

Forum of Bible Agencies Conference, Edinburgh, 2011. The Bible in a Globalized World

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KEY WORDS:

Globalization, Eschatology, Hermeneutics, Shalom, Mission, Catholicity

ABSTRACT:

The article explores the use made of the Bible in the earliest phase of European political, economic and religious expansion. It traces the hermeneutic which underlay the expansionist ideology of the Iberian powers back to the influential eschatology of Joachim of Fiore and argues that in the fifteenth century his vision of a 'Third Age' of millennial glory was used to justify the 'Conquest' of South America. However, alternative readings emerged in the same period, in which the Bible was read from below and became the source of radical prophetic critiques of the Conquistadores. The lessons derived from this period are applied to the contemporary context, especially with regard to biblical hermeneutics in relation to modern globalization.

The purpose of this study is to attempt to suggest some of the ways in which the message of the Bible might be related to the specific challenges posed by the globalized world which, it is assumed, will provide the broad context for the mission of the people of God in the twenty first century. Globalization is understood here to refer to the process by which the peoples inhabiting this world have been relentlessly (often unwillingly) integrated within a single economic system. In parallel with this, the growth of forms of rapid intercontinental transportation and the spread of highly sophisticated means of instant communication have shrunk the globe, transforming received concepts of human identity as what has been called the "space of flows" undermines the role of territorially based institutions operating within specific physical locations. A leading theorist describes this context as one in which "an economy that works as a unit in real time on a planetary scale," creates flows of capital, labour, information, and organizations, all of which "are internationalized and fully interdependent throughout the planet."¹ The issue which concerns us is how this massive, world-historical development

1. Manuel Castells, 'European Cities, the Informational Society, and the Global Economy,' in Richard LeGates and Frederick Stout (eds), *The City Reader*. Fourth edition. London: Routledge, 2007), 481.

is to be evaluated in the light of the biblical revelation and in what ways the message and worldview of the Bible might offer an alternative vision of the global future? However, before we attempt such an evaluation it is necessary to reflect on the historical roots of the phenomenon of globalization and to ask what role the Bible played in the initial expansion of European political and economic power more than five hundred years ago?

THE ROOTS OF MODERN GLOBALIZATION

The year 1492 witnessed developments in European history which marked the beginning of a new epoch. Before dawn one morning in early August, Christopher Columbus and his fellow-sailors knelt on the beach in the Spanish port of Palos to confess their sins and receive absolution and the sacrament before setting sail toward unknown western seas. As the sun rose, three vessels, led by the *Santa Maria*, began an epic voyage which was to result in the discovery of what came to be known as the “New World.” While this event is often remembered, the broader religious context in which it occurred is frequently overlooked. As James Reston notes in his brilliant study of this period, when Columbus travelled from Granada to Palos, “the roads must have been clogged with Jews departing Spain, scattering across sea and border in response to the Edict of Expulsion of Ferdinand and Isabella and their Inquisition.”² In fact, the deadline set by the Spanish monarchs for the expulsion of all Jews from their domains was the day after Columbus set sail, so that the event which was to trigger the expansion of European power was inseparable from the *Reconquista* and the brutal expulsion of Sephardic Jews from Spain. The conflict between Spanish Catholicism and Islam was understood in apocalyptic terms as a battle which would usher in a new golden age, and Columbus himself conceived of his adventure as likely to add glory to the anticipated triumph of Christian power within and beyond Europe. These events were viewed as possessing cosmic significance as the reconquest and purification of Spain combined with the discovery of new worlds to usher in a promised golden age. In Reston’s words, “In the cosmic drama, Discovery must join with Reconquest and Purification. Together, the three fitted into the new heaven and earth that was promised in the book of Revelation.”³

2. James Reston, Jr., *Dogs of God: Columbus, The Inquisition, and the Defeat of the Moors*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006, xviii.

3. *Ibid*, 221.

