

## Towards a Prophetic Response to Global Financial Idolatry

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Globalization, as a cultural, technological and commercial dynamic that reaches into every aspect of our daily lives, is neither good nor bad in itself. Even so, we must squarely face the reality that the world order we actually live in is embedded in deep and highly polarized structures of financial and political inequality. There is a relationship between our prevailing global world order and the age old divide between the rich and the poor.

This divide is not simply a divide between the Western world and the Majority world, for there is a growing financially secure class in the Majority world<sup>1</sup> as well as a growing underclass of people made socially and economically redundant in the Western world.<sup>2</sup> However, the growing underclass in the post-industrial West is often ‘kept’ by the welfare provisions of the state, the entertainments of the mass media, and the habits and liturgies of desire and satisfaction accessible to this underclass within the cultural life-world of consumerism. Keeping the low gears in any typical two-speed post-industrial economy moderately comfortable and ‘happy’ is necessary to maintain social stability in the Western world. On the other hand, the poor of the industrialized Majority world are not only structurally powerless, but they have to live with between desperate impoverishment and barely sustainable marginality, often without any state support at all. So it is clear that the poor and powerless urban workers of industry in the Majority world are the true global underclass.

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<sup>1</sup> See Martin Ravallion, *The Developing World's Bulging (but Vulnerable) "Middle Class"*, Policy Research Working Paper WPS4816, commissioned by The World Bank, January 2009. Ravallion notes that "...defining the "Western middle class" as those living above the US poverty line, the developing world added 80 million to the count of the middle class by this definition between 1990 – 2005." p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> On the post-1980s trend towards marked inequality growth between the rich and the poor in Australia, for example, see Michael Pusey, *The Experience of Middle Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

In this context, talk of globalization producing a “global middle class” is highly deceptive. Western middle class life conditions and Western poverty are totally distinct income and life situation categories from the Majority world’s “middle class” and poverty. Wealthy minorities in the Majority world are experiencing population growth and becoming important for global consumption, but many of these people were never part of the poor. Further, the growth in total numbers in the global poor has not abated even though – thanks to supercharged growth in high quality and cheap industrial production and information processing in China and India – there has been substantial relative growth in the Majority world’s second to lowest income category, the so-called “global middle class”.

The average daily income of this “global middle class” is just over US\$2/day, and this demography has indeed grown by a staggering 1.2 billion souls between 1990 and 2005.<sup>3</sup> Half of this growth has come from China alone, and this growth is reflected in some genuine decline in the growth rate over the same time in those in unsustainable abject poverty below US\$2/day, most of whom remain in Africa. So now one in six people in the Majority world are no longer officially “in poverty” as they now have an income between US\$2 and US\$3 a day.<sup>4</sup> This “middle class” is, however, very financially and politically vulnerable.

To be clear, the growing yet proportionally small rich class in the Majority World is not this “global middle class” and it must be understood that global income distribution remains staggeringly unequal with no meaningful comparison holding between Western middle class incomes and life situations and Global “middle class” incomes and life situations.

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Ravallion, *The Developing World’s Bulging (but Vulnerable) “Middle Class”*, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Ravallion, *The Developing World’s Bulging (but Vulnerable) “Middle Class”*, this citation is from the abstract.

On global income distribution Branko Milanovic notes that over the long time frame “the Industrial Revolution, by creating a massive divergence between the rich Western countries and the rest of the world, has pushed global inequality up.”<sup>5</sup> The prevailing dynamic of global inequality does have Western industrial causes, and is sustained today by Western technological accomplishments and by the prevailing power of the established Western commercial corporations that first profited from the staggering instrumental power of their accomplishments. Milanovic expresses how deep this inequality is today in these terms: “... if you take the whole income of the world and divide it into two halves: the richest 8% will take one half and the other 92% of the population will take the other half.”<sup>6</sup> There is no side stepping the fact that deep, historically embedded and structural wealth inequality is at the heart of the way the global economy actually works. Yet the question remains: what is the relationship between globalization and the global division between the rich and the poor? To answer this question we need some working notion of what makes globalization itself work.

“Space/time compression”, argues Zygmunt Bauman, is at the core of the transformations that result in the highly wealth and power polarized effects of globalization.<sup>7</sup> The now astonishing speed of transport, information and financial flow is the most decisive technical means by which the rich and powerful global minority maintain their way of life, and under which the poor and powerless global majority live. Via the technologies of space/time compression the financially powerful are effectively liberated from the constraints of localized responsibility that were previously unavoidable for the ongoing viability of any

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<sup>5</sup> Branko Milanovic, *Global Income Inequality by Numbers: in History and Now*, Policy Research Working Paper WPS6259, commissioned by The World Bank, November 2012, note 4, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Branko Milanovic, *Global Income Inequality by Numbers*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 2. This term was originally coined by David Harvey as “time-space compression” in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 260.

wealth venture.<sup>8</sup> Under these conditions the financially powerless cannot even expect a sustainable level of control over the local conditions of impoverishment to which they are inescapably and structurally bound.<sup>9</sup> Hence, in today's globalized world of commerce, "the company belongs to the people who invest in it – not to its employees, suppliers, nor the locality in which it is situated."<sup>10</sup> If you are a factory worker in clothing or textiles in Indonesia, you know exactly how this works.

