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MAX L. STACKHOUSE

Framing the Global Ethos

Abstract: This article summarizes the major themes and perspectives developed in dialogue with scholars and clergy from Asia, Africa, and the North Atlantic region and treated in detail in the four-volume series *God and Globalization* (2000–2007). Here specific attention is given to the tasks of theology and the implicit roles of the church in view of the pervasive dynamics of globalization in every sphere of social life. The article concludes with a proposal regarding the changing vocation of theology amid the new social ecumenicity now taking shape around the world.

I have been concerned with the religious, theological, and ethical meanings of globalization for several years. My concerns have led me to two convictions about theology and social life that have, in turn, led me to a third conviction about the mission of theology. The first conviction is that the cybernetic theory of religion and theology is a necessary corrective to the prevailing sociopsychological theory of them. The cybernetic theory holds that a rich and valid symbol set, rationally ordered and representing a comprehensive worldview, can and does shape cultural and social systems in decisive ways. If we see this theory as valid, every serious theology will also take its relation to society seriously. This theory corrects, however, a view that came into prominence with exegetical methods that treated textual or conceptual meanings as by-products of their Sitz im Leben. Interpretations of religious ideas were seen as rationalizations of the lust for political power, economic advantage, sexual satisfaction, national solidarity, or ethnic dominance. We have learned from

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this legacy and must acknowledge the partial validity of the hermeneutics of suspicion to which it led. But its reductionist tendencies may well have caused us to underestimate the real effects of beliefs and theological doctrines on cultural and social life and to undercut a hermeneutics of trust.

The domination of theology by such sociopsychological presumptions reached its apex in Feuerbach, Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, and was echoed in the work of Foucault and a host of advocates of the secularization thesis. They thought they were disposing of myth, moralism, and dogma by explaining what they were really about. This accent not only shaped Schleiermacher's and Barth's divergent reactions to modernity, but it is today widely accepted by no small number of liberation and communitarian theologians. Ironically, they both see all historically decisive meanings deriving from contextual factors—one embracing them to set the real world against the reactionary church, the other rejecting them to set the real church against the recalcitrant world.

Early versions of these options were challenged by Max Weber in his series of books on the sociology of the world's religions, partly allied with Georg Jellinek and his study of the religious basis of human rights as well as by Ernst Troeltsch in his monumental treatment of social-ethical teachings, and partly allied with Abraham Kuyper and his view of Catholic and Reformed cooperation for social renewal. For all their faults, Weber and Troeltsch agreed that psychosocial and sociohistorical developments influence the ways religious people rationalize their faiths, but they also insisted that religious convictions, sustained by being rationally ordered into theological systems, shape the cultural and social ethos in ways that predispose contexts to form or reform in one way rather than another. We find more recent examples of these efforts to correct the social-scientific reductionism in the Niebuhrs and in the Catholic Social Encyclicals. Compare, for example, H. Richard's *Social Sources of Denominationalism* to his *Kingdom of God in America,* or Reinhold's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* to his *Nature and Destiny of Man* and, if I read them rightly, Leo's *Rerum novarum* to John Paul's *Centesimus annus*.

The cybernetic theory has been applied to civilizational life in recent suggestive studies of globalization by Roland Robertson, Lawrence Harrison, David Landes, Peter Berger, Barbara Crossette, Orlando Patterson, and many others. They all take the religiously formed ethos as a central factor in culture and thus as the most important single factor in the shaping of souls and societies. Or, rather, they argue that it is so if it is inherently coherent, emotionally compelling, and intimately connected to the key systems of civil society with adequate feedback loops to find out both what is going on in these systems

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and where corrections are needed in the symbol set or in the social systems to make them viable. In short, religious worldviews can frame the ethos and guide institutions to which they are connected. This is a way of arguing in post-Enlightenment terms that theology can and should defend its role as the queen of both the descriptive and normative sciences if the contexts of life are to be understood and shaped. In this way, power analysis is taken to a new level. Or to put it another way for the emerging global ethos, it is a post-postmodern way of speaking of how a master narrative can and should be connected to universal history. I will return to this theme later.