The mention of the book of Revelation compels us to ask how the Bible was understood in this period and what part was played by particular traditions of interpretation in the epochal events which shaped the world we have inherited? The answer lies back in the twelfth century in the extraordinary visions of the medieval mystic, Joachim of Fiore (1145-1202). After years of profound meditation on the Bible, and frustrated that the gospel seemed not to have brought the blessings promised by the Hebrew prophets, Joachim came to believe that the Revelation of John anticipated a time of future glory, an “Age of the Spirit,” which would be characterised by “love, joy and freedom, when the knowledge of God would be revealed directly in the hearts of all men.”⁴ The impact of this vision of a utopian “third age” was immense and can be traced through the entire middle ages and into the present. Norman Cohn even suggests that the three stages of social history in Marxist theory and the phrase “the Third Reich” would have had little emotional power had not Joachim’s vision of a third age “entered into the common stock of European social mythology.”⁵ We might add that in 2005 the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra recorded Leos Janacek’s little known work, “The Eternal Gospel,” based on a Czech poem in which Joachim of Fiore is heard announcing the coming of the Spirit’s kingdom,

When affluence and worldly goods and riches,
gold, jewels, all shall turn to dust.
When every pauper shall be rich in spirit
and all the world inherits eternal spring!⁶

The vision of Joachim was to have a profound influence on various movements across Europe, including in Spain at the time of the Reconquista at the end of the fifteenth century. Ferdinand and Isabella, it came to be believed, were to play a crucial role in European sacred history, being destined to complete the evangelization of Europe, recover the Holy Land, and become the agents for the triumph of Christ to the very ends of the earth. Ferdinand believed that he possessed a divine destiny which involved purifying the Catholic faith of heresy, driving the Muslims from Spain, and recovering the City of David as a prelude to the return of Christ himself.

However, if the epochal events in Spain during the last decade of the

4. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*. London: Paladin Books, 1970, 108.

5. *Ibid*, 109.

6. See the essay by Nigel Simeone in the booklet accompanying the BBCSSO recording of this remarkable music under Ilan Volkov. Hyperion Records CDA67517.

fifteenth century seemed to their beneficiaries to be harbingers of the final triumph of Christendom and the fulfilment of prophecies of an age of glory, their consequences for minority groups within Europe and, even more, for the millions of indigenous peoples on the receiving end of the Spanish missions, were very different. Writing on the occasion of the five-hundredth anniversary of the expeditions of Columbus, the Chilean theologian Pablo Richard described 1492 as the year in which *death* came to the “New World.” It has been estimated that when Europeans first set foot on the shores of South America, the indigenous population was 100 million people, yet less than a century later, by 1570, it had fallen to between 10-12 million. Richard argues that this was “the greatest genocide in the history of humanity” and that it was tragically underpinned by a theological justification which subordinated the biblical tradition “to the historical rationality of the conquest.”⁷ Thus, the Spanish theologian Juan Sepulveda, applied the Just War tradition to the conquest of the Americas, defending the use of violence in the evangelization of uncivilized and “barbarian” peoples, and concluding that it was “thanks to terror combined with preaching” that native peoples “received the Christian religion.”⁸

READING THE BIBLE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE VICTIMS

Within half-a-century of the arrival of the Spanish *conquistadores* new Catholic missionaries arrived in South America, among whom were men who reacted with utter dismay at the discovery of the treatment meted out to the indigenous populations under the pretence of evangelization. As the terrible reality of the “conquest” began to sink in, voices were raised in prophetic protest against the oppression of the native peoples and the subversion of the gospel of Christ which made this possible. The protesters had “read and re-read the Bible” and concluded that what they were witnessing amounted to an oppression “much greater than that suffered by the people of God in Egypt or Babylon, or even by the primitive church under Roman oppression.” In other words they were witnesses to a historic injustice which “leaped over

7. Pablo Richard, ‘1492: The Violence of God and the Future of Christianity,’ in Leonardo Boff & Virgil Elizondo, eds., *1492-1992: The Voice of the Victims*. London: SCM Press, 1990, 59, 61. See in this same volume, Enrique Dussel, ‘The Real Motives for the Conquest,’ 30-46.

