## Imperialism, Privatization and Dispossession

In this section I argue that the issue of the “commodification of the commons” is the guiding thread of modernity. And as mentioned above, it raises the plight of the world’s indigenous populations—an issue that should gravely concern both Muslims and Christians from the standpoint of creation. Here I find Anthony J. Hall’s analysis particularly useful. For Hall, the issue of biodiversity and the privatization of what in traditional societies was considered a common legacy to be used by all (nature, folk knowledge, and the like) goes back to the west’s colonial project born in 1492—“the Columbian conquests,” as he puts it.[[1]](#footnote-1) Equally, the imperialist roots of modernity can plausibly be traced to the Christian conviction of that time that Christian princes had the God-given right to appropriate the lands of the “savages” (read “non-Christians”). This belief was enshrined by Pope Alexander VI in his “Bull of Donation,” which granted all territories “discovered and to be discovered, one hundred leagues to the West and South of the Azores towards India” to the Catholic monarchs Isabel of Castille and Ferdinand of Aragon. Just the year before, these monarchs had granted Columbus the charter to discover and conquer new territory. Indeed, the pope saw himself as God’s “caliph on earth,” much as the “rightly guided caliphs” who succeeded the Prophet Muhammad and who presided over an equally impressive campaign of military and imperial expansion some seven centuries before: “The pope as the vicar of God commanded the world, as if it were a tool in his hands; the pope, supported by the canonists [experts in canon law, or church jurisprudence], considered the world as his property to be disposed according to his will.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Christians, however, were not as tolerant as their imperial Muslim counterparts.[[3]](#footnote-3) Yet any attempt to quantify the human toll resulting from the western powers’ conquest of South and North America is a delicate and contested terrain. One useful indication, perhaps, is provided by Russell Thornton’s careful investigations: from 72 million indigenous inhabitants at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the number shrinks to about five million in 1900.[[4]](#footnote-4) Hall offers another telling description:

The lethal impact of the New World expansionism initiated with the Columbian conquests has been manifest in the early and violent demise of the vast multitudes of Aboriginal individuals, together with the extermination of more than a thousand distinct Aboriginal societies. The extent of this cataclysm in the Americas, the primary frontier of Europe’s most aggressive episodes of expansionary zeal, has been monumental. According to Todorov, the founding of New Spain and Portuguese Brazil in the “sixteenth century perpetuated the greatest genocide in human history.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Hall’s ambitious project (two more volumes on the way follow the massive first volume of *The Bowl with One Spoon*) centers around the emergence of a structure of “unregulated, superpower hegemony that currently defines the main outlines of world order” that came to fill the vacuum left by the unfulfilled promises of the de-colonization movement after WWII. Three-quarters of the world—most of whom qualify as “indigenous peoples”—resent the fact that “the formal structure of empires, colonies, and subject peoples has not been replaced with a fairer means of organizing human relationships.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Hall highlights the close attitudinal and ideological impulses in the early American messianic concept of “Manifest Destiny,” which gradually subjugated and destroyed most of the native population and culture in its path. Here too I agree with him that the Bush Administration’s declaration of war on terrorism after September 11, 2003 and the American and British invasion of Iraq in April 2003 partake of the same imperial spirit.

The irony of the tanks rolling into the heart of ancient Mesopotamia in April 2003, notes Hall, is that the United States itself was a society born of a violent revolution against the old powers of Europe.[[7]](#footnote-7) The founding documents of this newly emerging state were written by the likes of Thomas Jefferson, men steeped in the Enlightenment writings of John Locke and the French *philosophes*: Montesquieu, Diderot and Voltaire. Yet from the beginning, the proclamation of human equality and dignity did not hold for all people. The last in a long list of grievances presented to King George III in the Declaration of Independence reads, “He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, *the merciless Indian Savages* whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.”[[8]](#footnote-8) The Anglo-American colonists, much as the European powers they were opposing, conceived of themselves as the recipients of a God-given civilizing mission to push back the frontiers of barbarism and savagery. What is more, as the above grievance shows, the Anglo-American colonists castigated the British attempts at establishing large Aboriginal territories free from colonist incursions and conquests.

