some levels, as two recent Hollywood science fiction films illustrate. In *Gamer* (2009) a genius has created a technology that allows one individual to experience the sensory input of another and also control them. Thus, a physically unattractive man can enjoy sexual experiences through the body of a live hired woman, and a wealthy teenager can control a live death row inmate in a real death match. The film's message is unambiguously negative, suggesting that un-incarnated experience tends to break down normal constraints and quickly become abusive, coercive and dehumanizing. In another film, *Surrogates* (2009), the

world is populated by realistic androids that are controlled by their human users from the safety of their homes. In this way people can enjoy the real world at a distance without any personal danger or significant consequences to their actions. One of the subplots involves a man's frustration with his estranged wife, who refuses to meet him in the flesh but only interacts with him through her surrogate.

#### IV God's World and Human Worlds

Since virtuality raises questions regarding the nature of reality, the best place to begin a theological response is creation. Our biblical story tells us that the problem with the world is that God's good creation (so called seven times in Genesis 1) was spoiled because of human sin, that is, the breaking of trust between humans and God and between each other. It also tells us that God's goal (his mission, if you will) in salvation is the restoration of that good creational intention. The biblical vision climaxes with the new, redeemed world in which God and humans once again enjoy intimate fellowship. The Christian worldview, then, is intimately tied to the given world because the biblical goal is the reconciliation of human experience within God's creational ideal.

This provides a stark if ironic contrast to rational scientism's agenda of the endless improvement of human experience. Though it is in one sense completely this-worldly, rational scientism also proceeds from the Gnostic premise that the physical world is defective and inadequate and that

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, for Kant knowledge of the world was perception plus transcendental categories. But I think my point still stands.

<sup>10</sup> See Charles Barber, *Comfortably Numb: How Psychiatry Is Medicating a Nation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008).

physical constraints are a hindrance to human expression. If the human project of world-making beginning with Babel and ending with Babylon the great in Revelation, has been to build a reality in which sin may flourish, we would expect virtual worlds, then, to follow this same trend and create spaces where created givenness is set aside in favour of self-focused human fulfillment. It comes as no surprise, then, when we see that in Secondlife.com everyone is young and beautiful, there are no boring lives, and as we might expect, sex is very prominent. The created order itself embodies love, but worlds of human creation tend to embody human rebellion and selfishness. This virtual world creation is what N. T. Wright has called 'feeding the Gnostic dream'.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, virtuality may also serve any number of good ends. But I am attempting here to establish a basis from which to evaluate the Christian involvement in this new world. The root question we must keep returning to is whether any kinds of virtualities, be they as light as chatting and emailing or as intense as wearing virtual reality headgear, will cooperate towards the restoration of God's creational vision: the reconciliation of all things under Jesus Christ and the restoration of God's loving purposes in his creation.

Failure to think biblically will lead to one of two common fallacies. First, the pragmatic option of saying 'we can

reach more people this way!' and rushing in headlong to new methodologies without considering whether they might be consistent with our root principles. We have to remember that 'reaching' people within the context of humanly created worlds can come at a very high price. The second fallacy is the obscurantist option of rejecting anything that is new, and masking our personal discomfort in the face of change with pious traditionalism. Here we risk missing great opportunities to expand the kingdom and legitimate new ways to express our humanness.

### V Church Website as Evangelistic Tool

In light of the creational basis for evaluating virtuality, the fact that in some respects the Internet is moving towards an integration of online life with face to face reality is welcome. It is the extreme immersion in Internet or virtual reality that will most tend to devalue creational reality.

Many commentators point also to the inadequacy of electronic communication as it stands today vis-à-vis face to face communication. Emotion and intention are communicated in myriad ways which a listener picks up both consciously and subconsciously.<sup>12</sup> Further, we as interlocutors cannot hide our reactions or feelings as easily in face to face interaction, leading to greater vulnerability, which is healthy. This all points to using the Internet as a dimension of our face to face interac-

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<sup>11</sup> N. T. Wright, perf., *NT Wright on Blogging/Social Media*, prod. Bill Kinnon, July 2009: <<http://vimeo.com/5682808>> accessed March 23, 2010.

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<sup>12</sup> David Pullinger, *Information Technology and Cyberspace* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 79-80.

tions, not as a replacement of them. This principle may be fruitfully applied to the use of a church website for outreach.

Most church sites appear to be designed for the church member or the Christian looking for a congregation, but in societies that use the Internet a church web site is arguably the congregation's most public presence. It is also a non-threatening venue in which to explore church. Thus a church website should be geared primarily to the outsider. It should be a digital dimension of the face to face reality of the church community, and should inform and invite the non-believer to join that face to face community.