8. *Ibid*, 63

the boundaries of the Bible!”⁹ For example, in 1511 Antonio de Montesinos preached a passionate and uncompromising sermon on the island of Hispaniola (modern Haiti), denouncing the Spanish for having obliterated a beautiful culture and turned a paradise into a desert! He posed a series of searching questions which climaxed with the insistence that anyone claiming to follow Christ was obligated to love his neighbour (in this case, the aboriginal people) as himself. Seated in the dumbstruck congregation was a young missionary priest, recently arrived on a ship which was part of the largest Spanish fleet ever to cross the Atlantic Ocean. His name was Bartolome des Las Casas and three years later, having seen at first hand the massacre of native people on Cuba, he experienced a radical conversion which led him to conclude “that everything which had been done to the Indians... was unjust and tyrannical.”¹⁰

Las Casas has left us with a classic account of what he called “the destruction of the Indies,” providing a chilling, eye-witness description of the genocide, while also revealing the concern he shared with all the prophetic opponents of the *conquistadores* that, unless there was repentance on the part of the privileged and powerful elite in Spain, that nation would itself be destroyed “for sins against the honour of God and the True Faith.”¹¹ Justo Gonzalez has commented on the fact that two completely contrasting readings of the Bible emerged from a single theological tradition:

One simply continued the ideology that had been developed around the Reconquista against the Moors, which saw Spain as having a divinely appointed task to take the land from the infidel and establish orthodox, Catholic Christianity. The other, while sharing most of the theological tradition with the former, reversed that ideology, calling Spain and her representatives to repentance.¹²

Gonzalez asks how “voices of compassion” could have emerged from within the context of Inquisition, Reconquest, and colonial expansion? How did a radically alternative reading of the Bible come about which both critiqued “the nation’s greatest moment in history;” and provided a counter-cultural theological analysis of what was happening? His answer, which we shall need to remember when we turn to consider the role of the Bible in the context

9. Maximiliano Salinas, ‘The Voices of Those Who Spoke Up For the Victims’, in Boff and Elizondo (eds) *The Voice of the Victims*. London:SCM Press,1990, 105.

10. Bartolome des Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. Edited and translated by Nigel Griffen, Harmondsworth:Penguin Books, 1992, xxii.

11. *Ibid*, 127.

12. Justo Gonzalez, ‘Voices of Compassion Yesterday and Today’, in Guillermo Cook, ed., *New Face of the Church in Latin America*. New York: Orbis Books,1994, 11. Emphasis added.

of a full-blown globalization, is that the “voices of compassion” belonged to people who had “heard a different Voice” as they shared their lives “in solidarity with the oppressed natives of these lands.”

By the middle of the sixteenth century, and in the wake of the Reformation, the missionary impulse which had accompanied Spanish Catholic expansion appeared among French Protestants. The story of Jean de Lery and the attempt of a group of French Reformed pastors to gain a foothold in Brazil is little known, but it demonstrates again how different readings of the Bible can emerge within a single theological tradition. In 1556 Lery and his companions set sail from Honfleur in response to a letter addressed to John Calvin in Geneva requesting the Reformed Church to send people “well instructed in the Christian religion” to Brazil. We are fortunate that Lery was both a careful observer, with a sharp eye for detail, and an excellent writer, so that his book, *A History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America* (1580) is an invaluable historical source and a neglected classic of missionary literature.¹³ Lery and his fellow-missionaries endeavoured to work among the Tupinamba indians, but their encounter with this completely new cultural world led to radically different opinions concerning the moral and spiritual condition of this primal people. On the one hand, the leader of the group reported to Calvin that the indigenous people were “of such a stupid mind that they made no distinction between right and wrong” and did not even know that God existed. By contrast, Lery, having immersed himself in the culture in a manner that anticipates much later methods of research in social anthropology, reached a very different view. The Tupi, he wrote, have “little care or worry for the things of this world” and do not “drink of those murky, pestilential springs, from which flow so many streams of mistrust, avarice, and squabble” among Frenchmen. What is more, these people, although labelled as “savages,” could teach French atheists sobering lessons concerning the reality of an unseen world. Years later, having returned to France and witnessed the horrors of the wars of religion, personally surviving the terrible siege of the city of Sancerre, Lery confessed that his brief stay among a primal people had destroyed neat categorisations by which people were identified as civilized and uncivilized. He was no longer sure where the “savages” were to be found and described his regret at not being with the Tupi, “in whom... I have known more frankness than in many over here, who, for their condemnation, bear the title of ‘Christian.’” Here then is a Protestant “voice of compassion”

13. Jean de Lery's, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*. Translated and introduction Janet Whatley. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

which, like the Catholic prophets we have noticed earlier, identified closely and sympathetically with a despised, misrepresented and, alas, soon to be destroyed people, and who as a result, was compelled to re-read the Bible and to recognise the inadequacies of a received theology.¹⁴

THE HUMAN CONSEQUENCES OF GLOBALIZATION

It is not possible within the limits of this paper to trace the connections between the discovery of the Americas at the end of the fifteenth century and the full-blown process of globalization which emerged following the collapse of the bi-polar world, in which a capitalist West confronted a communist East for most of the twentieth century. Our primary concern is with the fact that while this world-historical development has been publicly celebrated as an inevitable and irreversible phenomenon which will, in the fullness of time, bring freedom, justice and prosperity to the whole earth, it currently creates millions of victims whose cries (like those of the native populations of the New World) often go unheard among the beneficiaries of the system. Globalization is accompanied by urbanization and in 2003 the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) published a global audit of urban poverty under the title *The Challenge of Slums*. The researchers found that 940 million people already live in conditions of urban squalor and they predicted that, if present trends continue unabated, every third person on the planet would be a slum-dweller within thirty years! The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has concluded that what appears as globalization for some people, resulting in freedom and mobility, descends uninvited upon others as a “cruel fate.” In a memorable categorization he suggests that the world’s population is increasingly divided between “tourists” and “vagabonds.” He writes:

For the inhabitants of the first world – the increasingly cosmopolitan, extraterritorial world of global businessmen, global culture managers or global academics, state borders are levelled down, as they are dismantled for the world’s commodities, capital and finances. For the inhabitants of the second world, the walls built of immigration controls, of residence laws and “clean streets” and “zero tolerance” policies grow taller; the moats separating them from the sites of their desire and of dreamed-of-

14. I have written concerning Lery and his mission in, “The Forgotten “Grandfather” of Protestant Mission: Perspectives on Globalization from Jean De Lery,” in *Missiology* XXXIV/3, (July 2006), 349-359.

redemption grow deeper, while all bridges, at the first attempt to cross them, prove to be drawbridges.¹⁵

At this point, the central issue with which this paper is concerned emerges with great clarity and urgency: *how does the message of the Bible relate to this globalized world?* Will it become a marginalised narrative, treasured by individuals who may continue to find personal peace and comfort within the text, despite the fact that it will be perceived more widely as an archaic remnant from pre-modern times? Or, even more worryingly, will it be deployed by the beneficiaries of globalization in support of this process as it presently exists, providing a religious justification for the privileges they enjoy? After all, Western Christianity and its mission has often been harnessed to the progress of North-Atlantic civilizations, so it is possible to envisage readings of the Bible in which globalization becomes a “sign of the kingdom of God.” Or again, will the Bible be read from the perspective of the victims of economic and political processes, producing twenty first century “voices of compassion” from a global faith-community compelled to bring a critical, prophetic analysis to bear on the world we now inhabit?

THE BIBLE IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

In reflecting on what a biblically informed response to globalization might look like I suggest that we begin by considering the broad context within which the story of Israel and the church unfolds. Walter Brueggemann has observed that the biblical narratives are set “always in the shadow of empire.” The imperial powers of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia weave in and out of the narrative and successively provided the setting within which the covenant people’s faith was developed, confessed, and deeply challenged. These empires made absolute claims and endeavoured to assimilate conquered peoples within their own dominant cultural and economic systems. While Israel’s experience varied under different imperial powers, in every case the Bible bears witness to the nation’s struggle to “maintain its distinct identity and to protect space for its liberated imagination and, consequently, for its distinctive covenantal ethic.”¹⁶ It is even more significant for us that this insight can be extended

15. Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, 89. See also his, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004.

16. Walter Brueggemann, *Texts That Linger, Words That Explode—Listening To Prophetic Voices*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000, 74.

into the New Testament since the ministry of Jesus and the story of the early Christian communities took place beneath the shadow of the greatest empire of all, that of imperial Rome. From the nativity narratives of the gospels, which so clearly locate the birth of Jesus in the rule of Caesar Augustus and the Roman collaborators in Palestine in the shape of the Herodian dynasty, to the Apocalypse of John received on the island of Patmos, the shadow of empire extends across the entire period, constituting a fundamental aspect of the context within which the confession that “Jesus is Saviour and Lord” was made. Within that setting this core belief was unavoidably controversial, potentially treasonable, and therefore dangerous.

The relevance of this to our concerns with globalization is surely obvious: while the use of the term “global” to describe the empires of the ancient world would be an anachronism, they *were* characterised by the ambition to dominate the known world and to incorporate the nations within their spheres of political control and religious belief. In the Old Testament the threat which the empires posed to the covenant faith reached its climax with the Babylonian exile when, “displaced from their homeland and all its sustaining institutional markers, the power of Babylonian culture to assimilate and the capacity of the Babylonian economy to substitute satiation for a faith identity” constituted a tremendous threat.¹⁷ But it is in the New Testament that faith confronts this challenge at its greatest extent in the context of an empire which claimed both universality and a sacred destiny as the agent through which human history would reach its ultimate fulfilment. The Roman imperial cult has been described as “a tool for the affirmation of the world-wide reach of Roman power” and buildings, monuments and altars promoted that cult, embedding “Roman ideas into the fabric of an eastern city and its public life.”¹⁸

The initial response of the covenant people to the threat posed by the empires was one of *resistance, critique and the warning of judgement*. The power and glory of the empires was not to be denied, but prophecy discerned what lay beyond propaganda and uncovered both the deceptive imperial mythologies which screened out uncomfortable aspects of reality, and an idolatry which exalted human beings to the place which belongs to God alone. The many prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel directed to the nations, which may strike us as negative in tone, were not expressions of racial pride or ethnocentrism, but arose from the perception that the idolatry which

17. Brueggemann, *Ibid*, 82.

18. Davina Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Re-imagining Paul's Mission*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, 96.

underpinned these powers was accompanied by injustice, violence and death, and stood in direct opposition to the purposes which Israel's liberating God had for the world. Nor is this theme limited to the Old Testament; indeed it is difficult to think of a more sobering and terrifying text in a globalized world than the description of the total collapse and destruction of Babylon (here a code-word for imperial Rome) in Revelation 18.

This note of judgement on an unjust and brutal politics cannot be ignored and must have a central place in a response to globalisation which is faithful to the Bible. We have heard how the "voices of compassion" in the fifteenth- and sixteenth centuries read the Bible from the underside of European expansionism and felt compelled to warn their compatriots that only a deep repentance could turn away the judgement of a just and holy God. Walter Brueggemann, in an important reflection on the role of the Bible in the contemporary church, notes that the first task of Christians today is to allow the narrative of Scripture to "de-script" the powerful story which presently shapes our societies. This process of "de-scripting," or deconstructing, the dominant worldview is the essential accompaniment to the task of "*the steady, patient, intentional articulation of an alternative script that we testify can make us safe and joyous.*"¹⁹

Throughout this paper a globalization which works to the benefit of the powerful nations of the Western world has been assumed to be the context within which witness to the truth of the Bible will be made in the century ahead. But there are alternative possibilities which need to be recognized. In the first place, what if a world organized for the benefit of the rich and powerful, and in which the suffering of millions of people (many of whom confess Christ as Lord) results in cries of distress which reach into heaven is shown to be *a world on the edge of collapse*? In this case the question cannot simply be, "How to respond to globalization?" but, how might the Bible be read in a situation in which the present economic order implodes? What if the economic crash in the first decade of this century were to be merely the overture for a far more spectacular collapse of the whole system? And what if this were then to result in a situation in which fascism were to reappear, claiming to be the agent of order and the instrument for the salvation of the global economy? Might it even be that the new rulers of the world would claim that their mission included the reinstatement of "Christian values" and the defence of a Christian civilization? What biblical themes might then begin

19. Walter Brueggemann, *Mandate to Difference: An Invitation To The Contemporary Church*. Louisville:Westminster John Knox Press,2007, 193.

to seem important for the church's witness in a context in which the idols of our times, despite having been exposed as lifeless and demonic substitutes for the worship of the true Lord of history, were like the Philistine Dagon, stood back on their feet and accorded ever more frantic devotion?

Secondly, what if the process of globalization which commenced with the political, military and economic expansion of Europe is prevented from immediate collapse by the emergence of the new powers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, a process which might be labelled the "revenge of the margins"? Tom Wright has observed that the need to develop a biblical response to empire arises not simply from the current dominance of American power, but even more from the fact that we may stand on the threshold of a world dominated for the first time in two thousand years by superpowers which have no historic connection to the Judeo-Christian tradition and are likely to view that tradition as a threat.²⁰

So much for the themes of *resistance, critique and the warning of judgement*. We need now to consider the even more significant fact that the biblical writers' critique of the abuse of power and wealth on the part of the empires of the ancient world is the outcome of their knowledge of *a different script in which real freedom and justice is promised to all nations as they come to worship the God who had shown his salvation to Abram and his descendants*. In other words, the destiny of the nations is not that which the empires believe it to be, but rather is to discover justice, freedom and community through the worship and love of the God who from the dawn of history has promised his *shalom* to the world. One of the benefits to come from recent studies in hermeneutics has been the realisation, or perhaps rediscovery, that the Bible contains a "big story." In Kevin Vanhoozer's words, Scripture is not "a rag-bag collection of teachings" but "an integrated drama concerning the unfolding covenant of grace"²¹ That drama commences from the first pages of the Bible and includes texts which have often been overlooked. For example, the "Table of Nations" in Genesis 10 charts the spread of peoples, each with their own language, and identifies urban locations which were later to be subjected to prophetic critique. This text has no known parallel in the ancient world and serves to affirm the theological fact that the entire world, with its diversity of peoples and their cities, is the object of God's mercy. When two chapters later, Abram is promised that "all peoples on earth" will be blessed through

20. Tom Wright, *The Bible and Tomorrow's World* (Crowther Monograph, 4). Oxford: Church Mission Society, 2008, 17.

21. Kevin Vanhoozer, in John G.Stackhouse (ed), *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books,2000, 76.

his faith, the extent of that blessing has already been mapped out in the Table of Nations. Claus Westermann describes this text as “the most forceful and heavily underscored statement of the Bible about the effect of God’s blessing, which extends over the whole earth and the whole of human history”²² This ecumenical vision pervades the Old Testament to a degree often overlooked; it can be traced in the historical books, is clearly present in the prayers of the psalmists, and surfaces repeatedly in prophetic statements concerning “the nations.” After the Babylonian exile the tradition bursts out in the shape of fresh visions anticipating the display of God’s glory “among all nations” and even to “the distant islands” (Is. 66:19)²³

This same language is found on the lips of the risen Christ, except now it forms the mandate for the mission of his followers who are told to “go and make disciples of all nations.” The promise implicit in Genesis 10, and explicit in the call of Abram, has now reached its fulfilment; the turning point of the ages has come and the announcement of salvation, of God’s great shalom, must be made to the entire world. Indeed, this is precisely what happens on the Day of Pentecost when “the wonders of God” are announced in the presence of people “from every nation of the world.” At the close of the New Testament we hear the echo of Genesis 10 again as the author, confined in a Roman penal colony, catches sight of a transformed world in which a numberless multitude “from every nation, tribe, people and language,” have renounced the idols of the empire and come to worship the slain Lamb who is alone worthy to “receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength.”

WORLD CHRISTIANITY AND GLOBALIZATION

What becomes clear from this brief outline of a single biblical theme is that Scripture contains the resources not only to critique the existing form of globalization, but to develop *an alternative vision of the future of the one world, and the one humankind, created by God*. However, it is not easy for Christians who benefit from the existing process of globalization to appreciate or embrace this radical alternative, with the result that, like the church at Laodicea, a nominal adherence to the biblical tradition is often accompanied

22. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11 – A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1984, 528-530.

23. See James Scott, *Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul’s Mission to the Gentiles, With Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians*. Tubingen: JCM Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995.

by a spiritual lukewarmness and a reluctance to risk suffering and loss on account of the confession that Jesus, not Caesar, nor the Free Market, is Lord. Commenting on the situation in North America, Walter Bruggemann says that, although the Bible offers us “an alternative world” shaped by God’s surprising and wonderful newness, the processes of socialization in Western societies have created an ambivalence toward the “strange world” of the Bible which “touches every church member, liberal or conservative, and engrosses every minister of whatever ilk.” As a result, Christians “are characteristically double-minded, standing between two scripts the way Elijah found Israel standing between Baal and YHWH.”²⁴

However, there are new Christian voices being raised from the underside of the globalisation process as the result of what has been called the “shift in the centre of gravity” of the world Christian movement. Those voices, often emerging from the churches of the poor in the slums of the megacities across the Global South, are liable to challenge the dominant globalization script from below, while also revealing to Christians trapped in the ambivalence we have just described the full extent of their captivity and compromise. These are the new “voices of compassion” and, like those we noted earlier, they speak both in solidarity with the victims of globalization and in protest and warning with regard to its beneficiaries. The question is whether they will be heard? Philip Jenkins concludes his important study of the role of the Bible in the churches of the Global South by admitting that the discovery of the dynamism and freshness with which familiar scriptural texts are read among the poor and oppressed is surprising and humbling:

If we live in Western cultures profoundly shaped by Christianity and Christian values over the centuries, we can be startled to watch the transforming effects of the religion on a society, when so often this process is grounded in scriptural texts that have for us lost much of their power to surprise.²⁵

Which leads us to a final comment: one of the most important theological issues which confronts World Christianity in the era of globalization is whether the followers of Christ in both North and South can discover together what it might mean today to confess belief in “one, holy, apostolic and *catholic* church.” Theologians from a wide range of Christian traditions have identified the *catholicity* of the church as an issue of fundamental

24. Bruggemann, *Mandate to Difference*, 201.

25. Philip Jenkins, *The New faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 193.

importance in a context in which John's vision of an ecumenical community of faith drawn from *all nations* is closer to fulfilment than at any previous time in human history. Globalization is thus, not simply a *threat* to faith, but an opportunity to display within history a foretaste of the new humankind made possible through the redemption provided by Christ. As Max Stackhouse has said, "Globalization involves the possibility of a gracious recovery and recasting of the catholicity of the faith."²⁶ That process, which may be long and difficult, is likely to be led by the new "voices of compassion" emerging from the underside of globalization, but Christians from the old heartlands may make significant contributions as they re-read the Bible and discover in a new way what it means today to be ambassadors of the new age in the midst of the old.²⁷

26. Max Stackhouse quoted in Donald Lewis, 'Globalization: The Problem of Definition and Future Areas of Historical Enquiry' in, Mark Hutchinson and Ogbu Kalu, eds., *A Global Faith: Essays on Evangelicalism and Globalization*. Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1998, 39. Stackhouse has edited an important series of volumes under the overall title, *God and Globalization: Theological Ethics and the Spheres of Life*, published by Trinity Press International. See too the important study by the Roman Catholic theologian Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local*. New York: Orbis Books, 2004.

27. The phrase comes from Kevin Vanhoozer, "'One Rule to Rule Them All?'" Theological Method in an Era of World Christianity' in Craig Ott & Harold Netland, eds., *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an era of World Christianity*. Nottingham: Apollos, 2007, p. 125.