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The Global Public Square

Vinoth Ramachandra

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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')[1] 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.[2] Mission was understood as 'foreign missions', the steady expansion of the former 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',[3] 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

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.

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.

***Vinoth Ramachandra**, PhD(Lond), is Secretary for Dialogue and Social Engagement, International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. His most recent book is* Subverting Global Myths *(IVP-USA and SPCK, 2008).*

days are ahead for every one of us, even the most distinguished person in our great company.'[4]

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.[5]

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'.[6]

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

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.

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'.[7] 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.[8] 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

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-distance, 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![9]

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

9 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.'[10] 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.

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

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 referenda 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

> 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.[11]

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.'[12] 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.'[13]

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

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.

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 enforcement, 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.[14] 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-

14 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[15] 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.[16] 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.'[17] For the foreseeable future, national governments are indispensable for global governance; but governments have to enlist the active involvement of civil society actors both

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

16 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).

17 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 companies 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.[18]

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, preordained 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

18 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.[19]

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; mega-malls 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

19 John D'Arcy May, 'Cosmic Religion and Metacosmic Soteriology', in *Encounters With the Word: Essays to Honour Aloysius Pieris*, S.J, eds. Robert Crusz, 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.[20]

'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.'[21]

IV Global Consumer Religion

The cultural narrative of global capitalism 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-

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

21 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.'[22]

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 'biomachines' 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-orients 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.'[23]

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

22 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.

23 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.[24]

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 ecocentric 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-

24 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.[25]

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 biblical 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

25 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 knowledge 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.