This leads me to my second conviction: there is no greater issue before us today than the fact that a new transactional public ethos is emerging in the complex dynamics of globalization. Religiously laden and legitimated by an indirect but distinct and discernable theological symbol set, this new ethos is essentially ethical in nature and is taking shape in an international cluster of civil society institutions that have outstripped political developments. If this is so, as I believe it is, major implications follow for the possible emergence of a worldwide civilization and for our task as theologians in regard to it. I am arguing that this new ethos has been generated and is being framed and guided by religious convictions, particularly those of Judaism and Christianity, in ways that we theologians and clergy have not adequately acknowledged. Is it possible that we have been so deeply influenced by our recent contextual reductionisms that we have failed to see how the grand theological traditions have been sown into, and thus are giving rise to, our global context? It is true that Christendom, national creeds, and enforced confessions have largely been cast into the dustbin of history, and that national sovereignty is rapidly eroding, but that does not mean that theology has lost its power. We may well have an emergent, pervasive, and powerful ethos, made of partial incarnations of Judeo-Christian motifs, that is reshaping our world and that needs both theologically guided critique and cultivation.

Of course, this does not guarantee that the cybernetic symbol set that is now being embedded in the globalizing ethos is a good or effective theology. But it does suggest that theology leaves more profound footprints in social history than theologians sometimes recognize or acknowledge as their responsibility. It also suggests that, in principle, bad effects are amenable to the principle of *semper reformanda,* or as other traditions have it, to the "development of doctrine." After all, there are many complex issues before us that are forcing us to modulate our understandings of some religious symbol sets. I think of ecological peril, nuclear threats, militant conflicts, racist and sexist domination, continued poverty, rampaging epidemics, irresponsible management, and

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failed economic ideologies. Many religious bodies and courageous theologians seek to address these by prophetic critique of national policies. But my main point here is this: these disturbing particular problems are all taking place within the comprehending dynamics of globalization. That demands a theology that can illuminate, address, and frame the emerging global ethos where it needs regrounding on a universalistic basis. Our situation requires a constructive catholic, ecumenical theology with an evangelical, reforming, apologetic edge, and perhaps more than a touch of Pentecostal zeal.

Many, to be sure, believe that globalization essentially is driven by economic interests. That economic interests are powerful social forces I have no doubt, and many ideologies offer a version of the golden rule that comes from "the gospel of Mammon": Whoever has the gold rules! But that view has been around for centuries, and neither it nor the simple critique of it has been able to generate an enduring or just civilization or to account for the fact that we cannot understand any civilization without recognizing the power of religion at its core. Besides, contemporary globalization is new. My inquiry into why it is taking its present shape and reorganizing economic forces the way it does convinces me that attributing globalization to economic causes alone is too limited. It only confuses effects with causes.

Globalization, I have come to believe, is a massive ethos shift that fosters the growth of new worldwide technological, communication, and regulative developments. These reflect an emerging moral infrastructure and bear the possibility of a new transactional civil society. This civil society increasingly comprehends and surpasses all previous national, ethnic, political, economic, and cultural contexts in a new mix of complexity. This development portends a cosmopolitan possibility that modernity promised but could not deliver. Its spiritual core was too weak. But the spread of constitutional democracy and human rights, of artistic styles and scientific education, of rule by international law and new agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the World Health Organization, and the policies of humanitarian NGOs now intervening in all parts of the globe are manifestations of the new ethos—all without a world government. These developments are beyond the control of any single nation-state, as the cooperative, multinational attempts to address the current economic crisis also show.

At this point I offer a brief excursus on the concept of civil society, for that is one of the empirical markers of the global ethos that led to my second conviction. The novel patterns of a radically extended civil society make certain economic changes possible and others necessary, and make national policies

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less effective. They also leave systems in transition open to corruption and exploitation, even as they make the growth of the world's middle classes more likely, extending to many peoples who were long desperately poor an exodus from enslaving fatalism, subsistence, and powerlessness. Some, famously in India and China, and increasingly in Indonesia and Brazil, for instance, are succeeding and competing with the comparatively inflated status of the Western middle classes. These changes enable wider global participation without homogenization. I think it works like this: in the emerging ethos, deeply stamped by Christian influences, new participants usually adopt the ethical patterns of life that formed or legitimated the desired results and then selectively adapt the religious patterns that generated the ethos to their needs and pre-understandings of what is sacred—which makes for hybrid cultures and a richer menu of theological options. This amplifies the spiritual core of the ethos, which is refined by theological critique and reflection over time.