In this regard, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 provided a constitutional framework for British America that sparked revolutionary action in the colonial communities. Among its provisions, King George outlawed the westward expansion of the colonists in order to keep Canada as an Indian hunting ground and as a source of fur for Montreal. This prospect of shared jurisdiction between Indigenous peoples and British colonists smacked as “provocative and tyrannical to many Protestant colonists, who regarded Catholic-Aboriginal Canada as a conquered realm and as their rightful inheritance by natural law.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

The fundamental issue at stake was a choice between two opposing conceptions of British imperialism in North America. King George III had opted for what we call today “Aboriginal and treaty rights,” or a “regime of recognition” of the rights of the indigenous population within the colonized territories. In an effort to atone for the dispossession of the natives and the mounting inequalities that resulted from the founding charters and patents granted by his predecessors, King George, along with an influential minority of voices, issued his 1763 proclamation in order to “add to the legal edifice of America some basic guarantees of the inherent human right of Indigenous peoples,” who then would no longer be “ robbed of their lives, their lands, or their collective capacities for self-determination.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Over the decades, the movement of opposition to the Royal Proclamation—the first attempt at nailing down some elements of international law—had sharpened its arguments and, in so doing, grew into what was to become the mainstream of the American Revolution. In Hall’s view, this revolutionary movement that was gradually to claim the whole continent as their rightful domain came from two sources, one religious and one secular. Part of its inspiration drew from the Puritan heritage, a powerful source of identity and direction for many of the original colonists, especially in New England. Here we touch on the central theological theme of the present book: already in 1630, the Puritan writer John Cotton argued that the take-over of Indian country was justified on the basis of the creation mandate: “in a vacant soyle, hee that taketh possession of it, and bestoweth culture and husbandry on it, his Right it is.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Further, the general mood in Protestant circles was that the Indian religion was idolatrous—a worship of nature instead of God. Ignoring the fact that their worship of the Great Spirit was tantalizingly close to monotheism, what seemed to provoke their ire more than anything was the fact that Aboriginal thinking did not accept the European conviction that human beings are to exert mastery over creation.

This linkage of dominion over the earth to private property and commercial contracts represents the second stream that flowed into the American Revolutionary ethos. Indeed, the ideas of John Locke held particular sway in the thinking of Thomas Jefferson. Thus for Hall, the entrenchment of the worldview of “possessive individualism” emanates from a belief that natural law configures society as relationships between proprietors and that “political society becomes a calculated device for the protection of this property and for the maintenance of an orderly relation of exchange.”[[12]](#footnote-12) It was not by chance that Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of the Nations* during this period (it was published in 1776). The charters that sanctioned British colonization in North America were steeped in capitalist ideology.

Lutheran theologian Larry Rasmussen shows that the key institution of modernity was not the nation-state (though it is crucial) but the corporation.[[13]](#footnote-13) And it is intimately linked to the vast European enterprise of the last 500 years, the “industrial revolution.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Indeed, its roots are traced to England’s exploration project of the “New World.” The central concept of “limited liability” enabled these chartered corporations to accomplish two goals at once: “absorb risk-taking and promote exploration and settlement . . . a dazzling innovation unwittingly tailor-made for the transition from agricultural societies to globalizing conquest, commerce and industrialism.”[[15]](#footnote-15) The process continues today: corporations go on extracting the world’s resources, globalizing means of production, technology and finance, and the promotion of values inherent in these processes. The figures are astounding:

In the 1990s the one hundred largest corporations in the world had more economic power than 80 percent of the world’s people. In 1991 the aggregate sales of the world’s ten largest corporations totaled more than the aggregate GNP of the one hundred smallest countries of the world. The world’s five hundred largest industrial enterprises, employing only 0.05 of 1 percent of the planet’s population, nonetheless controls 25 percent of the planet’s economic output.[[16]](#footnote-16)

A week after the September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington (he lives and works in Manhattan), Rasmussen commented that the Statue of Liberty that stood so close to the rubble of the Twin Towers has come to represent for Americans “not the Statue of Liberty so much as the Statue of Wealth.” He then adds that both Presidents Bush, a decade apart, declared that “the American way of life is not up for negotiation.” This assumes a definition of democracy “in market terms”: “The democratic society is one with virtually unrestricted liberty to acquire and enjoy wealth. This vision renders the right to property and its uses more basic than the right to use government as an equalizing force.”[[17]](#footnote-17) His theological vision of “earth community” (to which we shall return) leads us in quite another direction. A democratic society, in this understanding, is one that stands in solidarity with all others on the planet—including the non-people (living beings and physical environment)—particularly those most impoverished and vulnerable, because our prosperity, and indeed survival, depend on everyone being able to thrive in a sustainable lifestyle.