Ceri Longville agrees that Internet relationships need grounding in the face to face world, but sees the 'virtual community as a fantastic opportunity and tool to encourage initial contact'.<sup>13</sup> She also notes the importance of the quest for community in the postmodern environment, which also tends to assign value to face to face interaction. What follows are some of her important recommendations for creating effective outreach church websites which also use the Internet in a manner that is also consistent with the principles established above:<sup>14</sup>

- They must follow best practices for design: be succinct, avoid clutter, have clear navigation, etc.
- Church websites should be an authentic reflection of the church, not an ideal. To be dishonest here would mean to fall into the temptation of using virtuality to create our own world.
- Church sites should inform and thus reassure the outsider about the church experience. This can be done by showing pictures of people in the worship service, explaining the events as to outsiders and including a prominent list of Frequently Asked Questions, or FAQs.
- People are key. More than a lengthy textual explanation of the gospel content (which would be a web 1.0 approach), personal testimonies and pictures of real people will effectively communicate the sense of church community and the difference our faith can make to the website user. This is an example of the positive power of the Internet to communicate on a level previously inaccessible.
- It will be important to have prominent contact information and prompt responses to enquiries. However, other forms of interaction may also be considered—for example, a pastoral blog.
- Creative gospel presentations. In the web 2.0 environment there are many graphically intensive presentations of the gospel that can be incorporated into a church site free of charge. We should also consider the pastor's sermon under this category. It is especially important for the pastor to consider that if his sermons are online, he is speaking not only to his congregation on Sunday morning.

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<sup>13</sup> Ceri Longville, 'Reaching the Community with Church Websites,' (MA diss., Redcliffe College, 2008), 22. Available online: <[http://www.internetevangelismday.com/docs/churchsite\\_dissertation.pdf](http://www.internetevangelismday.com/docs/churchsite_dissertation.pdf)> accessed March 24, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> See chapters 4 and 5 of Longville, 'Reaching the Community with Church Websites'.

Many churches now also participate in social networking sites such as Facebook and the current level of Internet technology provides many different tools for this.

## VI Conclusion

Although the Internet and virtual reality can feed the 'Gnostic dream' of indi-

vidual self-satisfaction, there are also many opportunities to expand healthy relationships and do evangelism in this new virtual world. The church would do well to take hold of this opportunity without forgetting that Internet and Virtual Reality are also part of the human urge to create alternative worlds which facilitate sin.

# *The separation of beliefs and religion in Europe*

Birger Nygaard (Denmark)

"My beliefs have nothing to do with what is happening in Church"

One of the amazing features of our time is the way in which religions themselves are undergoing transformation in our fast changing globalized cultures. We used to think that religion was a pretty static feature in society and that the beliefs of any specific religion were only marginally adjusted. Today we see massive changes taking place, both in the area of radicalization through religious fundamentalism and through secularization of religion in affluent (Western) societies, where religion seems to change contents, character and role in the minds of believers and societies. We are still in the middle of this transition, the outcome of which is not yet clear.

Christian mission has not been good at reaching people of high religious heritage (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, etc.), whereas we have been very successful in reaching peo-

ple of animistic/folk religious heritage. We still need to focus much more on reaching the high religions. Similarly, however, we need to pay keen attention to the change in the very perception of religion—including our own faith, Christianity—due to globalization/pluralism/secularization. These globalizing forces are likely to affect people from disparate religious backgrounds because they are characterized by the same *subjective turn* and individualization, which is such a strong feature of secular, often affluent societies.

The following case study focuses on how this change is influencing religious life in Denmark, a society that is in an advanced secularized state. It is based on a recent PhD study.<sup>1</sup> In this

1 Ina Rosen, 'I'm a Believer—but I'll be damned if I'm religious', *Lund Studies in Sociology of Religion* 2009: 8.

study the researcher did a number of focus group interviews with 'ordinary' Danes, undertaken in work-place situations, not in religious settings. The point of departure for the study was the general statistics from the European Value Studies: 70 percent of Danes claim to be 'believers', and 50 percent take moments of prayer and meditation. Church going in Denmark is low (less than two percent on a normal Sunday) and 67 percent will attend a religious service once per year or less.

Through the interviews with the twelve focus groups, representing a broad spectrum of vocations, it emerges that there seems to be a common, clear separation of on the one hand:

*belief*—what I feel deep down, on a highly personal level. Belief is not part of a religious system, but in forming my religious beliefs, I am making use of whatever is at hand for what feels right and meaningful in the given situation (= bricolage) and on the other hand:

*routinized religion*—religion as it is 'performed' in religious institutions (worship services, etc)

*religion-as-heritage*—religious practice as it is part of our culture (having babies baptized and teenagers confirmed, etc.)

*practice*—e.g. prayer

*tradition*—e.g. weddings and burials at church.

The respondents have clear distinctions between the two parts: belief is in one category while the institution of religion, religious practice and traditions are in another category, which is separated from what they understand

as belief and faith.

Faith/beliefs are constructed individually in line with the individualized bent, which is prevalent in Western society (from consumer choices, to pupil focused education, to patient focused hospitals, etc.). Individualism is the water in which we swim. Therefore it is alien to us that there should be a religious system that is not determined by an individualized approach and it seems only natural to separate beliefs from religion and religious practice.