Because of the significance of religious, ethical, and cultural transformations such as these, any substantive critique or embrace of these global developments will demand attention to a theology able to elucidate, form, or reform the inner moral fabric of the globalization process so that its ethos can be adopted in various cultures and be adapted by multiple societies. Some of this I, with others, have tried to address in the series *God and Globalization*. The evidence and interpretive models we developed in that series strongly suggest that a major part of the impetus for the globalizing developments derive from the ways in which Christian thought has shaped a transactional ethos that has transformed previous cultural and social institutions and is now transforming patterns of life everywhere. Adherents to other traditions often see this as the effect of a Western secularization that destroys what they see as holy. But secularization by itself cannot be praised or blamed for how this works. If our vision is wide and deep enough, we can see that the secularization of some dimensions of social life is the result of theological development. Not all that is called holy or sacred is so, and it is an old story that some ideas of the divine get demoted if they face defensible claims about what is, in all likelihood, truly divine.

The question, thus, is no longer whether religions have shaped the formation of societies and civilizations in concert with other forces. That is beyond serious doubt. Instead, the key question is whether religion has—or better, which religious possibilities have—the power to shape complex civilizations and thus should guide our thinking and action with regard to the dynamics of globalization. The central theological issue behind these questions is whether the God pointed to by the Bible, the One whom Christians know through Jesus

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Christ, the One who is active within and among us as the Holy Spirit, is in any way prompting, inviting, chastening, allowing, or otherwise involved in these globalizing realities. I am inclined to defend an answer in the affirmative, even if others have doubts. But those who hold that God has something to do with creation, providence, and salvation should find it blushingly difficult to argue the case in the negative.

This significance of Christianity in regard to globalization forces us to reflect on our relative assessments of the other great missionizing religions, Buddhism and Islam, and reminds us of the great societies stamped by Confucian and Hindu ethical and spiritual philosophies—all of which are growing, some at exponential rates, and each of which has a different sense of the "divine destiny" that is to be pursued socially worldwide. The alternatives offered by these convictions and topics continue to haunt me, and I keep trying to refine and improve what we did in the *God and Globalization* series in the face of new experience and studies. Thus, I take up a few issues in this area as an invitation for others to speak to these issues in ways that may correct, amplify, refine, or surpass what we have tried to suggest.

Let me extend my excursus a bit historically. I believe that the globalizing developments we face signal a change as significant as the shifts from animistic hunting and gathering societies to the old polytheistic martial empires, then to henotheistic agricultural-feudal systems with royal governments, and to the multiple Erastian civil religions of urban-centered industrial nation-states, now being replaced by what Philip Bobbitt in *The Shield of Achilles* calls a "global society of market states." The primary purpose of these states is to stabilize, support, and regulate those corporations that house the educational, medical, financial, productive, trade, research, and ecological systems of civil society for the sake of providing opportunities for all people to flourish. This purpose, Bobbitt suggests, now equals or surpasses the central purposes of the nation-state: internal law and order and national defense that allow a sovereign state and its culture maximum freedom. Each shift was prompted by religious and ethical transformations in interaction with contextual factors and was marked by crises, conflict, and anomie as things changed, but it nevertheless rendered a new level of civilizational inclusion.

If he is mostly right, we can add what he implies but does not accent—that both the reigning theological worldview and the practical material results predisposed the shift to be approved and refined or resisted. Some religions seem to have had, while others lacked, the theological resources to address the perplexities of existence, to induce and morally guide these changes, and to correct, modulate, or restrain pathological aspects of them. The most successful

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are able to borrow from other cultures and to generate new doctrines or reinterpret old ones that inhibited threatening possibilities in material, sociopolitical, and cultural life and gave legitimation to the more promising developments. This is what is needed to form the moral infrastructure of what could become a new, worldwide, federated civil society that would be decidedly dynamic, incredibly complex, and inevitably contentious as it develops. This requires not only a way to map the newly forming context but also a theology of history large enough to give it direction.

Notably, this partially formed global civil society is developing without being under the control of any state, as I mentioned. To be sure, more developed lands, especially the United States, Great Britain and the other countries of the European Union, Japan, and increasingly China, India, plus Indonesia, Brazil, and possibly Russia and South Africa, are rapidly trying to adapt to the changes demanded, taking advantage of the opportunities they, most importantly, view as spiritually and ethically valid, and are becoming regional superpowers and global players. In the process they are both reinforcing the global developments and demanding greater regulation of corporate behavior through the international legal arrangements to which they commit themselves.

China, where I have spent a number of summers in conferences on comparative religious ethics and development, and also visiting numerous religious, economic, and village centers, is a particularly important example in this area. As anticipated by South Korea and to a degree by Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, a massive "new cultural revolution" is taking place, in spite of the economic downturn. The people and their leaders are adopting international standards in many areas of thought and life—including the fruits of Christian ethics and theologies—and seeing the phenomenal growth of the church as the mother of an independent civil society. These they are "stamping with Chinese characteristics" drawn from Tao, Confucian, Buddhist, and Maoist philosophies, just as Western Christian ethics and theologies historically adopted and adapted elements from Greek, Roman, German, Slavic, French, and British thought. The new ethos that is being formed is pulling millions out of poverty while the young see hope in the new developments—even if very large numbers of people are still caught in economic and cultural stagnation and the fuller realization of human rights and democracy stands only in the future.

India, too, where I have been a visiting professor fairly regularly in sabbaticals and leaves since 1973, is globalizing at an amazing rate. It is viewed by many as the next great cultural, political, and regional superpower that may eventually surpass China because of its more democratic traditions, the indirect Christianizing influence of the British Raj, the disproportionate influence

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of indigenous Christian populations, especially in education, and the growing willingness among the burgeoning middle classes to adapt Christian-shaped cultural influences into their civil society. These are present in spite of persistent patterns of caste discrimination, the rise of a militant Hinduva nationalism, conflicts with Islam, and a huge, if declining, underclass of Dalit populations, which seek access to globalizing possibilities.

Further, other countries of Asia, Latin America, and increasingly Africa are also adopting the worldviews and values indispensable for the web of societal development, especially where evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic forms of essentially Catholic movements are bringing them to people long marginalized. In these places, new forms of theological development are becoming socially embodied in globalizing lifestyles that they are fusing with traditional cultures in ways that contribute to the ethos under construction.

In short, the current cultural and social hegemony of the West is no longer identical with political imperialism or economic neocolonialism, nor is it identical with globalization. The temptations of imperialism and colonialism can more accurately be seen as the results of those forms of debased Christian worldviews that have become separated from, or even contemptuous of, their deeper roots and wider ethical contours. What were formerly religiously based worldviews thereby lose their ability to accurately recognize and actively revitalize the symbol sets that could correct these short-visioned but high-energy systems—especially political and economic. Thus, these systems become autonomous and self-serving. The hegemony that appears to be Americanism or capitalism gone wild is in fact a theologically decapitated set of vacuous cybernetic meanings. The formative and regulative theological symbol sets are also cut off from the systems of cultural and social existence and become gnostic-like speculations. This allows "normlessness" to guide key parts of the operating systems. On this point we could cite recent attempts to legitimate violations of human rights by politically engineered legal rationalizations, or the dissociative behavior of auto and AIG executives, who failed to recognize the effects of their directives and then claimed undue rewards for their incompetence. The emerging recognition by the top business schools of their failure, as reported in the press, is telling. They sent 40 percent of their graduates into the world of finance over the last generation and used to brag about the fact that all the leading companies were run by their former students.[1] Insofar as the cultures of these social institutions no longer consider any normative theological

1. Kelley Holland, "Is It Time to Retrain B-Schools?" *New York Times*, March 15, 2009, BU1.

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perspective as worthy of consideration, they have lost their sense of vocation and its ethic of trusteeship and stewardship, and the systems they direct have fallen into drift.

The fault is not entirely theirs. While there is no shortage of theologians who are contemptuous of modern business, what theologians can we name who have attempted constructively to engage these professionals and their vocations as they work under our new global conditions? I have sought them out and they are few. If no renewal is possible, the global civil society that now hosts these institutions is likely to lose its potential, as critics already claim is the case without themselves knowing how to alter course. If this course is not altered, sooner or later these emerging institutions will join the rubble of dead civilizations and lost faiths, and great will be their fall.

What then should members of the American Theological Society do? And what about our colleagues in the theological schools and departments of religion, or the clergy and the people to whom they minister? What is the vocation of theology in a globalizing era? My primary answer is that we must analyze the competing metaphysical-moral visions at work in the global infrastructure and be bold enough to suggest which are or are not theologically and morally laudable, and which can and cannot frame the ethos for a global civilization in which we are called to show the possibility of redemption under conditions of sin.

There are some historical precedents for this sort of theologizing. Some of them appeared in the age of Constantine, some with the Gregorian reforms, some with the Reformation, and today some are present in the promising movements toward a "theology of religions." Further, the historic missionizing religions, namely, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, plus some movements in periods of Hinduism and Confucianism—what the Japanese call the "going religions" in contrast to the "staying religions" of tribal and territorial faiths—all had a universal message, not merely a message for a people or a regime or a region. In the days of the old Silk Road, scholars developed critical and apologetic evaluations of various views as they encountered other religions and empires while following the caravan treks formed to foster spiritual quests and material interests. For centuries, theologies and pieties accompanied goods and greed, poetry and weaponry, musical artistry and technical craft, and challenged the sufficiency of material interests and political power. The goods, weapons, and handicrafts eventually decayed, the empires fell, but civilizations were enriched. These could be considered among the first signs of a wider and deeper globalization to come.

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Centuries later, new technologies were fostered by the faith-driven views that nature was fallen and in need of repair, that a novum and thus progress in history is possible, and that social transformations could more nearly approximate the promised New Jerusalem. Taking advantage of clipper ships and then steamships, missionaries accelerated the exploration of the continents, stimulated the study of anthropology and comparative religions and cultures, and spread the hopes of Christianity, the rule of law, mass education, and new technologies.

It must be said that such also enabled the expansion of slavery into the New World, which was already widely practiced in the old, but more importantly it also invited cross-cultural contact in unprecedented ways. Priests and preachers, educators and doctors, soldiers and administrators brought faith-shaped perspectives on God and humanity, new interpretations of the universe and the earth, new means of nurturing the young and curing the sick, and new modes of organizing the common life. The colonizers and the missionaries cooperated in much and brought much with them from their home culture. At times it obscured their intended message and almost overwhelmed indigenous societies. But the receiving peoples adopted only portions of what was offered and only selectively modulated their preexisting beliefs, practices, and social patterns. They brought their older faiths with them into their new religious and cultural fields of vision, and this made wider visions of society and humanity more common. The theological-ethical elements prompted their struggles against slavery, imperial domination, and colonial exploitation. But they adopted the faith and the church and from these bases new institutions were created, much like the early church—clinics, orphanages, schools for girls, centers of refuge for the beset and the poor. New synthetic worldviews were created, and it became more possible to speak of worldwide aspirations for human rights, government under law, and new hopes for economic development and for ultimate salvation—most often in indigenous but Christianized cultural terms.

Today's globalization is another such wave of development, a Joachite epochal change marked by the formation of new religious and cultural syntheses but also by the technological artifacts from jumbo jets and the Internet to new modes of geo-, genetic, and social engineering. The increased ability to control the biophysical world is matched by newly created channels of interaction and opinion that are different from what is approved or expected in our communities of origin. Such developments disorient established views of what is natural, of how we think of time and space, and what the normative

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guidelines for life are and should be. Thus, they force all those who do not see us caught up in a nihilistic breakdown to ask what values, principles, and purposes should drive our responses to globalization's promise and peril. What can revivify the residual ethic of love and justice that is buried in its promise but disconnected from its normative symbol set?

Answers are proposed to this question by the dramatic resurgence of old world religions and new prophecies, with many wanting to determine the destiny of globalization, while others wish to stop it by apocalyptic violence and still others seek privileged enclaves of sanctity from which, they say, they can see the hellish self-destruction of globalization innocently—the communitarian form of "rapture." Such developments suggest that a widespread quest for a guiding ethical and spiritual worldview is afoot, one that can attract loyalty and render a comprehensive vision of morals and meaning for souls and society.

This matter of loyalties, of a quest for a normative worldview in which to place our confidence, leads us back to the question of faith and theology. If it is true that globalization has been formed substantially by the mix of religion with social developments in many spheres of life, we can hardly deny that the result forces the question of their relationship again. What is universal enough to guide our thoughts, prayers, and ethical actions about globalization if it is not the result of the naked play of impersonal, amoral, nonreligious, or purely material interests? If globalization bears the imprint, and owes its fundamental character to a Christian cybernetic, what then is, has been, can be, and should be the relation of this faith to this global formation of a new worldwide civil society? An adequate answer, I am arguing, must be theological.

As I have tried to articulate more fully elsewhere, it is precisely in the midst of cultural, social, political, economic, and technological life that a thematic religious ethos was worked out over centuries and woven into the very fabric of our common life:

- A God who comprehends and supersedes all other authorities but providentially calls, commissions, and blesses the spheres of life through which the global ethos is being formed.
- A this-worldly work ethic that calls all of us to professional responsibility and to a rationalization of production, distribution, and consumption able to serve all people.
- An open polity, which we call democracy, as worked out in the councils and covenants of church life, in ways that led to the legitimation of the constitutional rule of law.

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- Human rights, based in the belief that each is made in the image of God, that all are endowed by the Creator with these rights and abilities that each must be free to actuate.
- Free incorporated communities, distinct from tribe or regime, race or class, working under just laws and for the common good, that can be trustees of the material necessities of life.
- Nature as created by God, thus good but not holy, thus incomplete or distorted and subject to stewardly dominion, making technological development possible and necessary.
- The promise of the triune God that humanity's ultimate destiny is to be a New Jerusalem, a complex civilization into which all the peoples of the earth can bring their gifts.
- The marks of grace as elements in a theology of history able to frame a global ethos.

All these notions and more are among the decisive symbol sets, indeed the basic public theological beliefs that derive from biblical and Christian doctrinal resources and the study of how they have substantively shaped our history. Such faith-based ideas may not have been held by all branches of the Christian tradition in the same measure, but these are the ones that became regnant in the ethos that fostered the promising aspects of modernization and now globalization. The problem is that these ideas are now seldom recognized by today's political, economic, scientific, technological, educational, or legal leaders, and where they are tacitly accepted their roots are seldom noted. Indeed, they are sometimes pilloried by clergy who are thus unable to develop and reform them where they are residually present.

Clearly these ideas did not come from Taoist or Confucian, Hindu or Buddhist, Islamic or tribal religions, although some parallels exist and are being exhumed from various traditions and celebrated by those in cultures that seek to adopt or adapt to the globalizing patterns of life and its ethos. And as Christianity has spread around the world, new religious developments are appearing—some rather wan and fragile, others quite robust and promising—often forming new syntheses with the cultural and social presuppositions partly shaped by non-Christian religions. In short, the really existing dynamics of globalization cannot be grasped or guided without theologically studying the relationship of faiths to cultures, cultures to societies, and societies to the formation of a new public—a worldwide civil society from which political, economic, and theological developments cannot be isolated.

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To expand on that idea, the recent interdisciplinary focus on civil society is anticipated by a long history of debate about its nature and character, which has implications for our understanding of theology and its ability to address contemporary life. Here is a definition I have gleaned from a recent set of essays, *Civil Society and Government,* edited by Nancy L. Rosenblum and Robert C. Post: Civil society is that set of voluntary associational communities which both perform distinct functions in a civilization and actualize its ethos. It delegates, through parties, advocacy, interest groups, and moral movements, both legitimacy and authority to states, and it retains the right to withdraw that legitimacy and to dismiss its government. Thus, it is the body made up of many distinct organs within which ultimate political power resides. In this sense, "civil society" refers to most organized spheres of human communal action except government itself: churches, businesses, schools, clubs, unions, media, charities, libraries, artistic groups, professional bodies, and other non-governmental organizations by which people relate to each other and form a moral consensus, usually legitimated by the dominant religious symbol set. Civil society is in this sense a cluster concept, with many spheres held together by a faith-based ethic at its center.

Such a contemporary definition derives from a tradition that includes Althusius, Locke, de Tocqueville, von Gierke, and their heirs who are impressed by the indirect influences that religious groups, especially theology and the church, have had on the body politic and on the moral character of the citizenry. This view differs from an older view, present still in many places, where the idea of *societas civilis* refers to the polis of ancient Greece, the imperium of Rome, and the nation-state of the Enlightenment as treated variously by Rousseau, Ferguson, and Hegel. This older definition views civil society as the politically organized state that, by virtue of its monopoly on the use of violent means of enforcement, legitimates, authorizes, comprehends, and guides all other institutions. These views clash when we ask whether society makes politics or politics makes society, or whether a public theology makes society or political theology makes religion.

The older view, reasserted now in some Islamist, Hindu, and Buddhist versions as well as in some Christian fundamentalist views (since its other recent, secular epigones—fascism and communism—have died), lauded a politically comprehending, sacred regime that has a duty to rule over all other groups and institutions, with the patriarchal family being the "natural" microcosm of the larger political form. This implies a political theory of society. The contemporary view, by contrast, presumes a social theory of politics rather than a

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political theory of society. However, under changing conditions there may be times when some sector of the civil society fails and is in need of repair. It then becomes the duty of the political order to lead the healthier spheres of the civil society to intervene in the failed sphere and set it right so that it can operate with integrity. That is why, with regard to the economic crisis of the moment, for example, the civil societies that play the largest global role stand between democratic capitalist and social democratic policies, with debates between a little more of this and a little less of that.

It may be useful to ask whence this social theory derived, for it is little studied by theologians. It does not seem to be the natural logic of history. Instead, historically, the founding and formation of the church nurtured a new and decisive kind of institution beyond regime, kinship, and class. From Paul on, the mission of the church was the reorganization of responsible freedom and the recentering of associational loyalty as well as the creation of social organizations little known in the pagan world. It was the formation of a covenanted *ecclesia* of worship and service, defined by a religious worldview based in faith in Jesus Christ and in the sovereignty of the triune God. This is the mother of civil society, until recently seldom acknowledged by social theorists or political scientists but today accented in new studies of the relationship of the world religions to democracy.

This social novum established a new sense of identity and gradually created new social spaces to form and reform other human associations that, over time, became not only the congregation and the monastery but also the university, the hospital, the council, the corporation, and the professional associations that nurtured accountable vocations dedicated to incarnating a divinely given ethic in these organs of the common ethos, as has been traced by historians of law. From these roots came the clusters of organizations and practices that are the indicators of a vibrant prepolitical civil society. In cultures where the church is absent or weak, civil society is fragile, and people continue to live under regime-based or kin-based systems. In cultures where the civil society has forgotten or forsaken its transcendent foundations, the fragmentation of cybernetic connections renders all institutions merely vehicles for achieving individualist or special group interests. If that is so, and if it is also true that no great civilization has ever endured without a religious vision at its core, as I believe to be the case, it is our task as theologians to help develop a theology capable of giving renewed moral and spiritual guidance to the emerging global civil society.

For these reasons, I have come to the conviction that contemporary theology desperately needs a new theology of missions, one based in a renewed

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vision of the mission of theology. We are commanded to go into all the world. Our forebears did so, and they framed a transformative ethos in many places. As a result, the whole world is increasingly present to us in new ways, and the basis for framing this new ethos cannot be neglected by us and left to the cultured despisers of the theological traditions.

What post-nationalistic, post-postmodern message do we have for the ethos of the emerging global civil society with its multiplicity of cultures, societies, institutions, and dynamics? My view is this: God's grace as it is given to us in creation, providence, and salvation offers the most theologically trustworthy way to be oriented to the New Jerusalem. God alone can sustain nature, render history meaningful, provide salvation, and point us toward the Heavenly City and bring it to us, but it is the task of faithful theology to understand the importance of this grace in our global circumstances. I urge the view, discovered by many a missionary, that globalization, with all its ambiguities, is a promising manifestation of that grace.

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