By means of a CIA supported military coup that killed at least half a million people, Indonesia was set up under Suharto to provide the ideal conditions for Western investors to reap huge profits with only minimal localized responsibility.<sup>11</sup> Prior to Suharto's coup, Sukarno had expelled the World Bank from Indonesia and he had close connections with the Indonesian Communist Party. This meant that the fledgling Indonesia was not a part of the "American Century"<sup>12</sup> until Suharto's New Order was brought in by violence of a

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Apple and Google legally set their global accounts up in order that their profits are effectively stateless for taxation purposes. See Steven Pearlstein's fascinating article in The Washington Post titled "Marty Sullivan figures out how the world's biggest companies avoid billions in taxes." (26 October, 2013). Trans-national corporate tax abnegation is endemic in the most vulnerable economies of the globe. See Christian Aid's "Tax Justice Advocacy: A Tool Kit for Civil Society" by Sally Golding (lead author), UK, 2012, <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/completetaxadvocacytoolkit.pdf>. See the 2008 OECD publication "Governance, Taxation and Accountability" <http://www.oecd.org/development/governance-development/40210055.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Zygmunt Bauman (in *Globalization*, pp. 19 – 20) notes that "rather than harmonizing the human condition, the technological annulment of temporal/spatial distance tends to polarize it. It emancipates certain humans from territorial constraints and renders certain community-generating meanings exterritorial – while denuding the territory, to which other people go on being confined, of its meaning and its identity-endowing capacity." The role of modern finance is central to how this dynamic works. Bauman notes that "thanks to new 'bodilessness' of power in its mainly financial form, the power-holders become truly exterritorial even if, bodily, they happen to stay 'in place'.

<sup>10</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization*, p. 6. This is a quote from Albert Dunlap's book *How I saved Bad Companies and Made Good Companies Great* (New York: Time Books, 1996), pp. 199 – 200.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Dale Scott, "The United States and the Overthrow of Sukarno, 1965-1967", *Pacific Affairs*, 58, Summer 1985, pages 239-264. John Pilger, *The New Rules of the World* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 17–47.

<sup>12</sup> "The American Century" was forecast by Henry Luce in his famous article in *Life* magazine, 17 February, 1941. This article is at once inspiring and hubristic, and the actual victories of the American dominance of the post-war globe reflect both the high idealism and the ruthless and pragmatic self-interest of American Internationalism. The Bretton Woods Institutions and the sustained international presence of the US Armed Forces did indeed set up the economic and geo-political structures for this American Century very much in line with Luce's vision. Unsurprisingly the prevailing post-war global economic order does indeed perpetuate American aspirations of global leadership along the lines that Luce saw.

staggeringly brutal and sweeping nature.<sup>13</sup> Shortly after Suharto's victory, in November of 1967, the Time-Life Corporation sponsored

an extraordinary conference in Geneva which, in the course of three days, designed the corporate takeover of Indonesia. The participants included the most powerful capitalists in the world, the likes of David Rockefeller. All the corporate giants of the West were represented: the major oil companies and banks, General Motors, Imperial Chemical Industries, British Leyland, British American Tobacco, American Express, Siemens, Goodyear, the International Paper Corporation, US Steel. Across the table were Suharto's men [lead by Hamengku Buwono], whom Rockefeller called 'Indonesia's top economic team'.<sup>14</sup>

Suharto amassed fabulous wealth to himself, his family and his close supporters from corruption, channelled through – amongst other sources – the World Bank, in exchange for an anti-communist ally of US geo-political interests in South East Asia, and near unfettered 'free market' operating conditions for powerful Western corporate interests.

What this means on the ground for a clothing factory worker in Indonesia today is that foreign money controls the debilitating conditions of their workplace, their produce is sold internationally, and they whose labour makes this all possible are savagely and relentlessly exploited. The minimum wage for factory workers in Jakarta (after a substantial rise in 2012) is a barely survivable \$232 a month.<sup>15</sup> This includes legal provisions for workers to do 50 hour weeks 2 months in a year with no increase in pay rates for night work or overtime, and with provision for continuous operation by factory owners to meet production deadlines. These minimum legal conditions may not be met in practise. This illustrates the obvious fact that the post-war global economy has often functioned as an alliance between violent and

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<sup>13</sup> See Joshua Oppenheimer's devastating documentary film of 2012, "The Act of Killing". See Michael Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics under Suharto: the rise and fall of the New Order*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> John Pilger, *The New Rulers*, p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> See this data sheet "Employing workers in Indonesia" prepared by the International Finance Corporation and The World Bank, 2014: <http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploreeconomies/indonesia/employing-worker> .

corrupt non-Western dictators and Western commercial interests, in a manner sympathetic with a distinctly pro-American internationalist ideology.<sup>16</sup>

Thus globalization entails a distinctive commercial dynamic with its distinctive technological signatures and accompanying polarities of power, which has now imprinted itself on every corner of the post-war globe. This commercial dynamic and its global reach is, historically, a function of modern Western developments in technology, finance and colonial and military expansion. Backgrounded to those developments is Western Liberalism. As rooted in Western soil, globalization is intimately connected to the matrix of power and belief that is normative in the secular Liberal West. Globalization is also intimately linked to the commercial and geo-political interests of those powerful corporations and states which now dominate the prevailing global world order. That is, globalization expresses a universalizing order of wealth and power within which all the people of the globe now live. This is the most far reaching form of “empire” the world has ever seen.

