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The Christian Revolution 3: Fraternity

Michael Jensen

I

In this, the third of the ‘Christian Revolution’ series, we will ask whether the dream of peaceful human unity is best served by secular liberalism; and, in keeping with the pattern thus far deployed, propose a superior theological alternative. I use the term ‘fraternity’ to indicate that which promises a true and lasting peace and co-habitation amongst human beings. In many of its forms, secular western liberalism claims to deliver (or even to have already delivered) global peace and prosperity. We will begin with an analysis of the phenomenon called ‘globalisation’ and its relationship to secular western liberalism.

What will ever unite humanity? Is there any hope for human beings to set aside their tribes, their differences, and their cultures and find a meaningful and lasting peace? Is there a table at which all nations can share? The ideal of universal human fraternity is one of the noblest ever conceived. The late Colin Gunton noted that features of liberal order are so intentioned: Is not some concern for unity at the heart of both a quest for rationality and a desire for the peaceful ordering of human relations in society?¹

Secular western liberalism is a strategy for the salvation of humankind from violence, both within states and between them. It reflects the deep desire that all human beings might live together as family, each with the other as another self.² It hopes that we might live as one, not as many; united, not divided; striving for the mutual good of all, and leaving aside the causes for which we kill.

It could be that in the process identified as ‘globalisation’ this dream is being realised. ‘Globalisation’ is one of the most controversial social phenomena of the millennial era. Described as the ‘emerging and homogenizing culture that tends to impact individuals and societies in all parts of the world’,³ there is little dispute over that fact that globalisation is occurring—just as to whether it is desirable or not. ‘Globalisation’ describes, for example, the product of the felt ‘shrinking’ of the world as a result of developments in technology, the increased ability of multi-national corporations to reach every corner of the

earth with their products, and the mass migration and intermingling of people groups in megacities. In the opinion of Max L. Stackhouse ‘the larger reality is that *the whole world is becoming one place*, an inclusive field of spaces, peoples and activities’.⁴ Positive accounts of globalisation view it as producing a feeling that the world is becoming unified—it is available to be explored and experienced quickly and without much effort. The freeing of markets allows for consumers and sellers to transcend national boundaries. ‘God is in globalisation,’ writes Stackhouse;⁵ in fact, he suggests that it is a side effect of the missionary genius of Christianity. Could it be that the epoch of globalisation represents a gathering of the nations in unity on a scale about which the Bible only prophesies? Is this finally a genuine achievement of human fraternity and catholicity—a *salvation* of humanity?

More precisely, globalisation may be interpreted as a secular western liberal adaptation of a Christian vision. The linchpin of globalisation is a liberal view of market economies, so that trade barriers are minimized if not removed (as they were, for example, between Australia and the USA in 2004-5). Free trade can have the positive effect in small economies of breaking down the wealth and power of oligarchies in favour of the majority,⁶ which has the apparent effect of advancing western liberal values.

This of course worked in Eastern Europe where religious life had been by and large suppressed, but has had limited success in the Islamic bloc. It was relatively easy to dazzle the citizens of the gray cities of the communist bloc with consumer goods and so to turn them against their governments. As President George W. Bush’s 2005 inauguration address revealed, the emancipatory master narrative of freedom is also being applied globally (and, ironically, by force if necessary). Globalisation means the universal application of liberal values. Human fraternity—a secular catholicity—will be achieved in the end because Western culture is assumed to be the universal—or, at least, the universally desired—civilization. This is a soteriology without an eschatology: in other words, the ‘end of history’ is to be proclaimed from *within* history. In other words, what we may readily observe with secular western liberalism is a secular form of post-millennialism.