## Globalization and the Fourth World

The wall of social injustice that we as a global community are now careening toward was graphically portrayed by the former president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn: out of the two billion people to be born in the next twenty-five years, only fifty million will be born in a rich country. He went on, “The vast majority will be in the poorer nations: born with the prospect of growing up into poverty and unemployment and disillusioned with a world that they will inevitably view as inequitable and unjust.”[[18]](#footnote-18) This is why I believe the concept of “Fourth World” is so important to the equation of a sustainable political, economic and cultural agenda for our planet. George Manuel was the Canadian Shuswap activist who became the leading philosopher of the North American Indigenous revival of the 1960s and 1970s. His vision of the Fourth World emerged out of his own contacts first in Tanzania, then with a growing coalition of Aboriginal peoples in New Zealand, Australia and the Saami in Scandinavia. The pioneering efforts of President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania within the larger African decolonization enterprise provided Manuel with a theoretical framework for North America: “Nyerere personified the animating impetus of egalitarian sharing and cooperation, . . . one starkly in contrast to that of ‘destruction, conquest and suppression’ which had been integral to the European colonization of the New World.”[[19]](#footnote-19) He elaborates on this theme in a speech, quoted by Hall: “We have only to watch Julius Nyerere taking time from his executive duties to work alongside the day labourers in a small village to know that the traditions of our grandfathers have a place in the modern, technological world.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

Manuel identified the ideological enemy as Social Darwinism, the credo of the social scientists and politicians who had cast indigenous peoples into the role of “savages,” “natives,” “backward,” and “tribal,” in contrast to societies of Europe and beyond that had embraced the ideology of the nation-state and its attendant paradigms of modernity and social “progress.” In a world divided by two superpowers, whether of the capitalist or the socialist kind, the Third World was inevitably caught between the two, fought over, thoroughly patronized and subjugated, with no room left for the dignity, value or “contemporary applicability of Indigenous knowledge and philosophy.” Hall goes on to explain:

Fourth World thinking is necessarily antagonistic to the bias of Third World thinking, a mode of conceptualization that promotes external models of change for most of humanity to mimic or duplicate. Unlike Third World thinking, with its emphasis on imposing standardized, monocultural moulds of growth and development on different societies, Fourth World thinking emphasizes the freedom of diverse peoples to chart their own distinct courses of social, legal, economic, technological, and political change. The object of this change is to ameliorate the pluralistic ecology of human relationships in ways that reflect and project forward the Aboriginal inspiration and dynamics of First Nation cultures.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Manuel’s dream of Canada becoming the first western nation-state to enter into a meaningful relationship with its indigenous population was partially realized posthumously through the Canadian Patriation Act of 1982, which recognized the Aboriginal and Treaty rights inherent to the 1763 Royal Proclamation. Yet in three subsequent rounds of constitutional amendments (with First Nations representatives participating in the discussions) these rights were watered down and the only winner to emerge in the process was the Province of Quebec, whose special status (ironically, considering its colonial past) was recognized. That struggle is still underway and in spite of high profile actions by coalitions of Indians and non-Indians in America, the bid to revisit broken treaties of the past faces greater obstacles in the US.[[22]](#footnote-22) Indeed, the clash between what Hall calls “the American Empire of private property” and the paradigm of “the Indian Country of Canada” has become all the more poignant since the neoliberal push to spread free trade throughout the Americas under the umbrella of NAFTA and the WTO has resulted in the dispossession of many native peoples throughout the continent.