At this point I am using the notion of empire in an ambivalent manner that gives scope to both positive and negative readings. Typically those who weigh the positives over the negatives are those who gain or who aspire to gain financially from the norms and structures of power which now prevail. Unsurprisingly, those who weigh the negatives over the positives are usually those who are systemically exploited by the operational norms of the global economy, or those who mourn the manner in which many of the traditional values and community structures of non-Western ways of life are powerfully eroded and economically homogenized by the forces of globalizing ‘progress’. And, of course, the push towards a

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<sup>16</sup> This is not an anti-American comment, it is simply a realistic observation. The American century has had many positive impacts on the globe – such as the post-war reconstructions of Japan and Europe – yet always the world constructed has had American interests in mind. The Euro zone is, in the final analysis, an American imposition on Europe and heavily controlled by the IMF and hence US Treasury [see Yanis Varoufakis, *Global Minotaur: America, Europe and the future of the global economy* (London: Zed Books, 2013)]; post-war Japan has, after all, no effective army; the Philippines provides, after all, a strategic military base for the US in Asia.

global consumer society fuels a rapacious and ever accelerating exploitation of the natural resources of the earth, as seen every day in the dense air pollution of Beijing.

There has been much useful analysis of globalization in the above terms.<sup>17</sup> However, let us seek to understand globalization theologically.

Western Liberalism – the socio-cultural context out of which globalization arises – is premised on a distinctive dualism of ‘hard’ reality and ‘soft’ belief.<sup>18</sup> Here a hard and factual realm of deterministic realism is separated out from a soft and subjective realm of personal choice where the individual is free to select belief preferences from a suite of intangible values and otherworldly or privately interpreted meanings. This dualism separates out the objective from the subjective, the public from the private, facts from values, religion from politics, interpersonal obligations from business efficiency, information from interpretation and legality from morality. This distinctive manner of defining and dis-integrating discrete spheres of life has a particular genealogy and is striking for its unusual nature as a cultural life-form. Non-modern, non-Western and certainly Biblical cultural life-forms are typically characterized by having a far more integrative understanding of how the various spheres of human life inter-penetrate and related to each other. Theologically, it is important to ask if the dualism of modern liberalism is compatible with Christian faith.

One of the earliest creedal affirmations of the Christian faith is the claim that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9). This affirmation situates the primitive Christian faith firmly within an

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<sup>17</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization*; Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents* (London: Penguin, 2002); George Monbiot, *The Age of Consent* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping our Lives* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> See Michel Henry, *Barbarism* (New York: Continuum, 2012). Henry links the amazing cultural success in the West of the Scientific Revolution – with its “Galilean reduction” – to a view of reality that is purely mathematical and quantitative, unleashing astonishing instrumental power at the same time as it makes qualitative aspects of our experience of reality merely subjective interpretive glosses. Thus a subjectivized moral and spiritual solipsism often accompanies the new pragmatic powers unleashed by the Western scientific revolution. This gives the classically Modern cultural outlook its signature dualism between a public realm of objective pragmatic effectiveness defined in terms of meaningless and necessary power, and a discretely personal realm of subjective meanings and values.

integrative and holistic outlook. Clearly, to claim that Jesus is Lord is to relativise the claims to the Lordship of Caesar and to defy the public cultus of the Roman empire. Christian faith here recognizes no ultimate separation of the public from the private or the religious from the political. Interestingly, the Roman empire recognized a private sphere of religious freedom – the realm of private cults – but required of its citizens and subjugated peoples a public affirmation of the cult of emperor as legitimating the public powers of military, legal and commercial life within the empire.<sup>19</sup> To affirm the lordship of Caesar in public was to show fealty to a collective frame of worship pointing to the unifying centre of the empire, and to affirm the moral and religious legitimacy of that empire's power and glory. The concrete and institutional powers under which one lived were thus directly tied to divine warrants which the peoples of the empire were required to affirm. In natural harmony with the ancient worldview, the order on earth is seen as being in an intimate relationship with the order of heaven.<sup>20</sup> Yet, if one wished to have private religious beliefs that left the public sphere firmly in the hands of Caesar, Rome was happy to accept any number of discretely religious aspirations to personal salvation. This arrangement, however, the Christian faith rejected. The age of martyrs is testimony to a strident Christian defiance of the safety and political expediency which could be theirs if they defined their faith as a matter of private and personal salvation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Of course the Jews gained a hard won compromise with the Roman Imperium on this point. The Jews were permitted to pray *for* Caesar rather than being required to pray *to* Caesar, but this arrangement was not granted to non-Jewish Christians.

<sup>20</sup> See Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 3–10.

<sup>21</sup> It can be argued that the aim of the Christian defiance of emperor worship was to preserve the autonomy of the religious from the political and that Christians had no difficulty with the Roman Imperium in political, military or socio-economic terms. However, such a reading is anachronistic. Paul's desire to witness to Lordship of Christ before Caesar was not a desire simply to convert one soul, but a desire that the Empire itself might be converted. This desire was largely achieved in medieval Christendom. The world view of Liberal Secularism was simply not a function of the type of integrative outlook native to Christians in the New Testament era.

