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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.*'¹

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

¹ 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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