

Religion and World Order Papers

A Christian Perspective On World Order

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Introduction

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

(Revelation 21:1-4)

This triumphant finale of human history as depicted in the concluding chapter of the Christian canon shapes Christian eschatological hope. As such, it is determinative in forming Christian striving and historical imaging. The future of the cosmos resides within God's keeping. World Order and all created matter lies within and is subject to God's sovereignty.

Given such bold hope in a God who acts in human history, one might easily conclude that Christianity, as a world religion, has little interest in, and less to contribute to, any consideration of "Religion and the World Order." Yet, it is not only the eschatological hope of Christian faith that informs the believer but the whole incarnational life and witness of Jesus that instructs. Moreover, the nearly 2000 years of lived

experience of the church offers ample illustration that Christianity brings a proactive and faith-based stance to the questions of life in and for the world.

The very complexity and diversity of the Christian experience over the course of two millennia means that no one "Christian perspective" on world order can be said to exist. Differences of culture, tradition, race, ethnicity, theology, age, gender and status will give rise to a variety of viewpoints, all of which can be said to take Christian teaching as their point of origin. The modest reflection which follows offers but one view of the role of religion in relation to world order from the perspective of Christian faith and theology.

1. Toward A Shared Global Ethic

Theology itself is broadly defined as critical reflection about the meaning of human existence and the nature of the created universe. Christian theology takes as its base position the revelation of God in the person of Jesus the Christ, as recorded in scripture and in dialogue with the church's historical experience, as well as in the context of contemporary human experience and in dialogue with those of other faiths and worldviews. Any Christian contributions to an emerging global ethic will grow out of the dynamism of a theological inquiry shaped by the experiences of individuals and communities of faith.

Perhaps most central to Christian thinking about a global ethic will be the place and understanding of community itself within Christian thought. The place of *koinonia* or community is well-established in Christian tradition. While Christian practice has often fallen short of a biblical understanding of *koinonia*, the value of community as an all-inclusive source of and context for human well-being is a venerable aspect of Christian thought. The extension of this concept of community to encompass the whole world or the *oikumene* is a value that undergirds Christian participation in discussion of global life together. The essential unity of the family of God, joined both to God and to one another within the created order, is the belief upon which Christian discussion of world community is predicated.

Development of a shared ethic on a global basis will require a process in which values are explicitly identified and articulated. Relative to other faith traditions and belief systems, Christianity has, for most of its history, benefited from highly articulated values codified in scriptures, creeds, prayers, texts, and formed theologies or ethical discourses. The mere existence of written text, however, does not convey primacy or assure usefulness. While Christian values have much to contribute, the world community can only be developed around values that are truly held and utilized by all those participant in community life. Christian values of peace, justice, kindness, mercy, and unity can be offered in a spirit that seeks to find points of consensus, or at least convergence, in the values of other belief systems.

1a. Peace and Security

Perhaps no text better outlines Christian teaching regarding peace and security than that which Christianity has drawn from Hebrew scripture:

No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth. And one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offering blessed by the Lord -- and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent - its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain says the Lord.

(Isaiah 5:20-25)

The peace envisioned in this prophecy is notable for its insistence on not only the peacefulness of the whole holy mountain, but also the security of each individual member of it. New Testament teaching reinforces this tendency, extending its typical greeting of peace not only to its own members but to "those who are far off..." (Ephesians 2:17).

Peace and peacemaking are central to Christian theology and to scripture. The admonitions of Jesus, "Blessed is the peacemaker..." (Matthew 5:9) and "be at peace with one another" (Mark 9:50), culminate in his weeping over Jerusalem in lament, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized the things that make for peace!" (Luke 19:42). Pauline theology likewise gives centrality to peace and peacemaking: "Let us then pursue what makes for peace" (Romans 14:19), "for God has called us to peace" (I Corinthians 7:15) and "aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace..." (2 Timothy 2:22).

Modern history has concerned itself more with peace between nations than the security of individuals. Christian teaching and the historic witness of the church provides ample material for a more thorough exploration of the nature of and need for human security. Christian social witness has long recognized the need for human security and has sought to assuage this need in the poor, widowed, orphaned and sick, as well as in ministries to the homeless and refugee. Any emerging global ethic will be challenged to define peace and security in human as well as geopolitical terms.

