

Some Protestant Reflections on Religion and World Order

by

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1. Working Toward a Shared Global Ethic

The need to bring moral commitments and religious perspectives to bear on the shaping of world order is evident. A major problem has been that diverse religious communities have found it difficult to speak together, often seeming instead to counter one another's potential influence. In religiously plural societies, communities of faith are, thereby, often divisive rather than unifying. Partly for this reason, politicians have often looked for guidance to the masters of technical reason, instead of religious leaders. Unfortunately, purely technical solutions are often dehumanizing, having adverse consequences for individuals, for their human communities, and for the Earth itself.

One important counter to this unhappy situation has been the formulation of shared beliefs under the leadership of Hans Küng. This has proved remarkably successful. Küng has demonstrated that leaders from highly diverse religious traditions can now agree on a wide range of principles partly because the teachings of their traditions have always overlapped extensively, and partly because all the great religious Ways have assimilated much of the spirit of the Enlightenment and of contemporary movements for justice and environmental protection. At best, however, each community finds that the account of overlapping teachings abstracts from the rich and motivating context found in the fullness of its faith.

Alongside the flattening trend resulting from the demands of globalization is another that accents the particularity of each community and its way of life. For example, some assert that religious traditions are cultural-linguistic systems in which each idea gains its meaning from its interconnection with others in such a way that no element of one system can be equivalent to an element in another system. From this point of view, whatever is formulated as common is either illusory (the words standing for different meanings in diverse systems) or a secondary language distinct from all the primary religious ones.

The history of the ecumenical movement in Protestantism illustrates a third way of dealing with diversity. Historic suspicions among Lutherans, Calvinists, and free churches were not dealt with primarily by minimizing the differences and identifying the many points on which they all agree. But equally, the denominations were not left each to itself simply in its uniqueness. Instead, each explained itself to the others, and each listened.

Representatives of traditions that stressed the preservation of the purity of doctrine and practice by authoritative leadership heard and respected the witness of those who stressed the equality of all believers

and the autonomy of local congregations. The latter came to appreciate the importance of the inclusive church and the need for structures that represent and maintain that inclusivity. The two groups did not merely come to accept the authenticity of one another's faith; they also rethought their own teachings so as to reflect what they had learned from the others. This did not lead to institutional union or the abandonment of particularity. But it did generate a deeper sense of unity and enhance the possibility of a common witness.

This mutual transformation has extended to relations between Protestants and Catholics. Among the teachings that had long separated us were the Protestant emphasis on scripture alone and the Catholic emphasis on tradition. Through dialogue, Protestants came to recognize that the Bible is in fact part of our tradition and that all of us are informed by an ongoing and developing tradition in which we are ourselves participants. Catholics came to recognize the value of highlighting scripture as providing critical norms for the evaluation of traditions and for directing the development of tradition in the present. Protestants remained Protestant; and Catholics, Catholic. But the self-understanding of both has been changed, and our ability to work together has been greatly enhanced. There has been a creative transformation of both Protestants and Catholics.

We can propose that collaboration among our great religious Ways take on a similar character. To some extent it already has. For example, through Buddhist-Christian dialogue, some Christians have learned (with varying degrees of real understanding) the truth and value of viewing all things non-dually in their mutual constitution or dependent origination. Some Buddhists, on the other hand, have come to appreciate the value of a greater historical consciousness in guiding their application of Buddhist wisdom in the transformation of the world. Buddhists remain Buddhist; and Christians, Christian. But both are enriched; and our capacity to work together is enhanced.

This is a slow, never-completed process of mutual transformation toward greater sharing of wisdom and values. It should be accompanied by efforts, such as that of Hans Küng, to articulate existing overlaps in our convictions. Working together on the basis of those overlaps will also lead to mutual transformation.

Protestants have a more ambivalent relation to ethical or value systems than most religious communities. We distinguish the life of faith from the moral life quite sharply, tending to disparage the latter ("All our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth": Isaiah 64:6). Apart from love, we understand even heroic morality (such as giving away all of one's possessions: 1 Corinthians 13:3) to be empty of true spiritual meaning.

Ideally, we affirm that the life of faith expressed in love of God and neighbor far transcends the requirements of mere morality. ("Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven": Matthew 5:20.) Unfortunately, we know that in practice the belittling of morality can lead some Protestants to moral laxity instead of to sacrificial love. To many, freedom from the law is not experienced as freedom to go beyond the law but as

freedom to be casual about morality. We also know that many Protestant groups, recognizing the practical importance of rules for governing life in Christian community, develop legalisms that are more arbitrary and divisive, and more likely to generate self-righteousness, than those in traditions that affirm the religious importance of rule-bound behavior.

The distinctive history of English-speaking Protestants is nowhere clearer than in our relation to the Enlightenment. Whereas most religious traditions, including the Catholic, continue to experience the Enlightenment as an external challenge, we experience it as a part of our internal history. In this history its ethical systems and values have been virtually identified with those of the Bible. Our struggle is to recover an authentically Biblical witness over against the rationalism, nationalism, individualism, and anthropocentric dualism that mar the authentic humanistic achievements of the Enlightenment.

Our distinctive contribution to the formulation of our shared convictions may include clarification of the Christian roots and substance of the Enlightenment. In many ways the Enlightenment was an attempt to work out the meaning of love of God and neighbor over against religious and political practices and structures that demeaned people and restricted their proper freedom. As such, we continue to affirm it. But we also see that as it separated itself from its initial theistic context, it brought about a fragmentation of thought and society. It also subordinated reasoning about ends to reasoning about means and, thereby, moral and spiritual values to economic ones. We repent of our tardiness in recognizing and naming the profoundly heretical and demonic character of this atheistic version of the Enlightenment.

Despite all of the associated problematic, our distinctive contribution to the conversation among religious communities must remain that of witnessing to the primacy of faith and love over structure and law. From this point of view, the Protestant perspective on specific contemporary concerns can be articulated.

#### 1a. Peace and Security

The love we see incarnate in Jesus certainly affirms peace and security as important contributions to the well-being of all. It shares this affirmation of peace and security with all the great faith traditions and with many others. The distinctive contribution of Jesus, here, may be the emphasis on love of the enemy. (Matthew 5:43-48. Scholars debate which of the teachings attributed to Jesus in the gospels were his actual words. In this essay I reference only verses which, I believe, probably express his thought. In any case, these are verses that have been taken by Protestants over the centuries as the words of Jesus.)

From this perspective, there is a danger in too great an emphasis on security. This tends to accent the security of each community over against others. In the United States it has been used to justify huge armaments and "first-strike" capability in nuclear arms. Peace is aimed at through a Pax Americana which is also justified by the importance of our security.

The distinctive Protestant witness, all too muted in this country, must be that those against whom we secure ourselves are equally loved by God and have an equal right to security. When we secure ourselves by means that threaten them, we profoundly violate Christian teaching as we understand it. We must advocate policies that lead to peace based on the equal security of all. This means that we should emphasize those means of insuring our own security that do not constitute a threat to others.

#### 1b. Economic and Social Justice

At least today all faith communities and many others will affirm economic and social justice as desiderata. Many American Protestants identify this concern as central to their efforts to work with God toward a world in which God's will is done. We find special inspiration in the Hebrew Prophets, and we locate Jesus and the kingdom he proclaimed in that tradition. For fifty years, from 1890 to 1940, this self-

understanding expressed itself in what we call the Social Gospel. This collapsed because it failed to appreciate its own limits, its naive optimism, its excessive identification with Enlightenment values, and its failure adequately to emphasize God's transcendence of history. But the more basic commitment to God's kingdom for whose coming we regularly pray, a world in which God's will is done, continues to inspire and energize us.

If Jesus not only inspires us to seek justice but also provides us with an insight into what justice is and how it is to be sought, the key element is his emphasis on "the least of these" (Matthew 20:40-45), that is, on those who have the least power and status in society. We assume that what we do to all our neighbors is important to the God whom Jesus called "abba," but his explicit words highlight that it is what we do to the least of these that we are doing also to him. Catholics have recently taught us to translate this into "the preferential option for the poor." If we are to move toward justice in the present situation, it will be by empowering the disempowered to have a major voice in determining world order.

### 1c. Human Rights

We experience the affirmation of human rights as a way of proclaiming our faith. To love our neighbors is to recognize their dignity, their valid claim to self-determination, and, therefore, the importance of limiting the power of society or the state to interfere in their lives. We also believe it appropriate to love ourselves and to assert ourselves against the tyranny of society, of church, or of government. Although this is especially true when our conscience requires such assertion, our rights go beyond the freedom to obey God rather than human authority to the freedom to enjoy our share of this world's opportunities and goods.

We realize increasingly, however, the one-sidedness of our long emphasis on individual rights and the resulting imbalances and distortions. Although we have always associated the rights of others with our duties toward them, the rhetoric of our culture has lost the strong emphasis on the claim of others upon us. We need to restore the balance. Also, the emphasis on individual rights developed in a context in which social pressures and ecclesiastical and governmental authority were strong. Combined with market economics, it has now generated a situation in some parts of the world in which the taken-for-granted strength and authority of community are threatened.

Individualism has thus become a demonic force in the world. This does not warrant the abrogation of individual rights, but it does require a different paradigm from that which initially led to the emphasis on individual rights. The rhetoric of "person-in-community" is more Biblical and more promising.

As Paul (and the Pauline school) pointed out, we are members of one another, jointly constituting the body of which Christ is the head (Colossians 1:18). Each part has equal dignity, deserving the respect of all the others and thus rightfully demanding that its rights be respected (I Corinthians 12:14-27). But each exists only in and through its relations with all the others. None can thrive if the body as a whole sickens. Thus each should exercise its rights with attention to how the whole is affected. The whole has rightful claims on every part.

### 1d. Ecological Sustainability

Like many others, Protestants long took the natural context for granted. We participated in the Enlightenment dualism of the human and the natural, and the anthropocentric justification of the objectification and exploitation of nature for human purposes. Under the influence of Immanuel Kant, we carried this dualism to an extreme, separating the study of human phenomena radically from the study of nature. We saw history as the context of all meaning, with nature, at best, as a stage on which the historical play is enacted. We were blind to the destructive effects of our historical actions on the natural stage. We reduced the Biblical doctrine of creation to an existential relation of human individuals to God. We ignored the rare prophets who warned us of our self-destructive ways.

Finally, it was a Presbyterian layman, Lynn White, Jr., who shocked us, toward the end of the 1960s, into some measure of awareness. In defending ourselves against his charge of our culpability for the ecological crisis, we began to recover the Biblical doctrine of creation. By 1975, the World Council of Churches was ready to affirm the central importance of ecological sustainability. In 1982 it committed itself to the "integrity of creation."

If Protestantism has a distinctive contribution to make in this area, it is by the extension of love to every creature. This is a different basis for ecological concern from that expressed in most secular approaches, and perhaps most religious ones as well. It does not depend on establishing either kinship or interconnection with other creatures, although the reality of this kinship and interconnection are affirmed. Otherness and separateness are not reasons for withholding love.

The argument for us is quite simple. In the first chapter of Genesis we are told that God sees that other creatures are good, quite apart from their use to human beings. In contemporary language, they have intrinsic value. The story of the flood (Genesis 6-8) brings out God's concern for species as species. Jesus tells us that God's care can be seen in the lilies of the field (Luke 12:27-28) and that God attends to each individual sparrow (Matthew 10:29). If God sees the intrinsic value of all creatures and cares for them, then we are called upon not to restrict our love to human neighbors but to extend it to other creatures as well. God "knows" them in the rich Hebrew sense of knowing. When we cause them suffering, God suffers with them.

This Protestant argument opposes the view of some who call themselves "deep ecologists" that all creatures have equal value. Jesus tells us that although God cares for the sparrow, we are of far greater importance to God than sparrows. All creatures have intrinsic value, but they do not all have equal intrinsic value. We are not wrong to care more for a dog than for the fleas and ticks that torment it. We are certainly not wrong to care more for fellow human beings than for the bacteria that sicken us.

One may argue that support for ecological sustainability does not require concern for other creatures in themselves. Human self-interest, it is supposed, when sufficiently enlightened, suffices. But this is probably not the case. Those who are interested only in human well-being simply do not attend sufficiently to what is happening to other creatures to be aware of long-term threats to sustainability. The requisite sensitive attention depends on love that extends beyond human beings to all creatures.

#### 1e. Cultural Identity and Integrity

In its origins, Christianity broke radically with the association of religious faith and a particular culture. "There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free;

but Christ is all in all" (Colossians 3:11). Even the distinction between male and female is transcended in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Of course, Christianity generated its own culture to some extent, and it tended to identify faith with that.

Protestantism in theory renewed the emphasis on the transcendence of faith over culture, but in practice it has usually failed to live by this understanding. In fact there is a Protestant culture with which Protestants easily identify faith. Especially in the English-speaking world, this culture has been one form of the Enlightenment, so that it has been difficult for Protestants to bring the Biblical perspective to bear in a critical and prophetic way against the failures of the Enlightenment.

Nevertheless, the conviction that faith transcends culture plays a considerable role. Protestants emphasize the importance of indigenization of Christianity in diverse cultures. In principle, thus, faith can unify across cultural boundaries without erasing those boundaries. But this may not be a contribution to the political issue of attaining sufficient unity while respecting cultural identity and integrity. Unity in faith does not provide for unity with persons of other faiths.

The one way in which the emphasis on the transcendence of culture by faith may help is by its relativization of one's own culture. Protestants know that the values of their cultures are real but limited, that other cultures also have real but limited values, that no culture defines what it means to be authentically human. In principle this opens Protestants to seek political arrangements across cultural lines that respect the relative values of each culture.

## 2. Working Toward Global Governance

Global governance was not an issue among the writers of the Bible. In the time of the New Testament, the Roman Empire was taken for granted as providing inclusive governance. Both positive and negative attitudes to that Empire come to expression. But the authors do not think of themselves as having any ability to influence the imperial government or be in a position to propose alternatives. If they think of an alternative at all, it is in apocalyptic terms, which means that the transformation is in the hands of God.

In subsequent centuries, when the church became politically powerful, it did deal with questions of governance over large regions. These were not, of course, global, since the people living around the Mediterranean were ignorant of much of the globe. Later in Eastern and Western Europe two patterns of dividing responsibility between church and state developed. In both cases the church concerned itself with large segments of social life.

It is difficult, however, to extrapolate from medieval Europe to our present needs to reflect on global governance. In that period, a single ecclesiastical institution was overwhelmingly dominant. Today many religious communities exist, and none is willing to submit to the hegemony of another. The issue of global governance must take account of religious pluralism, but other issues are primary.

Protestantism has not concerned itself with global governance any more directly than have other forms of Christianity. Nevertheless, because its historical experience is different, its perspective on the issues is

distinctive. Because of its disconnection of faith from culture and morality, it does not have "a core set of values" to offer. On the other hand, it does have convictions relevant to global governance.

As noted, its primary commitment is to loving God and neighbor -- understanding the neighbor as other people regardless of their friendship or enmity, their cultural differences, or their personal virtue. Recently, we have reemphasized that all people are members one of another (this is language applied by Paul to Christians only: Ephesians 4:25) and that our love is to be extended to all creatures. From these convictions some general principles can be drawn regarding global governance, recognizing that they need to be associated with other principles in each time and place in order to generate concrete proposals.

## 2a. Global Civil Society

To love another human being is to treat that person as one wishes to be treated oneself (Luke 6:31), that is, with respect. It is to seek a situation in which people can participate in making the decisions that shape their lives and have confidence that their freedom of self-determination will not be arbitrarily revoked. Equally, it is to insure that all have access to the goods they require for a decent life and the opportunity to make their own respected contributions to society.

As we realize the importance of community for individual well-being, we recognize that love for others involves also concern for the health and well-being of the communities in which they live. Efforts to improve the lot of individuals must not be at the cost of breaking up viable communities or rendering the development of new communities more difficult. Measures of well-being that ignore the health of human communities are abstract and misleading.

We now know that human communities are inextricably connected with local ecological systems. These ecological systems are composed of creatures of individual worth. Their individual well-being, in turn, is wholly dependent on the health of the system. For the sake both of human beings and of other creatures, the ecosystems in which we all live require sensitive attention and often regeneration.

## 2b. Global Structures and Systems

There is no Protestant doctrine as to what global structures and systems are best. The question is what structures and systems will best serve the interests of individual people, human communities, and ecological systems. The problems to be dealt with are increasingly global ones, and this suggests the importance of concentrating power increasingly at the global level. On the other hand, removing control so far from individual persons will accentuate the sense of powerlessness and alienation that already affects so many. Furthermore, the planetary environment will always also be the result of the condition of many local ecosystems, each of which requires preservation and regeneration locally by those sensitive to their uniqueness. The homogenization inherent in most forms of globalization is destructive both of human communities and of local ecosystems. We need a system that emphasizes both the unity of the globe and the singleness of every part, that empowers local communities while enabling them to act together effectively at the global level.

Protestants in North America have long struggled with a similar problem on a much smaller scale. Our solutions have varied. Nevertheless, on the whole, we now recognize the local congregation as the foundational unit of the denominations. Congregations select representatives to meet with representatives

of other congregations to make decisions about church life in the larger region. These in turn select representatives to still larger regions and finally to the national or global body. What decisions are made at what level varies from denomination to denomination. There are strengths and weaknesses in each system.

In this system, congregations give authority to institutions and leaders at various levels to exercise certain authority for the sake of achieving goals that cannot be attained by congregations acting independently. They also give to the larger organization some authority to maintain standards which all local congregations must meet. If a congregation begins to espouse patently unchristian ideas, such as racism, other congregations expect the larger organization to intervene and, in the extreme case, expel the erring congregation.

We may think of each congregation as a community and of the regional institutions as expressing a community among communities. The national level can be viewed as a community of communities of communities. If there is also an international level, the same general understanding applies to it.

This image can be proposed for consideration also in the political sphere. Here, of course, the local communities include all the people living in a locality instead of those who participate voluntarily in a local congregation. These may be conceived as the primary political units. Since many of their needs cannot be dealt with at the local level, they recognize their community of interests with neighboring localities with whom they constitute a community of communities, to which they assign certain responsibilities and sufficient power to carry these out. These in turn grant power to communities of communities of communities up through the national level and culminating in the global one.

Among the responsibilities of governments representing more inclusive communities will be setting minimum standards for the smaller units. For example, localities must function as genuine communities. They cannot be allowed to exclude unpopular or weak minorities from full political participation. Also, they must deal with their problems in ways that do not impose extra burdens on their neighbors. For example, they cannot be allowed to deal with their pollution by building smokestacks that improve the quality of local air by exporting poisons to other localities.

In any case, this proposal has implications for the five topics considered above.

#### 2b(a). Peace and Security

The distribution of authority and the power to exercise it over many levels should reduce the danger both of tyranny and of large-scale wars. Each locality would have primary responsibility for maintaining order in its own boundaries. If it fails to do so, or if it does so in a way that grossly oppresses segments of its population, then the community of communities may need to intervene. Similarly, if one locality violates its neighbors, intervention may be necessary. On the other hand, enforcement power should not be so concentrated at the larger level that it could easily override local liberties.

In the same way, there should be sufficient military power at the global level to restore peace and security in troubled nations and to stop aggression. But much of this power should be provided voluntarily by the nations making up this inclusive community. We do not want all military power concentrated in the hands of a single global army, control of which would make possible a global tyranny.

## 2b(b). Economic and Social Justice

No structure can insure economic and social justice. This depends on the will of all those involved and remains always and everywhere an illusive goal. Vigilance must be exercised at every level to establish minimum standards that will be enforced, when necessary, from larger levels of government. Smaller units must be equally vigilant to prevent larger ones from assuming excessive power or being unduly influenced by special interests. The challenge is to establish and enforce minimum universal standards in a way that does not disempower local communities or destroy the unique values of diverse cultures.

Two general principles can be formulated that should apply at all levels. The political structures must allow for the relative autonomy of various spheres of activity, such as the economic, the legal, the medical, the educational, the artistic, and the scientific. Those who understand particular aspects of life best must be safeguarded against too-quick interference by popular prejudices. Their connections will often be with persons in other localities. This will insure, also, that there will be important communities that cut across political boundaries and have authority and power of their own.

This relative autonomy is especially important in the sphere of religion. Some faith communities affirm an ultimate loyalty to God that political units should respect in a way that is not true of other social spheres. Freedom of religion is not just one expression of human freedoms generally.

Of course, this freedom cannot be absolute. People cannot be allowed in the name of their obedience to God to harm others. Religions must be accountable to the most basic needs of the inclusive community and its natural environment. Nevertheless, the fact that human beings are validly committed to goals that transcend the political sphere and have the right to express this commitment individually and in communities should be acknowledged and affirmed.

The second principle is that political life should not be subordinated to any other sphere. In some countries this means that the people as a whole must be able to express the full range of their concerns through political processes without being restricted by religious leaders from doing so. In the North Atlantic countries, and indeed generally outside the sphere of Islam, religious authorities are not today the major threat to freedom. The sphere that now threatens the autonomy of the political one is the economy. Today governments at many levels are subservient to economic institutions.

These institutions include national and transnational businesses on whose investments local communities are dependent. They also include public institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which have imposed structural adjustment on many of the countries of the world, as well as the World Trade Organization, which overrules national policies that it sees as restraining trade unfairly. The ability of governments to balance the many competing concerns of their people is also restricted by the influence of money in democratic elections and in shaping public opinion through the media.

Protestants join with all other religiously concerned people in holding that economic values are only one of many types of value. Certainly it is crucial that the physical necessities of life be provided for all, and it is highly desirable that all participate in a standard of living that goes beyond mere subsistence. But it is also highly desirable that people have a meaningful role in healthy communities, that they participate in shaping the policies that determine their destiny, that they enjoy natural and artificial beauty, that they are

free to think and stimulated to think well, that they have stable and happy families, and that they are able to express their deepest convictions in prayer and worship. When all aspects of life are subordinated to the economic, much of this is truncated. A society that is primarily devoted to the generation of material wealth is unacceptable. The New Testament tells us quite directly that we cannot serve both God and wealth (Luke 16:13). To organize society as a whole in the service of wealth is unacceptable.

This means that political units which have at least the possibility of serving multiple values must not be subordinated to economic units that are designed only for the service of wealth. Structurally this requires that economic units operate within political boundaries. If the economic units are local, they can be regulated by local governments; if they are national, by national governments. Transnational economic units require regulation by transnational government. This cannot be, as at present with the World Trade Organization, governmental institutions created only to promote the economy. It must be a government that is concerned about the whole range of human needs and values.

This principle requires either the great strengthening of the global level of governance or the reassertion of national control over economic actors. It is the rejection of the ideal of a global market transcending all political control. If we are to avoid concentrating political power at the global level, we must reverse recent trends that free economic actors from national control.

#### 2b(c). Human Rights

Every type of structure, and every level of government, is capable of distortion that infringes on human rights. Only a deep and widespread commitment of people everywhere to the maintenance of such rights can preserve them. Nevertheless, the structure here proposed may be helpful.

A major problem with local autonomy is that in many instances it allows a local majority to oppress local minorities or an elite to disempower the majority. In general, public opinion in other locations is critical of these abuses. Hence, government at larger levels is likely to give support to correcting them. This is a major reason for concentrating power at higher levels of government. The proposed structure of governance takes this into account.

On the other hand, human rights should be balanced by felt obligations to community. These obligations cannot be effectively enforced by higher levels of government. Concentration of power at those levels tends to weaken the local community feeling which generates the awareness of obligations. Thus, it is important not to give up localism for the sake of implementing universal standards of justice and human rights. The model proposed tries to maintain a balance between the need for local participation and the enforcement of standards from higher jurisdictions.

#### 2b(d). Ecological Sustainability

Ecological issues need to be addressed at all levels. Some are truly global. Global warming, the reduction of the ozone layer, and the pollution of the oceans are examples. There is also a strong global stake in the preservation of biodiversity. Global government should have sufficient authority to deal with matters of this sort.

On the other hand, local communities know, or can learn, about their immediate environment and its needs in their specificity. Often the imposition of rules from higher levels of government does not work partly because local conditions make them inappropriate, and partly because local people do not feel any ownership of them. The structure proposed here is designed to encourage people everywhere to be concerned with and take responsibility for their local environments. As they try to do so, their interdependence with other localities becomes clear and they are more willing to allow many decisions to be made at higher levels.

#### 2b(e). Cultural Identity and Integrity

To whatever extent cultures are local, the structure here proposed is favorable to their ability to maintain their integrity, as long as this does not abuse others. The problem is more difficult when, as today, even small localities are likely to be multicultural. Then it will sometimes help to think of even the single locality as a community of communities. Even so the danger of domination by one cultural group over others arises. There is need for power at higher governmental levels to check such domination.

This need is present at many levels. One reason for strengthening the power of global government is to check the tendencies of nation-states to oppress minorities. Nation-states often need to intervene in regions where such oppression occurs. And those regions, as noted, may need to intervene to prevent local oppressions.

The opposite danger is that the principles employed in determining the minimal standards of justice and rights to be enforced are themselves derived from one culture and then imposed on others. To check this requires constant discussion among representatives of the several cultures involved to determine principles on which general agreement can be reached, and whose implementation all can support. The importance of ongoing interaction among leaders of cultures and religions is demonstrated at this point.

#### 2c. Local Initiatives

Without strong support from people all over the planet, there can be no happy solution to issues of global governance. There must be widespread agreement as to the importance of such governance. Even when there is disagreement in detail about the interventions that larger governments exercise locally, there must be recognition of the necessity of such interventions in general.

But dependence on leadership from higher levels of government is enervating. As much power as possible needs to remain local. This requires that much of the economy be local as well. Local initiatives to strengthen the local economy and minimize control of the economy from distant centers is one important type of local initiative.

Also, local initiatives may be needed to protest decisions made at higher levels that are insensitive to their local consequences. Many nongovernmental organizations have their rise in such protests, and their voices are important to counter the excessive influence of special interests, particularly global economic ones, at higher levels of government.

It is highly desirable that local communities have greater freedom to experiment with educational systems. At present, authority over education in the United States is centralized at the state level. It is

appropriate that some standards be set at state and national levels, but the current loss of close ties between school and local community is too high a price to pay.

## 2d. Balancing Tensions

Most of what needs to be said in responding to the problems of balance listed here is implicit, or even explicit, in what has been written above.

### 2d(1). Individual Good and Common Good

If we understand ourselves as persons-in-community, the real good of the individual person requires the well-being of the community. On the other side, the community is made up of individuals, so that it is meaningless to suppose that it thrives if the individual persons who make it up do not.

The tensions arise, in general, from inaccurately defining what is good for individuals and communities. If we define the good primarily in economic terms, it is possible to suppose that an individual gains by amassing a higher and higher percentage of the communal wealth despite the resulting decline of the community. This is one more reason for rejecting the primacy of economic measures.

Similarly, if we define the community good chiefly in terms of harmony, then dissident individuals appear to be working against the good of community and have to be suppressed and oppressed for the good of community so defined. But this is to misunderstand what makes for the real good of community. The community benefits from internal diversity as long as the members continue to respect one another and listen to one another.

There may also be cases in which there is real conflict between the good of certain individuals and the good of the community. Some individuals may have values and concerns so at odds with the majority that no reconciliation is possible. If these individuals remain part of the community, they must sacrifice in order to hold the community together. The alternative is that the community is fractured in order to allow diverse interests to be realized.

No theory or structure can prevent such tensions from arising. What can be done is to help both individual persons and communities to develop understandings that show their community of interests. Individuals can grow as they appreciate the values for themselves of participation in community. Communities can grow as they recognize the positive contribution of protest and diversity. But no structure can prevent tensions from leading to rupture in some cases. Nor should we suppose that better solutions are always possible.

### 2d(2). Rights and Responsibilities

The Bible, like most scriptures, places primary emphasis on responsibilities. The call, especially in the New Testament, is more often to sacrifice for others than to assert one's own rights. Many today protest that they were taught by Christianity to allow themselves to be abused and oppressed rather than to assert themselves and resist tyranny.

The history of the church is mixed on this point. By encouraging people to believe that they are loved and affirmed by God, the church has supported a self-esteem that has sometimes led to self-assertion or to assertion of claims by oppressed groups. On the other hand, by reminding us that our self-centeredness and our claim to special consideration is sinful, it has led us to think that our suffering is merited. Women and those who have been colonized and enslaved suggest that the emphasis on self-esteem has been largely arrogated by elite white males, whereas others have been taught their obligations and passive acceptance of their condition of servitude.

The Enlightenment lifted up the claims of individual persons against the state, the church, and the community. Of course, Enlightenment thinkers also had a strong sense of obligation and duty. But this tended to be duties to other individuals more than those that arise from participation in community; these continued to be taken for granted.

Today we are struggling to understand rights and responsibilities more integrally. To participate as an individual person in community insures that the community gives one space to be a person whose decisions and contributions are respected and affirmed. On the other hand, it also means that concern for the well-being of the community as a whole informs one's decisions and actions. Failure in either direction leads to weakening both of personhood and of community.

### 2d(3). Private Sector and Public Sector

Within any healthy society, most of life and social activity takes place independently of the government. For the public sector to expand into all spheres of life and thought is totalitarianism. Protestant churches have always opposed such expansion, first and foremost because they claim the right to manage their own affairs and to proclaim the Word of God as they understand it, regardless of the approval or disapproval of governments.

At the same time, there are many functions important for society that can be performed only by governments. Protestant churches have always recognized and affirmed this. Hence, issues arise only around the question of which functions are best performed by the government under what historical circumstances, whether the government should play an exclusive role in these functions, and the extent to which activities that are essentially private nevertheless sometimes require restriction and intervention by the government.

Social services are an example of a borderline area. These were once performed chiefly by the churches and other voluntary groups. As needs came to exceed the capacities of these groups, governments began to play an important role, and eventually the overwhelmingly dominant one. The result is bureaucratization, with all of its problems. Hence the question arises as to whether churches and other institutions in the private sector should recover a large role in this area. Since no one wants to exclude private agencies altogether and no one supposes that the government can abandon all responsibility, the issue is one of balance. "Liberal" Protestants tend to emphasize the responsibility of government; "conservatives," that of the private sector.

The most important tension between the two sectors today is between government and business. The American people as a whole are convinced that freedom in the economic sphere is an important value, and that government interference leads to reduced efficiency in the economy. On the other hand, most people

want workers to be paid properly and provided with safe working conditions. They want to be protected from pollution and they want endangered species not to be casually wiped out. Hence, in fact they want considerable regulation of business. Among Protestants, liberals usually support stronger governmental regulations; conservatives, more freedom on the part of business. It can be argued, however, that business is free to act morally only when other businesses are also required to do so. Hence in some respects the freedom of business depends on government establishing the common rules by which all abide.

Today the most important questions concern the relation of transnational corporations to national governments. The commitment of national governments to "free trade" -- meaning the freedom of transnational corporations from control or interference by national governments -- has thrown the balance of power to the private sector. The ability of national governments to shape the economic life of their people is severely restricted. This means that economic growth becomes the dominant value and goal, with all other sectors of society subordinated to its pursuit. Although many Protestants do not yet understand the issue, in principle this situation is unacceptable from the Protestant perspective.

#### 2d(4). Long-Term and Short-Term Objectives

#### 2d(5). Economic and Environmental Needs

I am combining these two topics because the general issue of long-term and short-term objectives is most importantly illustrated in the tensions between economic and environmental needs. Within economic policies, the issue is more often formulated as the alternative of distributing the fruits of industry now, or reinvesting so that there will be more to distribute in the future. For the sake of long-term gains, it is often argued, "belt-tightening" is required in the present. Since those who must tighten their belts are often the poor, the present suffering required for anticipated long-term gains can be quite acute.

The problem is complicated by the fact that the long-term growth for which this suffering is demanded almost always adds to the stress on the environment. Thus, supposed long-term economic advantages are in tension with long-term environmental health. Protestants are beginning to recognize that without a healthy environment, the economic growth that our society so prizes will fail to deliver on its promises.

This means that in general (there are exceptions, and each situation should be considered individually), the tension introduced by economic thinkers between current distribution and economic growth is misplaced. Present suffering is being demanded for the sake of long-term advantages that can never be realized. True long-term advantages based on healthy human community in a larger healthy ecological system can best be realized in ways that meet human needs now as well. Desirable community development programs do not promise great future economic luxury or wealth, but, on the other hand, do not call for acute sacrifice in the present. They treat economic matters as only one of the important considerations of true development, and it is improvement in the larger picture, including the economy, that is sought. The tension between short-term and long-term objectives does not disappear, but it is greatly muted in comparison with typical economic thinking.

#### 2d(6). Local, National, and Global Sovereignties

Enlightenment political theory has thought it necessary to identify some one level of absolute political sovereignty. It has recognized that the sovereign can delegate power to other levels of government; but the sovereign is thought to be in a position to revoke what is delegated.

In fact, of course, the real situation rarely fits the theory. In the founding of the United States it was held that the states were sovereign units, and this rhetoric still persists. However, states that have appealed to this sovereignty to justify withdrawal from the federal union have met with strong opposition from the federal government. From the perspective of state sovereignty, what is usually called the Civil War was the War Between the States. But after the victory of the North, no one seriously supposed that states have the kind of sovereignty they could previously claim. Still, they are sovereign in some respects, and especially in relation to the lower levels of government within them. The reality is that sovereignty is divided between state and federal levels with some minor elements being delegated to local governments and international institutions.

The proposal made in this paper is that distribution of sovereignty go much further. Every level of government should have some sovereignty. The sovereignty of every level of government should be qualified by the sovereignty of others.

If we are to speak of a unique sovereignty at all in this system of global governance, it belongs to the people and to the local communities in which they directly participate. But because these are dependent on others, this sovereignty is immediately qualified by the acceptance of the authority of larger levels of government. The nation is one, important, larger level of government. But it derives its authority from the people and their local communities through the states, and it must immediately acknowledge the necessity of giving some of its authority to the global community of nations.

In fact it is better to give up the notion of sovereignty altogether. No one and no institution has sovereign authority. If there is any rightful sovereign it is God, and for some Protestants even that language theologically misrepresents the relation of creatures to God. Let us speak instead of the responsibilities of each level of government and insure that each has the power necessary to carry out these responsibilities.

## 2e. Religious Resources for Global Governance

Protestantism in the past has been prolific in the creation of institutions. This is especially true in the United States. Protestants were once the main source of the educational and medical systems in the country, and the chief provider of social services. Protestant missionaries created numerous institutions of these types in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The question here, however, is not about the role Protestants have played in the past. It is about the ability of Protestants to make institutions of these sorts serve toward the development of desirable forms of global governance. The answer here must be more modest.

Over the centuries, most institutions established by Protestants have become autonomous. The once-Protestant universities, such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Chicago are now secular institutions in which Protestantism has very little influence. Most of the hospitals established by Protestant churches have also become secular institutions. Protestant social agencies are quite minor factors on the national scene.

This process of secularization has not been opposed by Protestants. On the contrary, Protestants have given strong support to the idea that state and national governments should ensure, in ways the divided churches cannot, that education, medical care, and social services be available for all. As governments have moved into these fields, Protestants have largely withdrawn.

Today some Protestants have concluded that this concentration of responsibilities in the hands of governments has been a mistake, and they are supporting legislative changes that reduce the role of government and increase the role of the churches. On the whole, the old-line Protestant churches, which have been chiefly in view in this essay, are opposing this trend. They know that they do not have the resources to deal with the magnitude of contemporary problems.

Even so, clear decisions by the Protestant churches in the United States that they had the responsibility to promote global governance of a particular type could lead to significant support. There are liberal arts colleges with close ties to these denominations that could orient themselves to preparing people for service in the global scene and to supporting research relevant to global governance. Denominational publishing houses could encourage books and magazine articles that would move thinking in positive directions. And, of course, local congregations and councils of churches could contribute to creating a favorable climate of opinion.

#### 4. Developing Multi-Religious Initiatives

There are three levels at which work needs to be done. First, representatives of the several religious Ways need to get acquainted and discuss with one another, just as we have done in the Maryknoll meeting. Many dialogues are taking place all around the world among representatives of two or three communities; these contribute to the possibility of more inclusive meetings such as ours. These activities build mutual understanding and trust.

Second, representatives of these traditions need to determine whether they can reach consensus on the kind of global governance they favor. Our meeting moved in that direction, but for serious proposals to be formulated requires far more intensive and extensive discussion. Equally important to coming up with proposals would be getting these proposals seriously critiqued and modified from wider segments of the communities whose representatives have participated in the drafting. The processes that have been followed by Hans Küng and in the preparation of the Earth Charter may provide models. But the proposals I envisage may be more difficult to boil down into brief statements. They may require more sustained study in religious groups all over the world before they can play a role as expressive of religious consensus.

Third, the growing community of thought and concern among religious leaders needs to find expression in some ongoing institution that can speak for it. The closest approximation among Christians is the World Council of Churches. This is based on the official participation of many denominations. Whether the World Council of Churches could, as a unit, work with similar bodies representing other religious traditions, or whether the individual members of the WCC should be individual members of a multireligious institution, I do not know. However, the former approach would express the "community of

communities" pattern affirmed in this paper, and hence would be my first choice. A third option is an organization more like the Parliament of Religions, made up of individual religious leaders who speak for themselves.

From my Protestant perspective, the issue of how to develop an agency able in some way to speak for the religious communities is a practical one. If all that is now possible is an agency made up of individual leaders, that should be developed. If it is possible to develop an institution that can speak more authoritatively for all the great religious Ways, that would be better. If such an agency could promote discussion throughout the world and advance reflection on urgent issues, as is done by the World Council of Churches, that would, indeed, be a great contribution.