Yet (local) religion and (global) liberty are often in conflict. There are fractures in the global human community. We are part of a race at war with itself. Even

Francis Fukuyama, buoyant about the ‘end of history’ in 1989, was much more pessimistic in 1992, complaining that—

...the broad acceptance of liberalism, political or economic, by a large number of nations will not be sufficient to eliminate differences between them based on culture, differences which will undoubtedly become more pronounced as ideological cleavages are muted.⁷

Moreover, the cracks that have appeared at the turn of the millennium are more religious and cultural than they are economic. It is not just that some people are richer than others, it is that they possess vastly different ways of making sense of the world.⁸ These surface cracks reveal deeper divisions that are centuries old and quite profound. Samuel P. Huntington divides the planet into nine blocs—Western (US), Orthodox, Islamic, Hindu, Confucian, Japanese, Buddhist, Latin American and African.⁹ Further, as these great tectonic plates shift, there are earthquakes—as the secular Western way of thinking with its instrumentality and its pragmatism grows more powerful and influential, it has clashed violently against each of the others.

Several of Huntington’s blocs are explicitly religious rather than ethnic or economic. As Scott Thomas (writing with some prescience prior to September 11, 2001) argues, the global resurgence in religion is deeply troubling to the western liberal mindset (for example, see Fukuyama’s concerned comment above). It challenges the universalism of western culture to the core. Further, under a liberal conception of the relations between states, the only common ethical discourse is that of the Enlightenment rationalism of the west; but it is doubtful that this is adequate for a cosmopolitan morality in a variegated world.¹⁰ For example, the discourse of ‘human rights’ is couched in terms acceptable in the Western academy, but uncertain of succeeding under conditions of radical pluralism. As Thomas writes—

The main political project of liberal internationalism, the search for a cosmopolitan ethic rooted in the Enlightenment rationalism of the West, can no longer be sustained in the multicultural, postmodern, post-secular world that has been developing since the end of the cold war.¹¹

A typical liberal dilemma is raised by feminist concern at limitations, on religious grounds, of what are held to be the universal rights of women.¹² However, western liberals usually prefer the global value over the local. As

O'Donovan notes: 'Late-modern liberalism accordingly has followed the path of devaluing natural communities in favour of those created by acts of will.'¹³

Globalisation is not the realization of a liberal utopia. The rise of the blocs has also led to the rise of the nations: smaller ethnic groups vying for an identity at least, or better, a seat at the table of nations; attempting to challenge the accidents of history—the drawing of borders and the management of empires. However, these smaller peoples are powerless before the blocs; and so resort to violence in order to assert themselves. We could name many examples: the Kurds in Iraq, the Basques in Spain, and the Chechens in Russia are but three. At an even smaller level within all the other groupings, smaller (comm)unities are engaged in struggle with one another. Further, though the great urban centres of the world have been the sites of a great immigrant and refugee experiment—a great in-gathering of the nations—the process has had the effect of reinvigorating national (and racial) identity within western states. The forces of history have conspired to cross-pollinate humanity, though it has been and continues to be a very painful process.

So at every level, the human striving for fellowship is under a cloud. Salvation from the turbulence of the times has most certainly not been assured by secular western liberalism. The liberal appeal to a 'universal' set of values is unable properly to transcend particular and local interests except by force, which threatens to undo its authority altogether.¹⁴ The attempt to coerce global allegiance to the liberal metanarrative of emancipation is doomed to fail, or, succeeding, to become a violently twisted parody of itself. Though asserting itself as the 'sole and total order of human life,'¹⁵ secular western liberalism has failed to achieve that order.

II

The alternative story of human salvific fraternity is narrated in the Scriptures. As Cavanaugh notes, the primeval narrative of Genesis 1–11 illustrates the fragmentation of human community despite the purposes for which men and women were so evidently made.¹⁶ Genesis 2–3 explains that human beings have a fraternity according to their created flesh. Eve is so called because she is 'the mother of all the living' (Gen. 3:20): all human beings are thus the children of this original couple (theologically speaking), brothers and sisters in Adam. Even more deeply, they share together as children of God. As the image

of a relational God, people are made for fellowship with others: to know and be known, to love and be loved.