Such practices are regarded more in the category of consumer products, which you can buy if they are helpful. Or it may be a given heritage, which you respect as the best way to uphold society and tradition in our given culture (baptism, weddings, burials, etc.)—without any faith connotations. In this particular study even the focus group respondents, who went to church regularly, claimed that their beliefs were not formed through the church activity, but were formed privately as a result of their ongoing life processes. Another study has expressed that to most Danes going to church is like going to the hospital: 'You only go if you are sick. Going to the hospital without being sick would indeed be a weird thing to do.'

This leads the researcher to develop the thesis of *packed* and *unpacked* religion. What we have before us is not a system of well-ordered religious systems (packed religion), but eclectic making use of religious and cultural elements in whatever meanings the individual look for or need in a given moment. Thus in order that beliefs can stay in sync with life, they are likely to change as life situations are changing.



In Britain sociologist Paul Heelas has termed this approach ‘Spirituality of Life’.<sup>2</sup> The focus is on life management, not on ultimate concerns, and other similar matters.

However, individualized beliefs do not emerge from nowhere. They are formed by what you hear and learn in ‘social spaces’. As Danes do not normally go to church, traditional church activities have only little influence on the beliefs of the masses. Work place conversations, family and friends, not to forget *the media*, are playing major roles as social spaces, where you adopt eclectically whatever you can use in your personal and ongoing meaning building project.

Based on this research, the researcher concludes that in our given situation, it would be fair to regard religion as a ‘zombie category’—a living dead because religion as we used to know it has gone. But we still talk about religion as if it existed in its systematized forms. Religion in its ‘unpacked’ forms is of such a dissimilar nature that it is not meaningful to categorize it as religion.

It is important to note that secular people do not stop ‘believing’. That has often been the notion when we see that people stop going to church. In fact the 70 per cent figures has been stable to growing in Denmark over the last thirty years. The reason may be that more than before people today need to work on their belief and meaning systems in a society which does not provide these automatically.

The very big question is how we as church in mission and mission organizations can relate the gospel in this environment? We are used to thinking of the Christian faith as ‘packed religion’. It is indeed possible to ‘sell’ packed religion even today, where 83 percent of Danes are members of the national church. However, is our mission to have church members? Or is our mission to see believers become true followers of Christ?

It is important to note that the features described above do not apply only to ‘un-churched’ and ‘non-Christians’. We are also talking about new generations of Christians, who are highly influenced by the subjective turn. A recent American study<sup>3</sup> demonstrates that the de facto religion of American teenagers of all religious traditions—Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu etc. heritage—is a ‘moralistic therapeutic deism’, i.e.: ‘be good to one another—and we don’t expect God to be part of our lives except when we need him for some personal therapeutic needs.’ This resonates well with the Danish study.

This case study raises a number of questions. How are we to respond to such a new reality? Are we talking about a passing phenomenon? Or is this a permanent, vast and ever-growing secular world, which has ‘come of age’ (Bonhoeffer) and in which the gospel will find new ways to incarnate?

In conclusion a couple of reflections:

1) It is not that secular people are

2 Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

3 Christian Smith, *Soul Searching—The Religious and Spiritual Life of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

opposed to the gospel—the gospel is indeed good news—and consumers are likely to buy good news, but only if it provides meaning in the given situation. That means that the gospel mostly needs to be expressed in non-dogmatic ways that are a real challenge to our traditional theological perceptions and schooling. How can the gospel with its holistic nature be contextualised in such a setting where individuals ask only for one piece of the puzzle that will fit their search at this given moment?

- 2) Is it possible to operate meaningfully with a distinction between faith/beliefs and religion as the 20th century dialectic theologians attempted? Do we need to revisit and discover their reflections for our time?
- 3) What will Christian faith communities look like, where seekers can ruminate over a long period of time as they gradually come to an understanding and reception of a Christian worldview? And what will it take for our normal either-or Evangelical church and mission cultures and systems to adapt to such new reality?
- 4) Traditional religious settings are not the primary social spaces, where beliefs are likely to be adopted. Thus neither church Sunday morning, nor evangelistic stadium campaigns seem to be the way forward for these people. Yet, this is often where we put our efforts and resources in church and mission. What are the alternatives?
  - The market-place/work-place is of huge importance to the identity and meaning building for

individuals in secular societies. A well-developed theology and missiology for the market-place is a must. If the gospel does not deal with the 'real world' it is less than a gospel.

- 'Mediatized religion' is gaining importance. For example, movies touching on religious themes have a huge impact at a popular level. Christian influence in this area is crucial (like Walden Media with their focus on Christian worldview movies like Narnia, etc.). Is the next generation of 'missionaries' to train for jobs in the entertainment industry?
  - The Internet with the steady flow of new features on the net is increasingly becoming an important social space for belief exchange and formation. Danish Facebook users (half the population) now spend more than eight hours per month on this social medium site alone, and it has for them become a ordinary space for interactivity of all kinds.
- 5) To a systematic theologian the challenges from 'unpacked' religion in secular societies cannot be adequately addressed without a strong theology of and faith in the work of the Holy Spirit. It seems unlikely that the churches in secular societies will regain the privileged positions, where they provide significant input to formation of proper, well-ordered theologically based beliefs in the life of secular people. We need to trust the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals.