

## Theology on the Move: Discerning Global Shifts in Theological Thinking in the Global South<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The observable shift in the center of gravity of global Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the West to the Global South and East has given rise to new voices from the church in the non-western world. These emerging new voices reflect new Christian scholarship, imbued with new understandings and expressions of Christian theology. As Christian scholars in the non-western world passionately engaged in theological reflection, producing several new and emerging theological formulations within the contextual realities of the Global South and East, fundamental questions arise as to whether or not these emerging theologies represent “theology on the move.” That is, do they present new theological projects that are growing deeper in knowledge and understanding, furthering Christian thought and practice in its most basic, rigorously conceptual, and integral forms? If indeed the emerging theologies from the Global South and East suggest that theology is on the move, then each new expression requires investigation, dialogue, and critique, as they encounter and seek to find their place in the global Christian landscape.

This paper outlines five of these emerging theologies, *theology in the public square*, *theology of work*, *theology of child and childhood*, *theology of environment*, and *theology of suffering and hope*, and examines each in the light of Scripture, and in the light of global and contextual realities. The author believes that these five theological propositions from the Global South and East deserve some space in the global evangelical theological community after critical reflection and assessment.

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1 This article represents a lightly revised version of the keynote address given at the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association (CETA) Fall Conference held at Tyndale University College & Seminary, October 3, 2015.

## Introduction: The Rise of the Global South

It is now part of conventional wisdom and an accepted fact of history that in the last century the size and shape of global Christianity significantly shifted from the Global North to the Global South. Historians and researchers from the North have been telling that story with profound insight and concession.<sup>2</sup> The Pew Research Centre (June 2011) estimates that there are now 2.2 billion Christians globally. According to Pew (2012), over 600 million are on the continent of Africa. This includes the phenomenal growth of global Pentecostalism, which comprises approximately one-third of the total Christian population today.<sup>3</sup> The projections are that by 2050 the number of Christians globally will be around 3 billion, with over 70% in the Global South and East and, as Philip Jenkins points out, “only around one-fifth or fewer will be non-Hispanic whites.”<sup>4</sup>

As we move further along this historical trend, what is of interest now is to discern the significance of this major shift in global Christianity for the global church, and to try to draw some theological implications, particularly for global evangelicalism. For example, Todd Johnson of the Centre for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary has raised three important questions about this shift. First, will southern Christians challenge northern Christianity’s 1,000-year dominance in theology and ecclesiology by producing their own reflections and practices, harkening back to the earliest Christian centuries when they were in the majority? Second, will the dominant languages of Christianity continue to shift south (already by 1980, Spanish was the leading language of church membership in the world, and Chinese, Hindi, and Swahili are increasingly important languages of Christianity)? Third, will the closer geographic proximity between Christians and Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists on balance result in greater conflict or dialogue? Taking all three of these questions into con-

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- 2 Todd Johnson, “Worldwide adherents of all religions by six continental areas,” in *2013 Britannica book of the year* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013); Todd Johnson, et al., ed., “The Demographics of World Mission and Christianity, 1910–2010,” in *2010, Boston* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 3–12; Phillip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, “From Times Square to Timbuktu: The Post-Christian West Meets the Non-Western Church” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); “Global Survey of Evangelical Protestant Leaders” (The Pew Research Centre: [www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org)); Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter, ed., *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996).
  - 3 Wonsuk Ma, “A Global Shift of World Christianity and Pentecostalism,” in *The Many Faces of Global Pentecostalism*, ed. Harold D. Hunter and Neil Ormerod (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 2013), 62–70.
  - 4 Phillip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.

sideration, a central question remains: “How well will the new global Christianity navigate its increasingly diverse composition and southern majority?”<sup>5</sup>

Historians and researchers from the Global South and East have also been telling their story. They are attempting to point out meanings and implications of this new Christian reality for the global church from their vantage point.<sup>6</sup> Theologians in the Global South and East have come of age, and have now reserved the right to their own hermeneutical paradigms and applications of the gospel, amidst their own contextual realities. They have proceeded with formulations of their own contextual theologies.<sup>7</sup>

There are many new and emerging theological formations from the Global South and East. They warrant investigation, dialogue, and critique as they encounter and seek to find a place in the global Christian landscape. Do these emerging theological formulations, in fact, represent theology on the move in its most basic, rigorously conceptual, and integral forms? In this article I shall outline five of these emerging theologies in the Global South that I believe deserve consideration in the global evangelical theological community.

### Theology in the Public Square

Theology as *public theology* emerges from significant questions that arise within the contextual realities facing the church in the Global South. Many of these churches were planted in a colonial environment and have now emerged in a postcolonial context. In this new socio-political environment, several new political and theological questions arise from daily encounters in church-state relations in these new societies. For example, one of the issues that arise is the challenge of nation-building. In the modern state today there is much debate over the kind of national political culture that should be encouraged and cultivated for social transformation and nation-building. Since it is true that “power corrupts and absolute

5 “Christianity in Global Context: Trends and Statistics,” April 2013. Todd M. Johnson, Director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Prepared for the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life: <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2013/04/051805-global-christianity.pdf>.

6 Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Africa and the Changing Face of World Christianity,” presented at the Now and Next: Together in Mission/INFEMIT SUMMIT, Nairobi, Kenya, 6–9 March 2011; Julie Ma, *The Growth of Christianity in Asia and its Impact on Mission* (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2007); Wonsuk Ma, in “A Global Shift of World Christianity and Pentecostalism” in *Global Pentecostalism*, 62–70; Dieumeme Noelliste and Sung Wook Chung, ed., *Diverse and Creative Voices: Theological essays from the Majority World*. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015).

7 As Jenkins, *New Faces*, 17, points out: “Looking at the impact of the Bible in the Two-Thirds World—the choice of texts and the manner in which they are read—should remind Northern churches of aspects of the scriptural tradition that might have seemed lost, or—as in the case of the apocalyptic or healing—tainted beyond recovery. Fresh Southern readings help restore these traditions to their ancient centrality within Christian thought, but without the ultra-conservative implications that ‘fundamentalism’ has acquired in our own culture. The more exposure we North Americans and Europeans have of such readings, the harder it might be for us to approach that scripture in the same way again.”

power corrupts absolutely,” should the fight for state power in national politics be allowed to be corrupted by the “big man”? Can this fight be engaged only with “big money,” or support from special interests? Is state politics the hegemony of the capitalist class that primarily seeks to protect its own interests? What about the role of Christian conscience? Is there public space for the church to exercise its prophetic role in the politics of nation-building? Can Christian thought and action be exercised in ways that allow for influence on the secular state? Does the Christian citizen have a right to actively demand good governance with fair and equitable public policy? What principles of governance should inform the formation of laws in society, especially with respect to germane issues such as human sexuality, definition of family, access to education, public health services, and fundamental rights and freedoms? What about the infringement and sometimes suppression of religious liberty within the state by state and non-state actors? What should the role of the church be in response to issues such as these?