However, the first human brotherhood ends with fratricide. The consequences of the curse continue to be worked out in the life of the first prodigal son, Cain.¹⁷ Wandering the earth, and afraid that he will be murdered, he founds the first city and names it after his son, Enoch (Gen. 4:17). Moreover, the descendants of Cain become not only the ancestors of the nomadic peoples, but also the founders of music and technology—Jubal and Tubal-cain—all under the ambivalent mark of Cain. The spread of humanity away from the garden seems at least following this genealogy to be in flight from that aboriginal human scene. The murderous and vengeful song of Lamech to his two wives continues the pattern (vv. 23-24):

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice
 you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:
 I have killed a man for wounding me,
 a young man for striking me.
 If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
 truly Lamech seventy-seven fold.

The original purpose of the city, as Genesis portrays it, is protection.¹⁸ The walls of the city protected against the ravages of bandits and wild tribes, or from vigilante justice. It enabled the growth of economic prosperity in safety, and the specialisation of roles. Yet, soon, as the city grew in power and influence, economically and militarily, it became an attractive alternative to worship of the true God. Ancient cities had their own deities. The ultimate mythic example of this ‘titanism of imperial pretensions’¹⁹ is of course described in the tale of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9.

Not only is this a tightly-woven story explaining the confusion of the tongues of man, it is also as sharp a piece of satire as there is in the Bible.²⁰ The pretensions of the builders of this ancient World Trade Centre are mocked to scorn: made of bricks (not superior stone), for a start (11:3), and so puny that God has to come down out of heaven to even see it (11:5).²¹ The single language of human beings enabled them to concoct a plan that contradicts the plan of God.²² It concentrates people in one spot rather than spreading them out over the earth, contrary to their calling as humans to fill the earth (Gen.

1:28). The tower in the centre of the city ‘reaches to the heavens’ (or so it is planned: 11:4)—a marked symbol of human arrogance in thinking they can at least make some kind of ladder into the place of God and ‘make a name for themselves’ (11:4). As David Clines sees it, ‘like the eating of the forbidden fruit, the tower-building may be an assault on heaven, an attempt at self-divinization.’²³

Yhwh says in 11:6: ‘nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them’; and his solution is ingenious: confounding the tongues, forever impeding human communication. However, their unity was not proper to their creatureliness; and opposed to Yhwh himself. Their disunity was to be a sign of their dependence on God, and of the continued failure of human unifying projects.

It is as if the final fracturing of the curse has been completed: relationship with God is broken, with nature it is broken, between the genders it is broken and now the wider human community itself is broken. Human creativity, labour and ingenuity have been exercised for purposes that are not God’s purposes. Humankind was created for harmonious living together, and yet exists in a state of enduring struggle.²⁴ The genealogical lists of Genesis 5 witnessing to the familial bonds of the whole human race are undone as the race is scattered and divided: ‘... now humankind is no longer one ‘people’ or ‘kin-group’ (עַם 11:6), but ‘nations’ (גוֹיִם 10:32).’²⁵ What is manifest in human history here receives a theological analysis in terms of the human will-to-power and Yhwh’s judgement on it.

The primeval narratives provide the necessary context for the Abrahamic covenant. To Abraham and the laughing Sarah comes God’s promise to make a new family of God, and to establish them with blessing in a chosen place (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-22). Yhwh’s election of Abraham and his descendents does not compromise his absolute sovereignty: he chooses the people of Israel as his סְגֻלָּה (‘treasured possession’) from among all the earth’s peoples, for it all belongs to him (Exod. 19:15). *Torah* given them to shape their life in the land marks them out as a people who live together with God in their midst. In their political life, judgement is freely given to them, but rule is only given as a concession, for Yhwh is their King (see Deut. 16:8-17:20; see also 1 Sam. 8).²⁶ O’Donovan’s exposition of the Old Testament theme of salvation is extremely apposite here.²⁷ The initiative belongs to Yhwh in his

relationship with Israel, as their saviour and their king. He delivers the people from the hands of their enemies, often counter to human odds. The great victories won by Yhwh were a sign of his favour and his צדקה ('righteousness', 'justice' or 'vindication'). The salvation of the people was a vindication of them in a global court (Ps. 98:2) and for future generations (Ps. 71:15-18). The context of the exile makes the prayer for salvation in terms of vindication all the more prominent and now cast in terms of the 'public rehabilitation of a disgraced and humiliated people', which is the great theme of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 45:8, 46:13, 51:5-8, 56:1, 61:10, 62:1).²⁸ For Ezekiel, this rehabilitation is a matter of whole-scale revivification. The drama of the vision of the dry bones (Ezek. 37:1-14) is an indication that a whole new people will be raised out of the bones of the old.