1b. Economic and Social Justice

The Christian Church has not always identified itself or its interests with economic and social justice, any more than with peace and security. Yet church practice and Christian theology are not one and the same. Also, it remains true that those acting in Christ's name have witnessed powerfully, at times heroically, to the gospel call to economic and social justice.

Biblical teaching is replete with an insistence on concern for the common good and mercy toward the poor. Jesus' own occupation with the poor is filled with injunctions to "give to the poor" (Matthew 19:22), "preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18), "when you give a feast, invite the poor" (Luke 14:13), and "bring in the poor" (Lk. 14:21). This preferential option for the poor is at the very heart of Christian teaching. Two examples from this hemisphere and century (the Social Gospel movement in North America and the Liberation Theology movement in Latin America) give contemporary witness to this

Christian teaching. Around the world, other Christian communities have sought to address the widening gap of economic injustice and address issues of disparity in social justice. Such experiences have taught the church important lessons about the intractable nature of injustice and the complexities of economic planning.

An emerging global ethic will be confronted not only with the necessity of addressing individuals and nation-states concerning the standards of economic and social justice, but will need to address the practices and procedures of multinational corporate structures which hold vast discretionary powers over the economic well-being of the world's people. In many ways the infrastructure for discussions between governments is extant, while ways to address business interests remain illusive.

1c. Human Rights

Christian teaching, with its tradition of high anthropology -- placing a priority on human existence over that of other forms of life -- has a theological basis for the support of human rights. Dispersed as it is throughout numerous and diverse cultures, the Christian community has internally held opposing views with regard to human rights. The Christian West has often joined with those who define human rights in individualistic, democratically based formulations. The Christian East has often joined with those who give definition to human rights in more corporate and economically oriented fashion.

An emerging global ethic will need to be forged in the area of human rights which incorporates the insights of both perspectives and can be culturally supported in diverse societies. Christian teaching might well lend itself and its moral authority to a more comprehensive view of human rights.

If Christian teaching has the potential to be supportive of a more broadly drawn approach to human rights, Christian practice, like that of the world community as a whole, gives little room for confidence in the potential success of such an ethic. Historically, Christianity has found itself co-opted by, and even contributing to, massive violations of human rights, even within societies which enjoyed Christian majorities. The long Christian sanction and blessing given to chattel slavery in the US and the continued apparent peaceful coexistence of the church within cultures that deny women full human rights are but two examples. It is not that the church entirely lacks the capacity for leadership within the area of human rights. Even in this century, those acting upon self-conscious Christian convictions have participated and given leadership to the struggle for human rights in South Africa and Central America. Nonetheless, the Christian community might well approach the development of a global ethic of human rights chastened and humbled by its own history and alert to the contributions of others.

1d. Ecological Sustainability

The Christian proclamation of a creating and sustaining God who loves the whole of the cosmos (Genesis 1) offers a sound base for contributions to the ethical and practical formulation of attempts at establishing ecological sustainability. In recent decades, Christian ethicists particularly have developed increasingly

thoughtful explorations into the meaning of the Christian belief in the inherent holiness of the creation and their responsibility within it.

Any global ethic which develops around the issues of ecological sustainability will need to take into account the ways in which the preservation of the environment is directly linked with economic justice. Work in the United States in the last decade, and in the larger world during the last several decades, has indicated that issues of environmental protection and sustainability are often resolved in favor of those with economic capacity. Particularly for developing nations, the ethical dilemmas have been excruciating ones of preservation of the natural environment at the expense of the well-being of people. In a true world community, such a situation represents a false dichotomy. The overwhelming disproportion of the world's resources consumed by post-industrial nations must be considered carefully in the development of plans and programs for preservation of the natural environment. Understandably, developing nations harbor a great deal of suspicion about a commitment to environmental preservation in the contemporary setting.

1e. Cultural Identity and Integrity

In the contemporary world, which seems increasingly insular and xenophobic, the issues of cultural identity and integrity present an enormous challenge. Post-industrial nations, particularly the United States, carry out commerce and communication in ways that have the unintended effect of eroding cultural identity and undercutting the integrity of traditional societies. In particular, new communication capacities and technologies have done much to create what is sometimes called a "CNN worldview." Such a perspective does much to undercut and compromise other existing worldviews and perspectives. It is this process of erosion that many traditional societies have in mind when they close their borders and media outlets to foreign materials.

The erosion of culture only begins with the issues of news coverage and the materialism that often accompanies such messages. The fabric of traditional culture, along with its religions, systems of authority and accountability, and even family structure, is often laid waste by the seductive and attractive introduction of Western culture with its numerous goods and services.

During the last quarter-century, the global "Westernization of culture" has been viewed by some as a new form of colonialism. In the wake of such an invasion, we have seen the rise of a reaction that has entrenched traditional cultures, often at the expense of the human and social rights of their people. This counter-reaction is likewise disruptive to civil society and problematic for the development of a global social ethic. Careful and candid discussions and deliberations will need to be held to find ways to, on the one hand, provide access and information as promptly as possible, and on the other, preserve cultural identity and the fabric of society.

2. Toward Global Governance

2a. Global Civic Society

The Christian community might well find in a global civic society the need to advocate for persistent guarantees of human dignity within the context of cultural pluralism. An insistence on the rights of individuals will, in many cultural settings, run headlong into cultural practices and values at variance with such a perspective. Women and children, racial or religious minorities, and ethnic enclaves often become the object of their own society's bias. Moreover, nation-states which continue environmental exploitation, geopolitical militarism, and abuse of internal political debate will continue to pose a threat to the development of a global civic society. A bill of particulars must be developed internationally and affirmed globally in order to assure the most basic right of all the world's citizens.

2b. Global Structures and Systems

We need to develop global policies of aid and trade that reward national behaviors contributing to the common good, and that serve as a disincentive to those nation-states that fail to serve environmental sustainability. Such practices must gain the weight and force of law to be effective instruments in establishing global governance.

2c. Local Initiatives

While transnational initiatives will be central to the creation and maintenance of policies and systems capable of establishing and maintaining global governance, such initiatives will not be effective in assuring the full participation of world citizenry. Local initiatives are better able to assure full participation and provide the needed feedback to evaluate the ways in which international policies are (or are not) responsive to local need. The vast diversity of the world's cultures argues for the establishment of goals to be achieved by such local initiatives, while permitting the broadest possible cultural diversity in achieving those goals.

2d. Balancing Tensions

The tensions outlined in the guideline document provide the best evidence of the nature of the challenge confronting any attempt to be intentional with regard to the shaping of a future global ethic and world order. The United Nations must be enabled to become a venue of discourse which will allow for the identification of such tensions and their ultimate resolution. Many additional tensions will exist within particular cultures, and many cultures will be resistant to the legitimacy of countervailing values in such discussions. It is perhaps necessary for the UN to sponsor or be related to regional centers which would provide a venue for the discussion of such tensions as private-sector and public-sector responsibilities. Other tensions, such as national and global sovereignties, do not lend themselves so clearly to a regional settlement and would need to continue to be addressed on an international basis.

2e. Religious Resources For Global Governance

Three factors are central to the role of religions in shaping the world order: context, capacities, and process.

2e(1). Context

s Many of our religious traditions in communities are much more venerable than most present forms of governance, and certainly than the modern nation-state. In this demonstrated capacity for longevity, religious communities are themselves a model of sustainability.

s Religious communities and institutions might be conceived of as the interstitial membranes within the body politic: elastic, permeable tissues that lie between and around the governmental organs. While interstitial membranes cannot carry out the specialized functions of the organs, their existence is essential to the coherent functioning of the organism.

s Taking Robert Traer seriously [see Robert Traer, "Religion and..."], I am no longer comfortable with looking upon religion as a resource for global governance. Yet neither am I satisfied in this context to look upon religion as a source for global governance, inasmuch as human history is littered with disastrous examples of various religions' attempts to serve as a source for governance. I prefer to address religion as a catalyst to, and for, global governance. (I am also grateful for the formulation of our questions in terms of global rather than international governance. "International" relates to "between nations"; "global" better captures the notion of governance between peoples.)

2e(2). Capacities

Religion brings three essential capacities to its function as catalyst to global governance. (I speak from my own Western Christian tradition; others may judge whether these capacities apply to other religious communities. My experience in the Middle East leads me to believe that, to a degree, they apply to Islam as well.)

(a) Educative Capacity. The very processes which have maintained the faith, belief, and doctrines of our communities over the centuries can be instrumental in the birthing of global governance. Here "educative capacity" is used rather than "educational institutions" because I believe that the educational tasks in bringing forth global governance will go well beyond the education of the elite associated with institutional educational practices. Educative capacity includes not only institutions and practices of

primary, secondary and higher education, but also the practices of spiritual or faith formation, informal educative enterprises on a congregational basis, and educative processes associated with, for instance, "barefoot doctors," midwives, community organizers, and so on.

(b) Infrastructure. The infrastructure of our religious communities is sometimes explicit, often implicit. In many religious communities it is very highly developed, with institutions of healing, teaching, and service, and the capacity to interact with other sectors at the highest level of their national governance. In communities around the world, especially rural hamlets and frontier areas, governmental infrastructure is often noticeably absent; the church (and sometimes other religious institutions) supplies whatever infrastructure exists. Taken in the aggregate, I believe the infrastructure of religion will be an essential capacity in helping to bring into reality global governance.

(c) Moral Authority. The faith, confidence, and goodwill of its membership are of course the greatest assets of any religious community; the capacity of moral authority of the religious body and its leadership derives directly from them. The capacity of moral authority to validate, credential, authenticate, and foster inquiry into the moral and ethical necessity of global governance will be perhaps the greatest capacity religion has to offer the emergence of global governance. It is the use and application of this moral authority that allows our communities and nations to rise above mere self-interest to seek out the common good; indeed, it is this moral authority that can provoke the necessary sustained debate about the urgent need for global governance.

2e(3). Process

What is the process by which these capacities might function, within our present context, to bring about a movement toward global governance? The last half-century teaches many lessons about the role of religions in relation to global governance. Obvious examples include Gandhi and the Dalai Lama; I will concentrate on examples from the Christian tradition of ways in which the moral authority of the church, when combined with its infrastructure and educative capacity, can provide for real and enduring changes in governance.

s Shortly after his elevation to the Papacy, Pope John Paul II planned to visit Poland. To its everlasting regret, the Communist government of Poland chose not to itinerate him, so the job fell to the Catholic Clubs of Poland. In the aftermath of His Holiness' visit, the network established to provide for his visit quickly converted itself into the movement we know as Solidarity, which was instrumental in bringing down the government.

s Christian organizations in the USSR and the USA maintained difficult but important relationships throughout the cold war. Although the achievements of these relationships could not be made public at the time, it is now known that through such relationships, the names of Jewish and Pentecostal dissidents

were spirited out of the Soviet realm into the West. Along with other achievements, this ultimately contributed to the revision of governance in Central and Eastern Europe.

s Let us recall the role of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa; the role of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in bringing the moral authority of the Church's witness to bear on the struggle for civil rights in the United States; the work of Dom Helder Camara and Archbishop Oscar Romero in Latin America; and on and on. Lest we think such leadership only involves religious leaders in hierarchical churches, let us remember those motivated by Christian teaching who played an important role in the US civil rights movement, for instance Fannie Lou Hamer and Rosa Parks. On the other hand, we must also remember the most striking failure of the 20th century, at least from the perspective of the Christian community: the story of the Barmen Declaration and the Confessing Church during Germany's Third Reich should give us all pause. The words of moral authority must be matched by the brave deeds of moral witness.

In order to maximize the benefit of the role of religious communities in the creation of a more just and peaceful world order, an international venue of world religions must exist. Such a potential could be realized either through existing world religious structures, or be created as a parallel to the United Nations. As a first order of business, such a venue would need to provide the opportunity for the diminution of religious hostilities which now abide, replacing them with a fuller trust and confidence between religious communities. Ways must be sought to develop the means to adjudicate conflicts that arise between religious communities and their governments, and between religious communities and business communities, if all three sectors are to play a constructive role in the world order that is envisioned. Religious entities hold an unusual capacity to legitimize and encourage confidence in international organizations, policies, and systems. To be effective, any emerging world order will require the best effort from religious infrastructures, as well as the moral authority that religious organizations are able to exercise.

3. Collaborating with the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies

The member churches of the National Council of Churches of Christ USA, and many of their partner churches around the world, have long experience in working with and in conjunction with the United Nations and its specialized agencies. Many churches and religious bodies maintain offices at, or adjacent to, the United Nations and participate in committee structures on various issues before the UN. During the UN's fifty-year life, religious leaders have worked in conjunction with UNESCO and UNICEF as well as the agencies dealing with refugees in particular.

A detailed report of the involvement of churches with the United Nations goes well beyond the scope of this paper. In general, these relations have ranged from highly effective to woefully inadequate. It is not uncommon for church organizations to find the United Nations, and particularly its specialized agencies,

slow in responsiveness and at times insensitive to cultural and religious values at stake in the administration of programs.

The status of the United Nations within the various nation-states, and its chronic underfunding, have rendered it less useful than it might otherwise be. An example of this can be illustrated in UNICEF's response to the rapidly expanding area of child sexual exploitation and the world pandemic of child pornography available on the Internet. While UNICEF has been a staunch advocate for children, it has found its resources and structure far too limited to respond in an effective and timely manner to this rapidly expanding threat to children. With the cooperation of (but without the leadership of) UNICEF, the Queen of Sweden was able to sponsor the world's first Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. In order for this issue to be addressed effectively, cooperation will be required not only from the United Nations and particular nation-states, but from Interpol, the world's religious communities, and the travel and communications industries. At present the United Nations does not enjoy enough public prestige or financial resources to give leadership to such a multifaceted campaign.

4. Developing Multireligious Initiatives

Any number of multireligious or interfaith initiatives might be undertaken as a means for introducing a global conversation concerning the emergence of a just and human world order. World religious communities might even model the potential for such a world order by the emergence of an international multifaith agency to serve as an ongoing source of discussion among world religions concerning the development of a global ethic. Religious communities and structures with which I am well acquainted (the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, the World Evangelical Fellowship, Lambeth Palace, etc.), as well as the World Muslim League and international Jewish organizations, enjoy sufficient infrastructure and experience to enable the formation of such a place and basis for dialogue. Two hurdles which need to be overcome to enable a broader discussion include identification of (1) the appropriate initiating body and (2) the appropriate partners for such a discussion among the world's religions. Until such obstacles are overcome, the religious community will be stymied in its ability to contribute productively to either the process or the substance of an emerging world order.

Conclusion

Let us recall those of many traditions who have gone before us and modeled the way of justice and peace. Those to whom we look as exemplars knew how to utilize the context, the capacity, and the process of the religious community's role in service to social justice, even in the face of powers and principalities which were far more powerful. Each religious community, and certainly all the religious communities taken together, constitute a good and great force in service to the development of a global system of governance.

I would like to conclude with a story that, for this occasion, I will pry loose of its Christian moorings.

A man had done an exceedingly good deed, and the god of the universe sent an angel to him. The angel told him that the god wished to grant him a request as a reward for his good deed; however, the god's heart was troubled by an enmity that the man had long harbored against another, and so the god had directed that whatever the man chose for his own reward would be given twofold to his enemy. The angel departed, allowing the man time to think this over.

The man pondered: "Perhaps a bag of gold? No, then my enemy would have two bags of gold... perhaps a huge farm with crops and livestock? No, no; then my enemy would have a farm twice as large." And so it went. Finally, the angel reappeared, saying it was time to decide. Troubled, the man continued to weigh grace versus enmity, enmity versus grace. In the end, unable to free himself from enmity in order to accept the god's graciousness, he sadly told the angel, "Make me blind in one eye" -- knowing that this would plunge his enemy into total darkness.

In many ways, the world community faces such a choice. Will we give up our own enmity in order to accept the grace that is ours for the asking? It remains an open question. I personally believe the religious communities of the world, acting in concert, have much to contribute to the potential of the world community -- choosing grace.