At this point I would like to establish whether this early Christian rejection of an a-political and discretely private understanding of salvation is peripheral to the Christian faith or essential to it. From our historical vantage point, this is a highly complex question. Clearly the history of the rise of secularism and liberal democracy in the West is deeply integral with developments within Western theology and Western Christianity. In many regards it could be strongly argued that Western Liberalism, Western democracy and Western capitalism are all function of Western Christianity. A short chapter gives little scope for careful nuancing of the theological complexity of evaluating modern Western Liberalism. Even so it can be noted that there are persuasive voices arguing that theologically suspect developments within Western Christianity gave rise to at least some of the dualistic features of Modern Western Liberalism.<sup>22</sup> If this is the case then there could be credible grounds to find that holding an integral understanding of Christian faith is essential to Christianity and that Western Liberalism needs to be viewed with a theologically discerning eye. If Western Liberalism is theologically suspect, then there could be credible theological grounds to argue that a critique of the moral, political and religious signatures of modern Western dualism would entail an unveiling of the immoral, anti-sacral and politically biased and culturally colonizing pragmatism of globalization.<sup>23</sup> Such a critique could readily include a prophetic assessment of global economic and military imperialism from the perspective of those in the Majority World who suffer under this yoke, and whose integrative approach to life is continuously

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<sup>22</sup> See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> There are good theological and theoretic reasons to question Liberalism and the Neoliberal Economic ideology derived from Liberalism, which might be described as the doctrinal orthodoxy of the prevailing global imperium. These critiques centre around the absence of any morally substantial vision of the common good capable of unifying and inspiring political aspirations which globalization sets up. William Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) and Dan Bell Jr., *Liberation Theology after the End of History* (London: Routledge, 2001) critique Economic Liberalism theologically; Jean-Claude Michéa, *The Realm of Lesser Evil* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009) critiques Liberalism from within the Social Science milieu; Steve Keen, *Debunking Economics* (Sydney: Pluto Press Australia, 2001) critiques Neoclassical Economic Liberalism as an economist.

eroded by the powerful de-sacralising forces of globalization. This type of account is one I will seek to sketch here.

If Jesus *is* Lord of both heaven and earth then Western Liberalism's strict functional separation of a realm of non-religious hard facts (such as matters of commercial realism) from a realm of personal soft beliefs (wherein preside all religious and moral convictions) is a theologically deceptive illusion.<sup>24</sup> Further, such an illusion is not morally neutral for it normalizes and facilitates the instrumental exploitation of the people and resources of the earth for the relentless accumulation of power and wealth by the already powerful and wealthy. The sociologist Bruno Latour has pointed out that the demarcations of Western modernity are legal fictions that facilitate certain operational structures in society – we are not, in fact, sphere-discrete dualistic beings.<sup>25</sup> Further, it seems defensible to proceed under the ancient assumption that empires *always* have a religious centre, as some frame of worship is necessary to unify any socio-political set of norms.<sup>26</sup> If this is the case the question then becomes, what is the object of devotion worshipped by globalization and what does loyalty to the Lordship of Christ imply to all Christians living within this empire?

Jesus claims that you cannot serve both God and Mammon (Matthew 6:24). The accumulation of monetary wealth is here named as a principle of ultimate fealty that can

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<sup>24</sup> This separation is not actually genuine. Certain 'soft' beliefs amenable to 'hard' realism – such as the goodness and rightness of secrecy and deception in the pursuit of National Interest – are actively condoned by 'hard' realism. Certain centres of collectively unifying worship which strongly link facts and beliefs are actively condoned; notably nationalism and a hero-worshipping competitive victor culture in sport and business. Indeed, the soft beliefs which the dualism of Western Liberalism finds compatible with economic and geo-political hard realism are carefully selected for their sympathy with pragmatic amoral materialism.

<sup>25</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Imperial power in the ancient world was always explicitly tied to imperial religion. Whilst global military power as exercised by the USA, and global economic power as exercised by large multi-national corporations project themselves as 'secular' powers that are entirely religiously disinterested, this paper is suggesting that this projection is premised on a highly questionable dualism of the natural and the supernatural that sees them as hermetically sealed spheres that do not engage each other. If this is not actually true – if there is only one reality composed of both natural and divine realities which are continuously interactive – then there will be religious, moral and spiritual dynamics involved in global military and economic power however functionally blind to those dynamics a Western secularist and pragmatically 'realist' outlook is.

readily set itself up as an idol in place of God. Within the dualism of Western Liberalism, the pursuit of wealth and power can be neatly demarcated from matters of fealty to God such that the financial and political arenas take on a functional autonomy from the worship of God, and from governance by any higher good.<sup>27</sup> This enables the pursuit of monetary power to be ultimate within its supposedly discrete (and pragmatically realist) sphere. One could argue that Western Liberalism is the attempt to set up a structure of life where one can indeed serve both God, in the discretely private and spiritual sphere, *and* Mammon, in the discretely economic sphere of the public marketplace. But if our Lord is correct, this attempt to serve both is impossible. If we give ultimate fealty to God this will govern our economic and commercial relations and relativise the claims of merely pragmatic financial realism in the public arena. If we give ultimate fealty to Mammon in the public arena, this will end up governing all of our relations, including those of the supposedly discretely religious and moral arenas of our supposedly inviolate personal freedoms. Jesus here warns us of the tendency for the love of money to creep over all other loves and become the governing principle of all areas of our life. Indeed, Karl Marx also understood the creeping and dominating dynamic of monetization very well.

Marx noticed that in “the epoch of the bourgeoisie” – when the middleclass outlook of the shop keeper and the shopper becomes the dominant frame of vision governing power – not only traditional relations and social structures, but the sacral itself is continuously eroded. It is fascinating to hear Marx re-iterate the teaching of Jesus regarding what happens to the

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<sup>27</sup> This notion of a right to total power over Man’s ordained sphere of sovereignty pre-dates the Reformation. The notion of voluntarism – that the most basic feature of the nature of God is unconstrained will, such that He has total sovereignty, and thus that we, as made in His image, also should have total sovereignty over the sphere of nature which God has placed us in charge of – certainly finds its most virulent expression with Francis Bacon, but its roots are with Duns Scotus. And again, Luther’s two kingdoms teaching is prefigured by William of Ockham where the sacred and the profane are strongly demarcated from each other and the profane is given a certain autonomy from the sacred, and visa versa.

worship of God when the worship of Mammon becomes normative in a cultural life-form.

Consider this extract from *The Communist Manifesto*:

The bourgeoisie,<sup>28</sup> wherever it has got the upper hand ... has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment". It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade ... Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned...<sup>29</sup>

After the ideological defeat symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall one could also note that Communism, and even the idea of politics itself, is now more or less swept away by the rapacious and spiritually vacuous energy of 'free market' consumerism. This energy impacts on non-Western religion too. For whilst globalization may produce a new era of cosmopolitan religious pluralism, religion itself, as a private value and belief choice within the secular Western Liberalism of globalization, can become radically recast. Non-Western religion which is moderated and liberalized by Western globalized approaches to secular power, scientific naturalism and personal faith, becomes increasingly discrete from the 'hard' practical realisms that actually govern our life-world. Such religion readily becomes a personalized identity commodity and then a function of pragmatic and transcendence corroding market forces. Indeed, this dynamic is in large measure responsible for how the West ended up being post-Christian. Hence, whilst it is true that the demise of religion itself

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<sup>28</sup> In Marx, there are two warring classes within the conditions of the modern industrialized world: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie own the means of production and the proletariat have only their labour to sell. This sets up a relation of systemic exploitation between those who have capital and to whom the rewards of production go, and those who are necessary as cheap labourers. If you look at how Western consumers are economically related to factory workers in the clothing industry in Indonesia, for example, you can see that Marx's analysis is not limited to a merely 19<sup>th</sup> century outlook as shaped by the "Satanic Mills" of the Industrial Revolution.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), pp. 82–83.

as predicted by the “secularization thesis” is an obvious dud when one considers the vitality of global religion, on the other hand, globalization renders all relations functions of economic realism and saturates all cultures with the blandly materialistic allurements of consumer society. It may well be that the full bite of secularization may be yet to come. If the religious vitality of the non-Western world is doused in the cold water of globalized, Westernized consumer culture, the signatures of spiritual banality which now characterize the post-Christian West may be yet visited on the entire globe.

To clarify my point here, Marx agrees with Christ that one cannot serve both God and Mammon, but I am not advocating Marxism. Christians who live within the life-world of Western Capitalism have often seen Communism as a violent ideological assault on the religious freedoms enjoyed in Liberal democratic society. This criticism has considerable force because Communism is an explicitly atheistic ideology which sets Proletariat Man in the place of Mammon as the primary object of worship.<sup>30</sup> In the hands of ruthless dictators such as Stalin, Pol Pot and Mao, Communism has indeed proved to have a murderous and idolatrous topography. Significant numbers of Christians and pious devotees of other faiths who live in China, in Russia and other Communist states have been, and still are being, terribly persecuted. Persecuted Christians have thus found that far from ending religion, Communism is itself a religious form of empire with a strident idol at its heart, albeit an idol not to the market freedoms of Mammon, but to the market controls of the Worker. Thus, where either the works of Man’s hands (Capitalism), or the image of working Man

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<sup>30</sup> See Karl Marx, “Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”, Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher, 7 & 10, February 1844, Paris: “For Germany, the criticism of religion has been essentially completed, and the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism... The foundation of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man... The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness... The criticism of religion disillusiones man, so that he will think, act, and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses, so that he will move around himself as his own true Sun. Religion is only the illusory Sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself.”

(Communism) become the ultimate object of collective worship, then the face of idolatry is seen stamped on the way of life normative to that imperium.<sup>31</sup>

Two things should be noted here. Firstly, it seems reasonable to assume that empire is essentially religious in form, and this is no surprise if we are indeed religious beings and must have a collective frame of worship to spiritually energize any collective enterprise. If this is the case then Man – as a collective entity – will either worship an idol of his own hands, or himself, or seek to worship God. Secondly, whilst Communism has itself been broken by the energy and power of the epoch of the bourgeoisie, this does *not* mean that the analysis of exploitation endemic in the economic liberalism of the global economy which Marx saw is not still there. Significantly, the tie between Western individualist middle class comforts and the religious illusions upheld by bourgeois Christianity that Marx saw was identified even more clearly by Kierkegaard, yet without the atheism of Marx.<sup>32</sup> That is, atheism is not a necessary feature of the critique of Western bourgeois Christianity as a cloak for its own signatures of idolatry and exploitation. Marx can be found to be seriously theologically defective due to his humanist idolatry, yet his understanding of exploitative political economics under the conditions of Western Liberal consumer society can be re-situated within a deeply Christian frame of thinking.<sup>33</sup>

If, then, Mammon is the doxological centre of the imperium which provides the final warrants of legitimacy in the global world order which we currently live under, and if this order profoundly exploits the Majority World and subsumes the peoples of the entire globe into its imperium, what then is a Christian response?

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<sup>31</sup> In many ways the World Trade towers symbolized the religious power and glory of Western Capitalism and its global empire (hence they were attacked by a competing religious consciousness), and the Rabochiy i Kolkhoznitsa in Moscow symbolizes the religious power and glory of the Communist Worker.

<sup>32</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). See also the Latino scholar Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez, *A Vexing Gadfly: The Late Kierkegaard on Economic Matters* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> In 20<sup>th</sup> century Evangelical theology Jacques Ellul and Jürgen Moltmann, for example, have pursued this line of thinking to very illuminating effect.

Walter Brueggemann's book *The Prophetic Imagination* argues that there are two basic theopolitical mindsets: the royal consciousness and the prophetic imagination.<sup>34</sup> The royal consciousness – as expressed clearly by Pharaoh in the Exodus - is the consciousness of establish power. Here military might, temple authority and royal power all coincide to govern and uphold the supposedly good order of society. Here organized violence, wealth, law and religion back each other up such that *There Is No Alternative* to how things now are; get with the valid and glorious imperial strength, or perish. If one is to be realistic and operate safely within the powers as they are, one must show due deference to the validity and inexorability of the powers as they now stand. However, no political order is in fact inevitable, and all political orders require the cooperation of the subjugated and oppressed majority to enable the privileged minority to enjoy their relative power and privilege. This is why collective forms of imagination regarding what is normative and what is inevitable are actually the real pillars of power in any common (that is social) way of life. This is why religion as the carrier of a collective sense of right cosmic order reflected in the affairs of Men is either overtly or covertly at the centre of imperial power. Necessarily, then, imperial power seeks to tie cosmic legitimacy directly to its own military, legal and economic glory. Thus there is the long and established historical relationship between the palace, the judiciary, the temple and the marketplace in the great imperial civilizations of the ancient world. To rebel against the imperium is thus to rebel against divinity and right cosmic order; the principalities and powers on which the common good rests are thus integral with the rule of the Pharaoh/Emperor/King. Thus divine warrants are enmeshed in the prevailing order that produces the prospering of the economy, the upholding of just law and order, and the military security of the kingdom – even if all this power and glory in fact upholds the minority

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<sup>34</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

interests of the already rich and honoured at the expense of the majority interests of the poor and marginal. And perhaps little has changed such that those age-old fallen powers that are intimately tangled up in the affairs of fallen human power are still largely the same?<sup>35</sup> Jesus has told us that you will know a tree by its fruits.

The prophetic imagination dares to imagine the impossible; what if there was a different order of power, a different centre of worship that did not entail the oppression of the majority for the sake of the luxury and power of the idolatrous minority? Thus the prophet speaks words of judgement to the king, the temple and the rich, and the prophet speaks words of hope to the oppressed people under the boot of power.<sup>36</sup> The oppressed dare to imagine a

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<sup>35</sup> Walter Wink's fascinating analysis of "the powers" (see *Engaging the Powers*) points out that structures of power are, in themselves, considerably better than the collapse of civil order and the reign of arbitrary violence. Indeed, it is Biblical to accept that orders of power embedded in human political affairs are God ordained and there for are given to us for the benefit of all. Even so, the powers – along with Humanity and Creation – are fallen and are in constant need of redemptive interventions from below. For the tendency of power to become self-serving and self-worshipping, rather than other serving and God worshipping, is deeply embedded in human fallenness. So I am not advocating the prophetic rejection of the powers, rather I am advocating an ongoing need for the prophetic redemption – after the model of other service and right worship Christ gives us – of the powers.

<sup>36</sup> At this point it is important to add a little caveat nuancing the relation between the prophetic imagination and the royal consciousness in the Hebrew Scriptures. Martin Buber's fascinating text *Kingship of God* (New York: Humanities Books, 1967) is a detailed study of the book of Judges. Essentially Judges contains both a pro-judges voice and a pro-kings voice. An initial reading leaves one with the impression that this jarring dialectic is not resolved, in the same way that, for example, the very pro-Davidic Chronicles and the very Davido-critical Samuels profoundly conflict with each other in their evaluation of the glory of the Davidic reign. Indeed, the polyphonic nature of the Hebrew (and Christian) Scriptures should never be reduced to a single untroubled interpretive orthodoxy. However, Buber pushes deeply into the Hebraic notion of political validity and finds that what unifies the Judges (as flawed as they were) and the Kings/priests (as flawed as they were) is the notion of the Kingship of God as the final sovereign of the Hebrew people. The judges fail because even though God-inspired leaders like Joshua and Deborah are often wise and faithful to God (though not always – look at Sampson) the people often ignore good leadership, effectively rebelling against the kingship of God. Coercive centralized power is absent from the political model of the Judges, apparently to its practical detriment. But, when the Kings get coercive centralized power they abuse this power using it for their own advantage, as was predicted in 1 Samuel 8; here, the people's intermediate regent rejects the kingship of God subjugating the people to exploitation and leading the whole people into sin through the effacement of God fearing political authority. The final hope for the rule of God of His people is an eschatological hope, fulfilled, so Christians believe (here I am departing from Buber's account) in the God-man of perfect obedience to the rule of God, Jesus. So the prophetic imagination and the messianic royal hope are unified in being gifted by God in distinctly eschatological terms. Conversely, the prophetic hope reduces to the priests preserving their cultic power as depicted in the New Testament, and the messianic hope reduces to the political realism of the royal consciousness of Herod when the eschatological dimension is lost. Unsurprisingly, everything political comes back to the *Shema Yisrael* (Deuteronomy 6:4–9). To put God first is to put everything in its right place. Power that is self-serving, that has no faith in the providence of God is always idolatrous and always produces evil. Thus the prophetic imagination seeks to redemptively intervene against human power as faithless realism and

new order of reality breaking into the world and bringing them liberation. This word and this imagination must be crushed by the prevailing imperium because if it takes root it will end their power.<sup>37</sup>