### *The Public Square?*

Public theology is not only about theology done in public. It is also about theology in relation to public life and society. The public square is that space in society that allows opportunity for open dialogue and debate on matters pertaining to the common life of citizens. As evidenced by Garnet Roper, president of the Jamaica Theological Seminary, in the Global South today public theology centers more on the relationship between faith and society, faith and the formation of public policy for the public good.<sup>8</sup> Public theology in the Global South is surrounded by and engages with the legacy and impacts of colonialism. It addresses issues such as the use and abuse of state power, the cultivation and support of a culture of corruption, and the existence of structural and persistent poverty that entraps the under-classes. It addresses economic exploitation, anti-democratic influence of “big money” in political campaigns, and, ultimately, the capacity of developing nation-states for effective self-governance. Living with these as daily realities, evangelical scholars and leaders of the church in the Global South have now been debating and producing scholarly materials on these issues.<sup>9</sup>

### *Public Theology in a Postmodern Culture*

It must be acknowledged that one of the impacts of the culture of postmodernity is a push-back on the traditional influence of the Christian religion in the public square. This is being done in the name of cultural pluralism. Increasingly, Christianity is being aggressively relegated from the public domain to being a privatized

8 Garnet Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology* (Kingston: Jugaro, 2012).

9 Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

and personal matter. A good example of this in the West is the assertion of Alastair Campbell, spokesman for the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. When asked about the Prime Minister's faith, he famously said, "*We don't do God.*" That public statement was reflective of a zeitgeist of the modern secular western society that, to a large extent, has displaced religion from public life. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, and his son Andrew, responded in their recent book using Campbell's words as the title. They write,

There is a deep malaise in modern Britain about the role of faith in the public square. At times it seems a 'crusade' is being waged by the militant wing of secularism to eradicate religion in general—and Christianity in particular—from any role in public life. Yet this is only a small part of the story we tell during the course of this book. For the most part, the 'unease' with which modernity regards the public manifestation of faith arises out of ignorance, historical forgetfulness, and well-meaning but mistaken 'multiculturalism.' There is a hard-fought conflict between a secular spirit and the Christian faith.<sup>10</sup>

That "militant wing of secularism" of which the former Archbishop of Canterbury of speaks has been allowed to muzzle Christian conscience and the Christian voice in the West, and weaken its influence in the public square. The church, including the evangelical church, has been forced into retreat, and, in some cases, even into hiding. Some in the Global South speak of the church now as fully in "*Babylonish captivity.*"<sup>11</sup>

### *The Church Fights Back*

As the influence of this zeitgeist has spread to the Global South, impacting local culture, it has encountered new dimensions of Christian theology that is on the move, seeking to reestablish a credible and compelling religious voice in the public square. The church in the Global South is fighting back. It refuses to be silenced. It is embracing "public theology" as the theology for engaging in public

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10 George Carey and Andrew Carey, *We Don't Do God: The Marginalization of Public Faith* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2012).

11 Burchell Taylor, "The Babylonish Captivity of the Church," *CJRS* 4.1.2 (1982). This "captivity" affects the church in the Global South. From time to time debates rages in Jamaican society about the role of the church and its influence on society. In 2014, one of its national newspapers, the *Jamaica Observer* (Friday, March 21, 2014) reported on the churches' reaction to a proposed government policy to change the work-life habits of the labor force, "Churches angry; Slam Gov't over flexi week snub," to which several members of the public responded. One responder wrote, "Governments are elected to lead, and religion should be seen to be a private personal matter with appropriate places and times for worship. It is not acceptable to bring religion into the public sphere to be used as extortion, or blackmail."

discourse on issues that affect the public good. For example, in 2015 the country of Singapore celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a nation. As part of this celebration the Singapore Centre for Global Missions (SCGM) organized a Prayer Breakfast at the St. Andrews Cathedral, and focused on the topic, “The Gospel in the Public Square.” The keynote speaker, a theologian of the East Asia Theological Seminary (EATS) in Singapore, Dr. Kwa Kiem Kiok, argued for the role of theology in the public space. Others in Asia, such as Methodist Bishop Hwa Yung of Malaysia, have been advocating a “theology of nation-building,” seeking to retain and further build on Christianity’s historical influence in shaping thought and life in the public arena.

In Africa, an Assemblies of God Bishop, Joshua Banda of Zambia, has been at the forefront in helping to create national policy on HIV/AIDS, and shaping constitutional reforms.<sup>12</sup> His views and voice in Southern Africa are heard all the way to the United Nations in New York. In Francophone Africa, Assemblies of God Pastor Philippe Ouedraogo, who founded the Evangelical Association for Social and Economic Development (AEAD) in Burkina Faso in 1988, has been championing sustainable development in the areas of education and literacy, youth and vocational training, agriculture and food security, animal resources, the promotion of women and gender issues, social action and national solidarity, economy and finance, as well as healthcare. AEAD projects amply demonstrate the practical dimensions of public theology and mission in the context of national development.<sup>13</sup>

In theological institutions on the continent of Africa there are now five such institutions that are part of a global network for public theology.<sup>14</sup> This network promotes academic research and partnerships, and invites theological contributions on public issues affecting the poor, the marginalized, and the environment. They offer broad perspectives on public theology within which dialogue takes place. For example, the Centre for Public Theology at the University of Pretoria argues that “public theology” is not about theologians or pastors “doing theology” in the public square. “Public theologians are the film directors, artists, novelists, poets, and philosophers.”<sup>15</sup>

12 See <http://www.icofzam.org/index.php/81-our-leaders/african-leadership/206-bishop-joshua-h-k-banda>.

13 See Philippe Quedraogo, *Female Education and Mission: A Burkina Faso Experience* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014).

14 These include: (1) Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa (contact Anlené Taljaard), <http://academic.sun.ac.za/theology/centres.html#bnc>; (2) Centre for Public Theology, University of Pretoria, South Africa (contact Etienne de Villiers), [www.up.ac.za/](http://www.up.ac.za/); (3) Institute for Public Theology & Development Studies, University of Mkar, Nigeria (contact Godwin Akper), <http://unimkar.edu.ng/>; (4) Department of Religion and Theology, University of the Western Cape, South Africa (contact Christo Lombard), <http://www.uwc.ac.za/>.

15 Cf. Andries van Aarde, “What is ‘Theology’ in ‘Public Theology’ and What is ‘Public’ about ‘Public Theology’?,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 64.3 (2008), 1213–34.

### *Public Theology and the Bible*

In a sense, evangelical theology has been in the public square since the advent of Christ. He publicly incarnated his life-transforming gospel message in the first-century Roman Empire. His teachings about the dynamics of God's kingdom, and the new institution in society he inaugurated, the church, all took place publicly in the midst of burning social and political issues within the Empire. That Jesus's life and ministry represents "theology in the public square" is not least demonstrated by his public trial, condemnation, and execution by public authorities, in full public view. Those events generated great debates in the public square.

As the early Christian community sought to explain and account for the life and death of Jesus, as well as the truth claims of the message he proclaimed, they did so in open public arenas. They did so boldly and convincingly, at great risk to their own personal safety, even though public ideas, thoughts, and philosophies of life were daily discussions in Greco-Roman society. In the Aeropagus in Athens, for example, Paul was glad for the opportunity to bring evangelical theology into the public square for rational consideration and public debate (Acts 17:16–34). Although the mixed response to his Christian apologia, based on natural theology, was perhaps not what he anticipated, some did accept his arguments and became believers.<sup>16</sup> Paul's engagement in theological discourse in the public arena was not without an evangelistic concern. "Public theology," then and now, was and is not only about theology done in public, but also about theology as it affects public life and society.

The church in the Global South today has not only grasped the public dimension of the gospel, believing strongly that the gospel can engage the public square, it also seeks to establish the theological foundations of public theology in the tradition of the early church. The church in the Global South is doing theology that seeks to re-embolden the witness of the church in public life.

### **Theology of Work**

Another emerging theology in the Global South is the *theology of work*. Throughout the Global South a small proportion of young, upwardly mobile professionals are innovating and creating new cultures, patterns, and systems of work. Whether in Bangalore, Nairobi, Accra, or Sao Paulo, encountering this new generation of upwardly mobile professionals is a refreshing and encouragingly hopeful sign. They are an impressive lot. On the other hand, however, a vast majority of youth

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16 "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them" (Acts 17:32–34). There are those who argue, however, that he was disappointed with his performance, and so he left Athens and went to Corinth with a different approach, a more Christocentric and evangelical approach.

in the Global South are daily wondering where they can find work. In a tight job market, stagnant economy, or failing state, what are they to do if they have no employment opportunity or hope of finding a job in their adult life?<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the Global South, the issues of poverty and high unemployment (and under-employment) are pervasive and very real problems for the church and society. There have been many responses to these problems by the state, by multi-lateral agencies, and by several non-governmental organizations. In Latin America, a theology of work (TOW) has been developed out of interaction with the poor and with graduates of university who struggle to find meaningful employment in society. Over the past 30 years, amidst concerns for the conditions of the poor, and from a period of Bible study and deep theological reflection on the issues of poverty, work, and employment, a TOW program has been developed. This program combines theological education and application to the needs of the poor in what is called “*mission integral*.” Originally spearheaded by the Kairos Foundation in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the program is now driven by the Center for Interdisciplinary Theological Studies (CETI), which serves the entire continent. It began when Latin American evangelical leaders, including Rene and Caty Padilla, Samuel Escobar, and Pedro Arana, among others, were engaging university students and young urban Christian professionals who were determined to reach out to the poor, with a credible model of theological education that would serve the real needs of the poor. The program included a four-part curriculum, covering work, family, church, and society, as each having their place in life, and thus receiving the due attention they deserve in a full course of study and application. This curriculum is now being used not only in Latin America but also in Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. The CETI program is offered in multiple levels—from a basic certificate level to the Master’s level. The curriculum on work includes in-depth discussion on topics such as the relationships between faith and work, technology and poverty reduction, and consumerism and real human development.

In the Caribbean, a theology of work is emerging in surprising ways. Churches across the spectrum of denominations are experiencing a decline in the available pool of candidates for the pastoral ministry. This decline is being fueled by the perception, and sometimes the harsh reality, that the Christian Ministry as a voca-

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17 The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 47% of all unemployed persons globally are young women and men and 660 million young people will either be working or looking for work in 2015 (Ulrich Schoof, “Stimulating Youth Entrepreneurship: Barriers and Incentives to Enterprise Start-ups by Young People,” ILO, 2006). In Jamaica there are high levels of youth and young adult unemployment. According to the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN), Jamaica’s youth unemployment rate is currently 38.3% as at July 2014, close to three times the national average, which is at 13.8%. The age ranges measured for the youth population are 14–19 and 20–24 years.

tion is not economically viable, and therefore reduces the life chances of those who are called to it. Many in the pastoral ministry now engage in bi-vocational ministry. Pastors who are earnest about fulfilling the pastoral call are increasingly seeking additional employment that provides a viable financial basis on which to care for the needs of their family. At the same time, many churches are also engaged in some form of holistic ministry, or integral mission, attending to the welfare needs of the poor in their congregations and community. Pastors and people in general are struggling with the issue of work, its necessity and availability. In theological education, at least one Caribbean theological institution, the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology, has included TOW in its curriculum.

It was instructive and heartening to hear the remarks of Pope Francis, as he addressed New Yorkers in St. Patrick's Cathedral on September 24, 2015. In the city that, as Sinatra says, "never sleeps," Pope Francis, who is the first Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church from the Global South, challenged New Yorkers (and to an extent, the entire world, as many New Yorkers are from the Global South, North, and East) to come to grips with a theology of work that offers and secures a healthy work-life balance.

Francis received his ministerial formation in Buenos Aires, and was made the 266<sup>th</sup> Pope of the Roman Catholic Church on March 13, 2013. On his first visit to the United States, and his first visit to New York (of all places), he chose to speak about the value and meaning of work. "Work," he said, "was an expression of gratitude to God and service to others." He pointed out that work can mean self-sacrifice. That is, while it can be used as an act of self-enrichment, work is also a responsibility to community. Francis additionally warned about evaluating success by the standards of "spiritual worldliness," and further encouraged New Yorkers in the taking of rest. "We need to learn how to rest," he urged, as he pleaded for proper work-life balance.<sup>18</sup>

### *Theology of Work and the Bible*

It is important to understand work from a biblical perspective. The Old and New Testaments are replete with theologies of work. Genesis begins with a portrayal of Yahweh as a worker who not only models work-life balance but who also demonstrates the value and significance of work as a creative enterprise. Likewise, the New Testament writers valorize work as a creative enterprise in which all human beings are invited to participate. In all, a biblical theology of work affirms:

1. Work is important, and has intrinsic value (Ecc 9:10; cf. Col. 3:23–24).
2. There is more to work than "living from paycheck to paycheck," or an

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18 The full text of Pope Francis's address is available on the New York Times website: [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/24/nyregion/pope-francis-homily-at-st-patricks-cathedral.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/24/nyregion/pope-francis-homily-at-st-patricks-cathedral.html?_r=0)

attitude that says, “I’m just trying to make a living.” Rather, work fulfills humanity’s “humanness,” and is thus an integral part of life.

3. Human beings can experience joy, fulfillment, and meaning through work.
4. There is, however, a negative side to work that can undermine life. An unbalanced work-life relationship can destroy and bring “death.” Work should not be the all-determining value of human identity and worth.

Thus, a theology of work is not just a philosophical exercise. It focuses on one of the deepest existential realities of human life, that is, how humanness is to be fully achieved. Work requires reflection on its true meaning and value—its theological and spiritual dimension as a human enterprise, especially in the demanding globalized marketplace of today’s world.

### *Theology of Work, the Church, and the Working Poor*

The modern world has experienced a series of revolutions in its recent history. Among them are the agrarian, industrial, cybernetic, and digital revolutions. The impacts of these revolutions, alongside the phenomena of urbanization, globalization, and commercialization of human productive activity, have all changed the meaning and value of work. It is in this context that the question arises: what is the future of work?<sup>19</sup> How does a theology of work help us to understand our place and purpose in the world?

A theology of work has become a necessity for emerging leaders of the church in the Global South. As the growing pressures of joblessness, poverty, social exclusion, and aging congregations affect the vibrancy and strength of church life, it is now becoming quite apparent that this theology is a necessity for all demographic sectors of society. For the church to respond meaningfully and in a comprehensive manner, it must re-examine its theology of work, developing new ways for work’s intrinsic and therapeutic worth to find expression.

The new industrial revolution is delivering dramatic advancements in technology. However, the impact of this in the growth of the number of the working poor on the one hand, and the age of retirement on the other, brings new challenges to the nature and meaning of work. In some instances it is contributing to the nature of work and the workplace having to be re-imagined. For example, in trying to deal with the issue of joblessness and the need for job creation, especially among the youth, many states in the Global South are turning to the promotion of entrepreneurship as a way of encouraging new and creative forms of self-employment. The present global search for jobs thus presents an opportunity for the contempor-

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<sup>19</sup> This question has been around for decades, if not for centuries. See Fred Best, ed., *The Future of Work* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973). See also Leyland Ryken, *Work and Leisure in Christian Perspective* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1987).

ary evangelical church to demonstrate and apply its theology of work in creative ways. Accordingly, it is time that a biblical theology of work be a central focus in all our theological training institutions and church congregations.<sup>20</sup>

### Theology of Child and Children

One of the most disturbing things on the planet today has been the way in which children and childhood are regarded and treated in society. On every continent, in many nations and communities, children are being traumatized, exploited, abused, trafficked, and murdered. The status of children is very low. Understandably, in the context of the reality facing children and childhood in the world today, particularly in the Global South, a third focus of emerging theologies is *Child Theology*.<sup>21</sup>

In 2005 the UNICEF global report, “Childhood under threat: The State of the World’s Children 2005,” offered a comprehensive report on the status of children at that time. The report stated:

Children experience poverty as an environment that is damaging to their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual development. Children experience poverty with their hands, minds and hearts. Material poverty—for example, starting the day without a nutritious meal or engaging in hazardous labour—hinders emotional capacity as well as bodily growth. Living in an environment that provides little stimulation or emotional support to children, on the other hand, can remove many of the positive effects of growing up in a materially rich household. By discriminating against their participation in society and inhibiting their potential, poverty is a measure not only of children’s suffering but also of their disempowerment.<sup>22</sup>

More than a decade later, has anything changed?

A devastating aspect of the current global refugee and migrant crisis has been its impact on children and families. The publicized graphic image of the little boy washed up on the beach in Turkey tells the sad story of children and families caught up in adult conflict and war in the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, Nigeria, across Asia, and most cities in Latin America. So many other graphic

20 The Caribbean Graduate School of Theology (CGST) in Jamaica has developed a new course in Christian Social Entrepreneurship (MBA/CSE) to bolster its MBA program, and add value and a unique dimension to business education and the historic Christian practice of business as mission. This study includes the contribution of the faith-based sector to GDP, and to the transformation of under-served communities, as recognized and affirmed by the state.

21 Cf. Keith White and Haddon Willmer, “An Introduction to Child Theology,” <http://www.child-theology.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Booklet-1-sample.pdf>. The authors claim that the term “Child Theology” was first used in Penang, Malaysia in 2001.

22 <https://www.unicef.org/sowc05/english/povertyissue.html>. Accessed April 29, 2017.

images of children in crisis are in the public media today. The world has taken note of the recent bombings in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and the serious threat of devastating war in the Korean Peninsula. Millions of innocent children are being put at risk.

What of child poverty in Latin America, in Asia, Africa and the Middle East? In the Caribbean, the social phenomenon of “barrel children” is a very serious problem. This is a term coined by Dr. Claudette Crawford-Brown of the University of the West Indies, author of the book, *Children in the Line of Fire*.<sup>23</sup> It describes children who are abandoned by their parents as they seek a better economic life abroad and send remittances—i.e., barrels of supplies—for their children back home. Rooted in the history, legacy, and culture of violence from the days of Caribbean slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, children in the Caribbean today suffer from significant vulnerabilities to domestic violence, child trafficking, abandonment and neglect, structural poverty, and early exposure to social violence and a culture of death.

I often draw attention to the monument in the city of Kingston where I live. The monument is in Justice Square, next to the Supreme Court and the Kingston and St. Andrew City Council. I call it, “Kingston’s Monument of Shame.” The monument was erected in 2008 in memory of children killed under tragic and violent circumstances. Over 1600 children have been murdered in the last decade. At the base of the monument are the names of some of these children placed in little plaques. There is no other city in the world that I know of where such a monument has been erected. Yet, who is not moved by the plight of children on the planet today, affected by war, poverty, disease, and the burdens of life? Children are at great risk in society. Their plight in the world challenges us to put everything we have toward rescuing and enabling them to survive and fulfill their God-given potential.

That is why one of the responses of the church in the Global South has been the development of a Child Theology Movement (CTM) focusing on a theology of child and childhood. The CTM emerged in the late 1990s and now, just over a decade old, has successfully held significant consultations in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, as well as in the UK and on the European continent. It has generated some important pieces of theological reflections and publications on the nascent academic and missional study of Child Theology.<sup>24</sup>

Initially motivated by the works of Oxford-based theologians Haddon Wilmer

23 Claudette Crawford-Brown, *Children in the Line of Fire: The Impact of Violence and Trauma on Families in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago* (Kingston, Jamaica: Arawak, 2010).

24 See Siga Arles, et al, ed., *Now and Next: A Compendium of Papers Presented at the Now & Next Theological Conference on Children, Nairobi, Kenya, March 9–12, 2011* (Colorado Springs, CO: Compassion International, 2011); Dan Brewster and John Baxter-Brown, ed., *Children & Youth as Partners in Mission: A Compendium of Papers presented at the 4/14 Window Missiological*

and Keith White, Global South scholars like Bambang Budijanto (Indonesia), Rosalind and Sunny Tan (Malaysia), Jesudason Jeyaraj (India), Genevieve James (South Africa), Victor Nakah (Zimbabwe), and Shiferaw Michael (Ethiopia), along with children's advocates Menchit Wong (Philippines), Enrique Pinedo (Peru/USA), and Dan Brewster (USA/Malaysia) have been blazing the trail for the Child Theology Movement.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps one of the most significant consultations so far was the 2012 gathering in Nairobi, Kenya. A major contribution from the Global North that informed that consultation was Marcia Bunge's paper, "Biblical Understandings of Children and Childhood: Resources for the Church and Mission Today." In her paper, Bunge articulated six biblical perspectives on children and childhood, and warned that

whenever we as Christians retreat from this rich, complex, and almost paradoxical view found in the bible and Christian traditions and focus instead on only one or two biblical themes alone, we risk falling into deficient understandings of children and adult obligations to them, and we risk treating children in inadequate and harmful ways.<sup>26</sup>

The CTM focuses on the recognition and understanding of the integral role and significance of children and childhood in Scripture, in society, in Christian mission, in nationhood and nation-building. Its key theological paradigm is an understanding of the dramatic and symbolic placement by Jesus of a child in the midst of a theological discourse on the kingdom of God (Matt 18).

### *Child Theology and the Gospel*

The Gospels record some very strong theological assertions by Jesus about the significance, importance, and treatment of children. These assertions carry implications for understanding how anyone accesses the kingdom of God, as well as the way in which the kingdom of God works. Indeed, how adults relate to children, and children's own access to and inclusion in the kingdom, were central in Jesus's teachings. In Matthew's Gospel, he warned,

[U]nless you change and become like little children, you will never

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*Conference, Seoul, South Korea, February 2013* (Colorado Springs, CO: Compassion International, 2013).

25 Jesudason Jeyaraj, Rosalind Tan, et al., ed., *Repairer of Broken Walls: Essays on Holistic Child Development: In honour of Dr. Dan Brewster* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge: Christian Forum for Child Development-India: Global Alliance-HCD-South Asia Unit, 2014).

26 Marcia Bunge, "Biblical Understandings of Children and Childhood," in *Now and Next*, 7. See also Marcia Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

enter the kingdom of heaven. . . . If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea (Matt 18:1–6).

Jesus affirms here that the *kingdom of God belongs to children*. The question that the CTM raises is whether the church has missed this important dimension of the gospel in its attitude and policies towards children.

It is instructive to note that amid his strong remarks to his disciples, Jesus said, “*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them*” (Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16). He welcomed children in a gentle and affirmative way, creating a safe space for those who are to be counted among the most marginalized and vulnerable in any population. From the Gospel writers’ account of Jesus and his relation to children, four things are clear:

1. *Jesus was on the side of children*. Whatever else can be said, Jesus’s words and actions consistently point to this conclusion.
2. *The church must unblock access of children to Jesus*. Unlike the disciples who blocked the children’s access to Jesus, the church must seek to remove all obstacles to children and youth involvement in the mission of the church and kingdom of God.
3. *The church must ensure appropriate ways to bless children*. In an age of legal restraints placed on physical contact with children, children still need and crave the blessing of adults. It is very important to them. In its ministry to children and youth the church must establish appropriate, clearly defined ways in which parents and other adults can bless children.
4. *Christian mission must be radically counter-cultural*. Christian mission, by its very nature, challenges the status quo and offers an alternative vision of the present and future. It cannot uphold cultures of exclusion or exploitation of children and youth. The dynamic of the Judeo-Christian faith is that it moves beyond the status quo, advancing towards the day when “*the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea*” (Hab 2:14).

#### *Child Care and Protection, and the Church*

Children are considered among the most marginalized and vulnerable group in any population. They deserve every care and protection. Spurred on by the wider context of the global scale of child abuse and exploitation, the CTM and its associated networks have taken up the issue of child care and protection from an ecclesiological point of view. Global statistics on children at risk through issues

such as child refugees, child poverty, infant mortality, child labor, child trafficking, and child murders are at alarming levels. The impact on the church of the extent of the problem has certainly not been lost. Pedophile priests have been exposed, the church made to pay a heavy price, and new legislations have been promulgated by governments following the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 by member-states.<sup>27</sup> Within a decade my own government in Jamaica brought in national legislation (1998), and established five state agencies in 15 years to protect and care for children.<sup>28</sup>

How sad it is that in the marketplace of today the world commodifies children, placing monetary and material value on them as products to be marketed, exploited, traded, or used to service the greed and indulgence of adults. I am amazed at how much money is spent by the advertising industry in advertisements targeted towards children. According to a Federal Trade Commission report on food marketing to children released in 2006, the US advertising industry spent approximately \$1.6 billion marketing their products—mainly soda, fast food, and cereal—to children. They recognize the commercial power and appeal of the children and youth sector and devote significant percentages of their advertising budget towards them.

For the church, the concerns and questions are many. What is the role of the church in the midst of the crisis facing children and childhood both locally and across the globe? Is the church a safe and welcoming place for children? Are child protection policies in place in the local church? Are the children in church being excluded or exploited by the adults around them? How does the church show that it welcomes children and demonstrate a radically different valuation and affirmation of who they are in contrast to what obtains in the marketplace of the world? How does the church make space for children in their midst, as people of the community bring their children to church for divine blessing?<sup>29</sup>

In light of the above questions, Dan Brewster and the Compassion International organization have asked another very important one: what percentage of our church's budget is expended on children and youth? How much do we spend to recruit, train, and develop children into the men and women God created and

27 It should also be recognized that all almost all of the eight international millennium development goals set by the United Nations to be realized by 2015 have core concerns for the care and protection of children.

28 Since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was enacted in 1989 the Jamaican Government has responded by establishing the following state agencies: The Centre for Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse (CISOCA) 1998; Child Care and Protection Acts (CCPA) 2004; Child Development Agency (CDA) 2004; Office of the Children's Advocate (2005); Office of Children's Registry (2007).

29 In my small and marginal contribution to this movement, I have given two biblical reflective pieces on the missiological implications of Jesus and children in the Gospels, as narrated by Mark and Matthew. See Las G. Newman, "Jesus, Children, Church and Mission" in Brewster and Baxter-Brown, *Children & Youth*, 199–209.

redeemed them to be? Quite recently the World Council of Churches (WCC) and UNICEF signed a partnership agreement pledging to work together to support children's rights, with special initial focus on two major issues: violence against children and climate change.<sup>30</sup> This is a significant move, and one that should be emulated by other church councils and organizations.

### **Theology of Environment**

On a sunny Sunday afternoon while visiting my neighboring country of Haiti, I was invited to the evening service at a church in the capital city, Port-au-Prince. On arriving near the entrance to the church, I was struck by the mountain of garbage piled high on either side of the entranceway. Passing through the narrow entrance we arrived at the church that was very neatly perched on the hillside. The evening service was a powerful and vibrant testimony of faith and praise. But I felt like I had just come through what the children of Israel must have experienced when they passed through the Red Sea on dry land. Like the parted sea was the wall of garbage on either side of the church's entrance.

After the service we had to exit through that same entrance. I asked my colleagues why the garbage was allowed to pile up so high. The answer was a bit of a challenge to me. My colleague said that to attempt to do anything about it was risky, because that would be considered getting involved in "politics." The national government at the time was in a state of political gridlock that paralyzed public services, and things like garbage collection were left unattended. So what was the church going to do about the garbage right outside its door, I insisted. Surely that was a public health hazard. "The church can't get involved in politics," was the only answer I received.

While I recognized the political problem, that poignant juxtaposition of faith and environment that Sunday afternoon left me with a searching question. Is there a relationship between Christian worship (whether Pentecostal, Evangelical, Catholic, or otherwise) and the external environment? Is there any connection between the two, between creation theology and confessional liturgy? Which should inform the other? Should theology, at least biblical theology, not inform confessional liturgy? And should confessional liturgy not inform and shape Christian witness?

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30 The agreement was signed and announced on September 18, 2015. It asserted: "UNICEF will be working with WCC members—over half a billion Christians in 345 member churches in 140 countries—to recognize, monitor and promote children's rights within their communities and congregations. The partnership will leverage UNICEF's knowledge on children's rights and violence prevention with the WCC's longstanding theological legacy and commitment to children, in order to achieve positive change for children around the world." ([http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_85552.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_85552.html)).

*Faith and Environment*

There were more questions. In the face of this environmental crisis, I asked myself, what is the role of faith? How should the church as a community of faith respond? What should people in faith communities be doing? As a historian I have observed how faith has been a powerful agency for social change throughout history. Examples of faith communities that experienced renewal and regeneration have shown how hope, nurtured by faith, played an important role in their survival. For example, one of the main impacts of the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was the formation of new communities of faith and practice. In the face of a deeply entrenched feudal agrarian society, the Radical Anabaptist Reformation gave rise to new communities and faith traditions. Among these were the Mennonite Brethren and the Hutterite movements. At the root of their formation and development was the conviction that faith has within it the power to create an alternative world. Groups such as these show that faith in the God of Abraham and of creation have been a key agency for social change. Indeed, the powerful relationship between religious faith and enlightened care for the environment has enabled the cultivation and development of a culture of environmental care, with sustainability as its essence. As evidenced by the Mennonites and Hutterites, it is a culture that has been able to survive for over five centuries.

*Global Evangelical Theology and Creation Care*

A fourth emerging theology in the Global South is the *theology of environment*. Global evangelical theology has not always embraced an active environmental theology. However, a defining moment came in the 2010 Lausanne Congress in Cape Town, South Africa. Not only was creation care a major topic on the agenda in the multiplexes in that gathering of over 4,200 global evangelical leaders from 198 countries. It was also highlighted in a significant way in the published statement, “The Cape Town Commitment” (CTC). The statement on creation care was a major affirmation of the core of biblical convictions about the created world and about human responsibility for its development and survival. The CTC spoke clearly and boldly:

*We love the world of God’s creation.* This love is not mere sentimental affection for nature (which the Bible nowhere commands), still less is it pantheistic worship of nature (which the Bible expressly forbids). Rather it is the logical outworking of our love for God by caring for what belongs to him. “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.” The earth is the property of the God we claim to love and obey. We care for the earth, most simply, because it belongs to the one whom we call Lord. The earth is created, sus-

tained and redeemed by Christ. We cannot claim to love God while abusing what belongs to Christ by right of creation, redemption and inheritance. We care for the earth and responsibly use its abundant resources, not according to the rationale of the secular world, but for the Lord's sake. If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says "Jesus is Lord" is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ's Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.<sup>31</sup>

### *Biblical Theology and Creation Care in the Global South*

Since Cape Town, a global movement known as the "Lausanne/WEA Network on Creation Care and the Gospel" has been engaged in action plans and a series of consultations and conferences in Latin America, East Africa, Southern Europe, the Middle East, East Asia, Nepal, Canada, and the United States. The first consultation was held in Jamaica in 2012 in which theologians, scientists, writers, and environmental practitioners from 23 countries (as diverse as Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, Kenya, Uganda, Singapore, the UK, the USA, and Canada) met for five days to pray, discuss, and reflect on the state of the earth, the home in which we live, and on the role and ministry of the church in caring for God's creation. Within this movement a theology of the environment is emerging along lines that affirm the biblical worldview on creation:

1. Creation is Yahweh's intentional act out of his immense love and willingness to share fellowship with his created world.
2. Creation as we experience it is broken and degraded, and groans in peril (Rom 8:32).
3. Creation is not abandoned as the philosophies of modern atheism, deism, secular existentialism, and others assert.
4. Creation is being recovered and restored by providential design.
5. Human beings have a big part to play in that recovery and restoration.
6. Believers in Jesus the Christ look forward to a newly restored creation—a new heaven and a new earth in God's time (Rev 21:1).

Global South biblical scholars such as J. Richard Middleton have been making the case for a biblical theology of environment along such lines.<sup>32</sup> This creation

31 <http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment#p.1-7>.

32 J. Richard Middleton, "Islands in the Sun: Overtures to a Caribbean Creation Theology," in *A Kairos Moment for Caribbean Theology: Ecumenical Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Garnett Roper, and J. Richard Middleton (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 79–95.

theology is important for the Global South in general (and certainly everywhere else), but especially for the most vulnerable Small Island Developing States. The impacts of the global ecological crisis are issues that arise from human-induced environmental degradation, including damage to basic life sustaining resources. These issues demand immediate response by everyone, rich and poor alike.

*How Has the Church in the Global South Responded to the Global Ecological Crisis?*

Let me share three examples taken from Central America, East Asia, and the Caribbean. In 1998 one of the deadliest hurricanes in the annual Atlantic season was Hurricane Mitch. Mitch was a category 5 hurricane that devastated the countries of Central America, including Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. Over 14,600 people were killed and an estimated \$3 billion in damage resulted.

Honduras, home to some of the highest rates of poverty in Latin America and a population of just over 7 million, was hit very hard. At least 2 million were made homeless, 70% of crops destroyed. Large warehouses and storage rooms for coffee were flooded; maize and corn crops were devastated; 80% of the banana crop was completely destroyed. Altogether, crop losses were estimated at \$900 million. Critical food, medicine, and water shortages were felt everywhere. Hunger and near-starvation were widespread in many villages. At least 20% of the country's population was made homeless. Many of the unidentified dead were buried in mass graves or their bodies cremated.

Oswaldo Munguia, a Honduran conservationist and member of the Assemblies of God church, rallied his denomination of over 1,850 churches to the national restoration effort. He and his team mobilized the planting of over 5 million trees in the mountains and across the country. Oswaldo was invited to the Lausanne Consultation on "Creation Care and the Gospel" in Jamaica in 2012 to share his inspiring story. This faith-based project projected a strong vision of the importance of creation care and conservation efforts towards the sustaining and flourishing of human life and community.

In East Asia, the work of the Singapore Centre for Global Mission (SCGM) has been making its mark on the level of environmental awareness of the church. Lawrence Ko, founder and director of the SCGM, was also at the Jamaica consultation. He said,

The world we are living in presently is indeed in the midst of a grave ecological crisis, if not a serious economic concern. Environmental crises are always intricately linked to energy issues and economic challenges. The consumptive lifestyle of the wealthy often leaves the poor with a degraded environment to live in. The

poor are often left with very restrictive choices of energy and fuel options. They could only afford the cheaper fuel which may be lower in cost but higher in price, as they pollute the earth and cause global warming.<sup>33</sup>

Over the last five years Ko has led a team of young Singaporeans to participate in the Green Desert project. This is a very imaginative project aimed at cutting the pollution index in Beijing, the capital city of China, with its population of over 21 million. As citizens and visitors alike know from experience, Beijing is one of the most polluted cities in Asia. Much of the dust pollution comes from the deserts of Mongolia. The Green Desert project mobilizes students and young Singaporeans across denominations in a concerted attempt to reverse the desertification of the Mongolian desert.

He tells the story in his book, *Can the Desert Be Green? Planting Hope in the Wilderness*:

Our participation in creation care and environmental stewardship projects are small acts with huge significance. They are small symbolic acts which seek to address the anguish of the helpless masses. They are small but prophetic voices, echoing voices of the empowered poor and seeking to address the “powers that be” which may be too busy to walk the streets enough to listen to the folks on the streets. These small symbolic acts, of caring for creation and the poor, are acts of faith, believing that things that have gone awry can be changed, that the bad situations can be redeemed, and the good can be restored. These small symbolic acts reach out to the poor and powerless, who are the beneficiaries of our creation care efforts. Acts of caring for creation are acts of painting the future, training us to tread gently, to handle both material creation and people with care. Acts of caring for creation teach us to appreciate the beauty of both the visible as well as the invisible.

Envisioning the future possibility of a redeemed and restored creation encourages us to dare to dream of a future which need not be a nightmare. The future can still be a beautiful and realisable dream, a future worth creating because nature and culture are both valued, with eternal significance. These acts of creation care can become signals of transcendence, lifting us to the vision of hope and higher planes of living. They point us to the hope that the cre-

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33 <http://www.scgm.org.sg/creation-care-and-environmental-missions/>

ation will be restored to the way it was meant to be when it was created by the Creator God.<sup>34</sup>

In the Caribbean, the 2012 Jamaica Consultation deliberated on the statement in the Cape Town Commitment (CTC) regarding creation care and the gospel, namely, that “creation care is a gospel issue under the lordship of Christ,” and that “urgent and prophetic ecological action is needed.” The Consultation developed a major evangelical response and Call to Action, referred to as the “Jamaica Statement.”<sup>35</sup> Since then, the themes and structure of the Jamaica consultation have been taken into regional and sub-regional forums in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. They focus on God’s Word (*theology*), God’s World (*science*), and God’s Work (*our response*).<sup>36</sup> As the movement develops and expands, the call and charge in the Global South today is, “*Go Gospel, Go Global, Go Green.*”

### Theology of Suffering and Hope

The church in the Global South and East is facing unimaginable suffering today. As Philip Jenkins notes, “[the book of] Lamentations can be considered as a prayer book for Africans—a grim statement but undeniably true.”<sup>37</sup> We have watched in horror the sufferings of the hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees, mainly from the Global South, flooding into Europe. The stories they bring of suffering and despair in their homelands that caused them to flee, often in grave danger of dying along the way, are truly heart-rending.

I have been calling attention to this issue in terms of “Christian mission in an age of extremes,” drawing on the work of historian Eric Hobsbawm, who has described the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the “Age of Extremes.”<sup>38</sup> If Hobsbawm were to take a look at global Christianity in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, would he not describe it as no less an age of extremes? Would he recognize, on the one side, a church where millions of Christians across the globe proclaim their freedom, joy, and material progress thanks to a gospel of prosperity—a gospel of “health and wealth,” and “bling” Christianity? Indeed, in the Global South, across Africa,

34 <http://www.bibleadvocacy.org/news/planting-hope-in-the-wilderness-reflections-on-asian-journeys-green-desert-project/?lang=en>.

35 <http://www.lausanne.org/content/statement/creation-care-call-to-action>.

36 A book was published as an outcome of the Consultation: Colin Bell and Robert S. White, ed., *Creation Care and the Gospel: Reconsidering the Mission of the Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016).

37 Jenkins, *New Faces*, 77.

38 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London; New York: Penguin, 1994). Hobsbawm is known for his work on the history of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and for describing the 20<sup>th</sup> century as “The Age of Extremes.” That century, he says, was marked by incredible scientific and material progress on the one hand, and appalling acts of genocide and human atrocities on the other. It was an age of immense progress in freedom and democracy and the expansion of liberty on the one hand, and on the other, it was an age of total war, with the amazing rise of intolerance and repression, fundamentalist faiths, and the denial of liberty.

Asia, and the Americas, including the Caribbean, there are pastors of mega-churches mirroring the lifestyles of the rich and famous, suggesting that these are new ways in which Christianity and the gospel are to be communicated and experienced. But, on the other end, would Hobsbawm not also see the suffering church, in which millions of Christians are caught in daily conflict—persecuted, hunted down, killed because of their faith in Jesus Christ and their public loyalty to Him?<sup>39</sup>

*The Suffering Church in North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia*

Let me share several brief stories about this reality in the Global South from Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. In 2002 the Marxist government of Eritrea cracked down on churches, outlawing all religious practices except Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Sunni Islam. Around 3,000 Christians, including many pastors, were imprisoned without charge or trial pending denial of their faith. Several are known to have died after being subjected to severe mistreatment and torture. Many are still in prison. Global attention has been drawn to the case of Christian persecution in Eritrea. However, this situation has been understood as only one example of the problems surrounding the issue of religious liberty taking place on a global scale, as evidenced in the recent debate in the British House of Lords on Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Charter on Human Rights.<sup>40</sup>

A few years ago I had the privilege of visiting a country in North Africa where Christian witness is restricted to the expatriate community. It is forbidden for a Christian expat to witness to a native of that country. I was invited to meet with a group of foreign students studying in the universities in that country. I was picked up at the airport in the capital and driven four hours to the place where over 70 students had gathered for this meeting. As we arrived, one of the student leaders suddenly announced, “We’ve got trouble.” He noticed a car that was parked at the entrance with four men inside. We pulled up at the entrance and noticed that it was the secret police awaiting our arrival. Two men came over to our car and asked for the list of students who were attending this meeting. The student leader handed over the list and these members of the Government’s security forces then drove away. They returned later and remained for the three days we spent at this place. They listened to everything that was said and took notes. But what encouraged and fascinated me was the strong faith and determination of these foreign students who wanted to serve the Lord even in the face of intimidation and fear. They knew

39 The World Evangelical Alliance, in its report to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, revealed that an unprecedented number of Christians now face disinformation, discrimination, and outright persecution worldwide. It reported that more than 200 million Christians are being persecuted worldwide.

40 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldhansrd/text/150716-0003.htm>; <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5593/archbishop-speaks-in-lords-on-religious-freedom>.

the price they would pay if they were found guilty of violating the laws of the host country. But they were bold and courageous. And they strengthened one another by meeting in this way, even inviting someone from the “outside” to speak to them.

In the Middle East, the birthplace of Christianity, the crisis of suffering facing Christians today is pervasive and commonplace. Many Christians have fled the region, which is what prompted Pope Benedict XVI to refer to the situation in the Middle East as a modern-day “new exodus” of Christian believers.<sup>41</sup> Even before the advent of ISIS, the Hezbollah organization in Lebanon was exerting powerful, repressive pressures against Christian witness. In Egypt, Coptic Christians who form about 10% of Egypt’s 90 million population are feeling the brunt of the increasingly radicalized Muslim population. The once dominant role of Christians in the Egyptian economy with employment opportunities in government and civil service has been drastically curtailed. Churches are torched, and young Christian girls are forced to convert to Islam. Relatives who go to the police end up being beaten and having to serve time in prison. On a recent visit to Egypt I was struck by the fact that outside the entrance of a church that we attended in a little town in the south, there was a group of security men with Kalashnikovs at the entrance guarding the Christians worshipping inside.

In India, in the state of Orissa, many Christians have been attacked and killed; many more have suffered for their faith. On August 25, 2008, two days after the outbreak of violence against Christians, a group of about 50 thugs set upon Fr. Thomas Chellan, a Roman Catholic priest in a local village. They stripped him naked and savagely beat him with sticks and axes.<sup>42</sup> A religious sister working with him was also subjected to violence and public humiliation.

### *Response from the Suffering Church*

Fr. Thomas survived the ordeal, and was recognized with an award from a Catholic religious organization for his strong defense of the faith in the midst of severe persecution. In accepting the award, Fr Thomas said:

I dedicate this Award to all the persecuted Christians in Kandhamal, especially to those who lost their lives and stood by their faith. When I received news of this award, I was overwhelmed by the

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41 There are now over 1.5 million Palestinian Christians in exile as far away as Chile, South America. Arab-Palestinian Christians are afraid to complain to the foreign press for fear of retribution in the form of rape of their daughters or wives, beatings, and murder. A decade ago, the Christian population of Iraq was about 1.5 million. Today that has been reduced by half through the deliberate murder of Christians by their Muslim neighbors, and various jihadist groups. Many have fled to Jordan and other parts of the Middle East, and are now part of the flood of migrants into Europe.

42 Catholicagency.com reported the event with the following headline: “Six years later, Christians in India await justice for kandhamal massacre” (see <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/six-years-later-christians-in-india-await-justice-for-the-kandhamal-massacre-67937/>).

solidarity of Faith. Our Faith makes us one family, unites and bonds Christians beyond geographical borders, beyond barriers of ethnicity, nationality, or language. Beyond the limits of territorial boundaries. Faith makes us one family. I am grateful to be here with all of you. There were moments of crises; I felt rejected from the place, from the people I knew, and when the news of this award was given to me—from someone, whom I have never seen or heard from, they called me and offered their solidarity. I felt a deep sense of solidarity and comfort. I felt I was not left alone in my suffering. I was consoled that I was not abandoned, and I marveled that it was because of my faith [that] I endured the persecution, and know it was only because of my faith [that] I have been embraced by universal solidarity. Faith Unites, Faith Bonds, and Faith Heals, and Faith forgives . . . and this brings a lot of joy.

He went on to say that

[T]he history of the church teaches us to experience joy through suffering, a faith that is tested through trials, and this is the history of the church universal, not just Orissa[. And] if we trace the history of Christians, they have gone through this struggle and persecution. I firmly believe that from these Christians of Kandhamal will spring forth new life of the Risen Christ.<sup>43</sup>

In Fr. Thomas's remarks, the ingredients of a *theology of suffering and hope* that undergird Christians in the Global South are clearly evidenced:

1. Suffering is part of the Christian life experience and there is a universal community of faith that shares this experience.
2. Thousands of others in the history of the faith have also suffered.
3. The resurrection of Jesus, as the other side of suffering, is the basis of Christian hope. Suffering will not have the last word.

This theology of suffering from the Global South provides an important lesson to the church across the globe. In an “age of extremes” it may be seen as a rebuff and counter-reality to the theology of prosperity and wealth that is also prevalent.<sup>44</sup> A theology of suffering and hope brings into sharp relief the power of the gospel, predicated upon what the Suffering Savior himself experienced, and publicly demonstrated, in his life, death, and resurrection. Accordingly, Heb 12:2 urges us to “[fix] our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set

43 <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/%E2%80%9CDefensor-Fidei%E2%80%9D-prize-awarded-to-Fr.-Thomas-Chellan,-one-of-Orissa%E2%80%99s-first-victims-15308.html>.

44 See Femi Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (NIV).

## Conclusion

In this paper I have shared five examples of emerging contextual theologies in the Global South. These five are the: (1) theology in the public square, (2) theology of work, (3) theology of child and childhood, (4) theology of environment, and (5) theology of suffering and hope. But they are by no means the only ones, or even unique to the Global South. Indeed, many Christian groups utilize global networks for collaboration, cross-fertilization, mutual learning, and support.

What these emerging theologies signify, therefore, is not merely contextual theologies, as a fourth arm of the “three-self” missiological paradigm set out by Henry Venn in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup> Rather, they represent authentic attempts to do theology, reflecting upon biblical texts in socio-cultural contexts, in order to discern, understand, and apply more deeply this knowledge of the self-revealing God to his creation, and to his church.

These emerging theologies may or may not represent a definitively growing shift in how theology is understood and taught in the Global South. But they nevertheless stand as a testament to the development of the Christian theological mind, and of Christian discipleship at the grassroots level in the Global South. They represent new thinking, a new search for authentic biblical Christianity, and new responses to old problems. As such, they bring additional voices to the global theological fraternity, new discourses and enquiry, and new streams of mobilization of the church for witness and action in the Global South, and elsewhere. Above all, these theologies represent the radical application of faith to life in *all* its existential realities and challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That, after all, is at the heart of the historic evangelical faith. A faith that proclaims the centrality of the *universal* redemptive work of Jesus Christ, through his eternally prevailing church wherever it is planted. It is a *faith that is on the move*.

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45 Henry Venn, the influential Secretary of the Church Missionary Society (1841–1873) promoted the idea that when a church is truly planted it would have three defining characteristics. It would be (a) self-governing, (b) self-supporting, and (c) self-propagating (cf. Wilbert Shenk, *Henry Venn—Missionary Statesman* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983]). What Venn did not envision was the day when the church planted by Christian missionaries would also become *self-theologizing*, as a fourth self-defining characteristic. That is what is occurring today as theology is on the move.