Yet, as Paul read the story first in Galatians 4 and then in Romans 4, this new people was not to be united in DNA and the sharing of flesh-and-blood parents, but Abraham's descendents in the Spirit, by faith: '...in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith' (Gal. 3:26). As he explains in Romans 5:13-21, the new race of people—Jew *and* Gentile—are to be cut from the cloth of Christ. This of course Paul demonstrates in the course of explaining that the gospel of Jesus has come to the Gentile as well as the Jew, to the nations as well as to Israel. The old dividing wall between the two kinds of people had been torn down, and a new fellowship of people established: indeed, a new race entirely. For example, we present the language of Ephesians 2:13ff:

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace....

Here is a vision for the healing of the fractures in humanity: not merely a war without guns or an overlapping consensus, but finally a true and lasting peace, because there is a new unity—a unity in Christ. Markus Barth calls it 'the political result of the Messiah's mission and work'.²⁹ Those who were 'far off'—namely, the Gentiles—now find themselves 'fellow citizens with the saints' (Eph. 2:19). This new humanity ἐν Χριστῷ has as its lynchpin of unity not a race or a cultural history or a language but the crucified body of Jesus

Christ himself. He calls them ἀδελφοί (Matt. 12:49; Acts 1:16; Heb. 2:11-12); and so they too can truly call each other ἀδελφοί.

However, as the New Testament talks about the people of God, it describes them as united in the basic quality of their existence: there is one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, one God and father of all (so Eph. 4:2-5). There is not a need for the dissolving of cultural and personal differences—because there is a unity founded on something far deeper. Galatians 3:26 should not be over-read in this connection. As Wannewetsch puts it:

The contrasting pairs Jew-Greek, man-woman, freeman-slave, listed in Galatians 3:26ff represented—and represent still—fundamental differences, ethnic and religious, sexual and economic...the intention was not to abolish these antinomies in general. They are to be set aside in a quite precise sense: the political one.³⁰

However, the experience of transformed relationships and unity in the church's life could not leave untouched what being Jew or Greek, man or woman, freeman or slave meant for life outside the church. Wannewetsch continues:

God's Spirit, which rules the *ekklesia*, relativises the ties with all the different political, economic, and ethnic systems which are determined by another spirit, the spirit of self-preservation.³¹

The point of Paul's body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12 is that human difference and distinction are not obliterated in Christ but brought together by the Spirit and found complementary. Conformity is to be found in imitation of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). The futility of Gentile living is to be abandoned (1 Cor. 6:12ff): together the body finds a unity of purpose in living in a way which pleases God, keeping unity and peace with the other members of the body.

III

What we see in the end, in Revelation 21, when the Lord declares 'Behold I have made all things new', is the coming down out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband a new city, a God-transformed civilisation, which is everything human community is supposed to be. Evil is excluded and banished from the scene; God lives in open relationship with his people, there being no need for a temple because the lamb and the Lord are its temple. The nations live there together; and in 21:26 'people will bring into it the glory and

honour of the nations'. Could it be that the best parts of human cultures are in fact part of the final scene? The best of the old human fraternity is apparently not crushed or blended out, but embraced.

Christians are then people who pray 'your kingdom come' in advance of this final scene. We are involved in the establishment on earth in the present time of an alternative to human civilisation: a community that lives under God, honouring him and seeking to live his way. We live out the unity of the Spirit with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We build the city of God here on earth by building the church of Jesus Christ. And yet we also live in the cities of the world simultaneously. By building the one we do not hope to shut out the other: rather we are calling the citizens of earthly cities to become citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. But we do hope to have right perspective on the other kingdom. Within the new community the resurrection is made actual in the here and now. The future of humanity is found in the Body of Christ.