Here a very interesting dynamic is apparent, a dynamic which has some synergies with certain features of Western Liberalism. Consider 1 Samuel 8. Because the prophetic imagination is premised on God being above all earthly rule, and God being the true ruler of His people, no human imperium can command ultimate fealty and no prevailing order is beyond imaginative challenge. This Judaeo-Christian de-ultimating outlook on human power and authority is deeply within Western Liberalism, and its origins have a lot to do with those roots of Western modernity which are tied in to the Protestant Reformation. The separation of the natural from the divine is certainly a powerful motif in Karl Barth's theology too. So apart from pre-reformation developments in nominalism and voluntarism, both hard hitting Protestant theology and the life-world norms of the shop owner culture of Evangelicals – embedded in the exclusion from professions as a function of 17<sup>th</sup> century non-conformism – strongly drives the emergence of Western Liberalism, and for what one might well term prophetic theological reasons.

The next move I wish to make in this argument is demandingly subtle. For whilst the prophetic imagination is 'anti-constantinian' in a recognizably Protestant manner, and a manner with ties to Western Liberalism's commitment to checks on power and its profound suspicion of religious authorities integrated with political power, the prophetic consciousness I am seeking to outline does *not* affirm the dualism of Western Liberalism but is premised on the integrative Lordship of Christ. To this integrative outlook – far more at home in Roman

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faithless self-interest and must always be critically engaged with institutional power deemed merely human or idolatrous, and must always oppose merely human or idolatrous conceptions of authority.

<sup>37</sup> See William Cavanaugh, "The Sacrifice of Love: The Eucharist as Resistance to Terror and Torture" a published delivery at the O'Shea Centre, Brisbane, Australia, 7 June 2006.

Catholic theology than in Protestant theology – the Church must embody Christ concretely *within this world*, and so it must assert the rule of Christ against every this worldly principality and power that is in defiance of the Lordship of Christ (Ephesians 6:10), such as the sacrifice of people and creation to Mammon. Thus a prophetic consciousness capable of seeing the idol of Mammon at the centre of global imperialism – a discernment readily appreciated by Christians of the industrial underclass of the Majority World – must synthesise aspects of Protestant political theology with aspects of Roman Catholic political theology to seek to arrive at a catholic Christian political theology. In carefully refusing to embrace the dualism of Western Liberalism this outlook is no longer a function of Western theology and seeks to be a genuinely catholic outlook.<sup>38</sup> Let us proceed with this synthetic, catholic and non-dualist aim in mind.

In this fallen world order, political power and the maintenance of a just civil order always either uses or threatens the use of violence.<sup>39</sup> Thus any intimate marriage between the rulership of this fallen world and the rulership of Christ is impossible because Christ's

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<sup>38</sup> Bauman makes a very interesting distinction (*Globalization*, pp. 59 – 65) between the universal and the global. The global within globalization is precisely *not* defined by a transparent and justly ordered system of fair and equal rights and responsibilities that are universally and impartially applied to all citizens of the globe. The opposite is the case. Opaque financial and commercial power operates according to its own self-serving logic in a remarkably partial and exploitative manner. So the Greek word *katholikos* - Latinised to 'catholic', meaning universal, impartial, applicable to the whole – is a counter word to the term global, even if the size of the set (reaching across the entire world) is the same. The catholicity of the Church is not like the global reach of commercial power in large transnational corporations.

<sup>39</sup> See Jacques Ellul, *Violence* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969). Note also Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1914), one of the founding texts of modern Western political theory, and its overt approval of the modern nation state being ruled by a political sovereign that has total and unreserved coercive power. Note also that Paul and the writer of the pastoral epistles finds violent civil authority has some connection with right cosmic order (Romans 13:3; Titus 3:1) as distinct from the terrors of lawless violence. Yet note also 1 Corinthians 2:8 in counter Romans 13:3. Thus we pray for our rulers that they might administer some measure of justice, for the principalities and powers which govern our lives do protect us from arbitrary violence, yet they are fallen principalities and powers and the ruler of this age easily uses them for the maintenance of oppressive order upheld by violence and favouring the rich and powerful and in so doing become the tools of the prince of this world, the Devil. Thus was the great Irish poet Francis McNamara right to observe that the Devil does "detest and hate the poor" and is delighted by oppressive regimes such as illustrated by the brutal penal overlords of convict Australia - as quoted in Les Murray (ed.) *Hell and After* (Sydney: Fyfield Books, 2005), p. 14.

Kingdom is not of “this dark world” (Ephesians 6:12).<sup>40</sup> The natural prince of this fallen world order is the Devil (John 12:31; 14:30) and deception and violence are the modes of governance this dark lord empowers and ultimately stands behind (John 8:44).<sup>41</sup> If Christ’s rulership was *of* this fallen world, His followers would have used violence to grasp and uphold His rule (John 18:36). But Jesus has not come as a new prince of the fallen world, but as the Son of Man who comes to redeem the world itself from its fallen state. Thus the church is to be salt and light witnessing to and embodying the redemptive work of Christ *for* the world (Matthew 5:13-16; John 3:16), but is not to be *of* the realisms of this fallen world order (John 17). The church is a sign of the reign of Christ to come, and the missional fount of that reign within the present age. But it is precisely not a reign of violent power, a reign where the strong lord it over the weak, where the rich and powerful exploit the poor and powerless, as is simply the reality of political and economic power within this present evil age (Galatians 1:4). The law of the jungle as the natural laws of power is radically inverted by Christ; the

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<sup>40</sup> Note the tragic story of Saint Martin of Tours in his failed attempt to keep a group of bishops from conspiring with the Emperor to execute a group of heretics and confiscate their property to build up the Emperor’s coffers. See Regine Pernoud, *Martin of Tours*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006), pp. 133–41. The relationship between ecclesial authority and imperial power in late antiquity was a complex one, and Augustine’s role in the Donatist crisis did end up endorsing the use of the violent power of the state to discipline heretics, and this is strikingly at odds with what Martin had in mind, though this is by no means a simple issue. [See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 229 – 39.] After the collapse of any viable imperium the Roman bishop more or less inherited what legal authority was left in Western Europe. When the Middle Ages arose in economic and military power, the Roman Church naturally rose in civic and legal power with it. The relationship of that marriage was very complex but it had inadequate safeguards against the same failings that beset the Kings of Israel. The demise of Christendom via the Reformation and then Modernity does not necessarily vindicate the political ethos of the Reformation and Modernity, but clearly the relationship between the political realisms of coercive temporal power and the Western Church during Christendom after Martin were deeply problematic.

<sup>41</sup> This is complex. The fallen order is not totally depraved or else no good would be possible. Structures of order, of goodness and of intrinsic meanings given to the cosmos by the Word of God are the final structures within even fallen nature such that the rule of the prince of this world is not an ultimate rule and rule and structure are themselves good. So in any human power dynamic “Heaven and Hell wrestle on our backs” as Arthur Miller put it (*The Crucible*). Should those in power be seduced by power such that they fall to self-worship – which the essence of idolatry, the essence of sin as outlined in the Genesis fall narrative – then the prince of this fallen order gives a demonic dynamic to that power. Should those in power realize that they are not God but are stewards of the earth and that power is a function of service of others for the goals of the common good, then Heaven smiles on human power and blesses the human order. Thus there is always this spiritual dynamic to power which is a function of the worship of those in and under human power.

Christian cannot be a political realist just because the reign of sin still holds sway over the earth.<sup>42</sup>

The prophetic imagination can call the false object of worship that underpins the global imperium by its true name: Mammon. The prophetic imagination in any context is a function of the desire to worship the true God in all our daily dealings, and is always felt by those who both reject every false object of functional worship as well as know the falsity of those idols because they are the ones who suffer under the power structures of fallen empire. And in the global context it is Christians of the Majority World who see the dark face of globalization most clearly.

If you are a factory worker in clothing and textiles in Indonesia or Vietnam; if you are a coffee or cocoa plantation slave in Africa; if you work in toxic recycling in the back blocks of China; if you simply live in the pollution of Beijing; if you pick cotton in Uzbekistan or Bangladesh; if you live in the swampy slums of Manilla and have to regularly battle against natural disasters that sweeps all away, yet again; if you live under the continuous threat of drone attacks and violent political instability in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan; if, out of poverty and powerlessness, you have been forced into prostitution; if you are one of the hundreds of millions of global citizens who have poor access to clean drinking water and basic health service, who face malnutrition and infant mortality regularly, who are debt slaves and whose natural resources and labour supplies are simply strip mined by powerful global corporations who do not pay tax in your country... then you will feel the evil idol of power that unifies the global economy. The experience of being oppressed enlightens one to the presence of idolatry upholding the powers under which we live.

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<sup>42</sup> See John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

The idolatry of Mammon at the unifying centre of globalization is exploitative and in rebellion to God. We cannot let its logic, its gifts and its horrifying costs define the operational norms of our faith. In order to resist the false claims to universal lordship and unlimited power of globally devouring Mammon, the church must reject the dualism of Western Liberalism. The Western church is profoundly compromised by this dualism and its spiritual vitality is correspondingly profoundly eroded. Hope must come from Christians in the Majority World not embracing Western beliefs and ways, even though the powers of globalization do all they can to promote this sort of spiritual erosion. Further, if there is to be hope for the West itself, it will come from Christian mission from the Majority World to the West. For Western Christianity often operates within the atomised personal sovereignty ideal of Western freedom such that religious faith itself is an essentially self concerned commodity. God here provides things for me, is a significant function of my personal identity choices, provides me with assurances and comforts, and facilitates my advancement in a highly competitive success culture. The centre of consumer religion within the dualism of Western Liberalism is that most basic false god, The Self.

Finally, the prophetic imagination of the Global South must not be seduced by the promises of liberation from poverty and exploitation that the glamorous prosperity of the Liberal West proclaims as the true gospel for the entire globe. That is a false gospel. The evils of exploitation, poverty and degradation will not be broken by a global consumer society. The world order we currently live under has never been morally sustainable, but it will soon be simply physically unsustainable as the exploitation of the natural resources and working class of the globe combines with ever greater political and financial volatility and with food and energy scarcity. Empires always fall. Who is preparing for the post-imperial age to come? Where will the seed of hope be planted? How can Christians of the Majority

World keep their spiritual vitality now, without being corrupted by the still seductive force of the dying of Mammon's global imperialism, to be a light in the coming darkness? A discerning prophetic theology of global financial idolatry is needed to provide both critique now and hope for the future.