Christians haven't found this easy, especially as the church has grown in power and become a kind of worldly kingdom itself. Some have seen this building of God's city as occurring within this age entirely, and so have laboured to establish it here and now according to some vision of social justice (whether it be left or right wing). Building the city of God has been a matter of accommodation to the city of the world. This neglects the radical disruption in history promised in the apocalyptic writings. Others have so emphasised the disruption that they have seen present civilisation as doomed to destruction and washed their hands of it. Building the city of God has been a matter of separation from the world. But this, of course, neglects the continuity of the new with the old promised in Scripture.

The answer naturally lies in the middle of these two: we build the church so that we may be a light to the nations. We are a kingdom of priests and a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9) in order that the nations may come in. We are called out from the nations to be sent back to them with the gospel.

Thus we call human society to recognise the original fraternity of all human beings as children of Adam, the son of God. Cain asked the vile question, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' with a shrug of denial. The question is still being asked today: 'do I have an allegiance to someone outside my tribe, my people, my

bloc?’ The answer must, of course, be in the affirmative. The blood of many of our brothers and sisters still cries out from the ground. Can we see human beings as an ‘us’ and not a ‘they’? Our human fellowship does not allow us to say ‘not my problem’. I would like to question whether excessive patriotism—which is especially whipped up for us by advertisers and by sport—is something we should be so comfortable with.

We challenge visions of ultimate human fraternity that are alternatives to that which we have been shown and experience in Christ. Human civilisation does an impressive imitation of being eternal and of fulfilling all human needs: but it is an imitation only; and conceals a darkness of heart. We stand to remind our neighbours that this is not true. We look only to God as the one will shatter the spear and put an end to war. True peace will not come down the barrel of a gun, nor with the setting up of democratic government in every land. We should not be persuaded—and our community should not be persuaded—even by those of our leaders who are Christian, to think that justice and peace will embrace in our time without the coming of God himself. Futhermore, in our gathered life together we should be able to offer something far better: a true family of believers who in the midst of disconnection and friction have found connection and peace: peace with God and so peace with each other.

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ENDNOTES

1. Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p. 21.
2. Jean-Marie, Cardinal Lustiger, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” *First Things* 76 (1997): 38.
3. C. T. Kurien, “Globalization: An Economist’s Perspective,” in Duncan B. Forrester, William Storrar and Andrew Morton (ed.), *Public Theology for the 21st Century: Essays in Honour of Duncan B. Forrester*, (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2004), p. 197.
4. Max L. Stackhouse, “Public Theology and Political Economy in the Globalising Era,” *Ibid.*, p. 179.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Peter Sedgwick, “Globalization,” in Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 492.

7. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 233.
8. John L. Esposito and Michael Watson, "Overview: The Significance of Religion for Global Order," in John L. Esposito and Michael Watson (ed.), *Religion and Global Order* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 17-38.
9. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).
10. Scott Thomas, "Religious Resurgence, Postmodernism and World Politics," in *Religion and Global Order*, p. 56.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
12. For example, in India and Afghanistan; Sedgwick, "Globalization," p. 494.
13. Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 276.
14. For example, note the peculiar combination of evocation of 'freedom' and the threat of force in George W. Bush's Second Inaugural Address.
15. The Barmen Declaration, 5th Thesis, 1934.
16. William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination—Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), p. 1.
17. As Volf notes, this is not just a narrative about individuals, Cain may allude to the Kenites, a people on Israel's southern border; and so the story describes an inter-ethnic rivalry. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace—a Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 46.
18. For some of the ideas that follow, see the fruitful exposition of Jacques Ellul. Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1970).
19. O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, p. 70.
20. The echo of 'Babylon' in the name בְּבִלָּא ('confused') is likely deliberate. See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1. (Waco: Word Books, 1987), pp. 239-43.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Wannenwetsch suggests that even this single unified language was not 'natural' but an act of wilful 'self-creation'. Bernd Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p. 224.
23. David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed., Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series: 10 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 75.

24. W. T. Cavanaugh, "The City—Beyond secular parodies," in *Radical Orthodoxy*, p. 182.
25. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, p. 76.
26. See O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, p. 62.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 36-7.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
29. Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), p. 266.
30. Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens*, p.136-7.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 142.