Nevertheless, Manuel’s legacy lives on—the man who could simultaneously spearhead a cultural and political revival all across the spectrum of indigenous north-American nations and elicit the support of influential anthropologists and ethnographers, who, partly through his inspiration, had founded Survival International (based at Harvard University), the Scandinavian association and the International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs. Manuel attended a Scandinavian-based conference in 1973, attended by Inuit, Dene, Cree and Saami representatives. Two years later, these relationships formed the network Manuel used in order to found the World Council of Indigenous Peoples.

To sum up, the vision of the emerging Fourth World finds its inspiration in the memory of Tecumseh, the leader of the Indian Confederacy who lost militarily to the Americans in the War of 1812 (but thereby secured the existence of Canada, “apart from the realm of the Stars and Stripes”), and the legacies of George Manuel and other native leaders worldwide—the philosophy of the bowl with one spoon. Hall explains the central symbol of his project:

The bowl with one spoon is an Aboriginal pictorial representation of the principle that certain hunting territories are to be held in common. In northeastern North America the image appeared frequently in the design of many wampum belts used to signify the terms of treaty agreements. In the era of Tecumseh the image came to signify the need for federal unity among Indigenous peoples if the shared Indian Country was ever to achieve sovereign recognition in international law.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The contemporary nature of Tecumseh’s fated struggle was poignantly illustrated by the Zapatista uprising of 1994 in Chiapas, Mexico. The Zapatista Liberation Army took control of several localities in Chiapas, deliberately timing their simultaneous attacks to coincide with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). But far from being a fundamentalist exercise in communitarian politics, the masked leader (“Subcommandante Marcos”) “initiated an unorthodox campaign for political change that was simultaneously locally rooted and globally oriented.”[[24]](#footnote-24) By reclaiming the revolutionary aura of Emiliano Zapata, Mexico’s founder, the Zapatistas sparked passionate interest around the globe. Particularly in North American and European cities some 45,000 sympathetic web sites were created to support the movement and/or to extend it to other venues and issues.

Suddenly, people everywhere were connecting the dispossession of poor Indian farmers by NAFTA’a policies of industrialization to the wave of impoverishment created by the neoliberal machine globally. In Ecuador, the rural indigenous population revolted when the government announced the conversion of the local currency to the dollar, while in Bolivia Indians rioted against “major increases in the cost of water, as well as against high fuel prices, unemployment, and pauperization” and forced the government to abandon its IMF-imposed water privatization campaign.[[25]](#footnote-25) Journalist Greg Palast did some investigating into these riots, that were not in the least covered in the US media. In fact they claimed six lives, with “175 injured including two children blinded after the military fired tear gas, then bullets, at demonstrators opposing the 35 per cent hike in water prices imposed on the city of Cochabamba by the new owners of the water system, International Waters (IWL) of London.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

Fourth World politics, invigorated in the 1990s by the Zapatista rebellion, were not the plaything of a few leftist dreamers. Rather, they were propelled by a groundswell of anger on the part of dispossessed and marginalized people (in part Aboriginals) everywhere. Palast counters the optimism of both Thomas Friedman[[27]](#footnote-27) and Anthony Giddens[[28]](#footnote-28) on the topic of globalization. Palast, who managed to get a hold of scores of “confidential” IMF and WB documents, recognizes that these institutions have attempted to reform some of the excesses of their earlier neoliberal zeal, as shown in the change of vocabulary—from the deadly “Structural Assistance Plans” to the more innocuous-sounding “Poverty Reduction Strategies.” This is an urgent move—though he remains skeptical about the actual substance of the change, in view of the fact that the IMF admitted in its April 2000 World Report that, “in the recent decades, nearly one fifth of the world population have regressed. This is arguably one of the greatest economic failures of the 20th Century.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

Tellingly, Joseph Stiglitz, the former chief economist for the World Bank (and chairman of President Clinton’s Council of Economic Advisers) was fired from his job in 1999 and spent several days in April of 2001 explaining to Palast why he regreted the ideology that had driven him and the WB for so many years.[[30]](#footnote-30) Confirmed by the documents in hand, Stiglitz reveals here that every poor country in need of funds is given the same four steps to follow:

1. Privatization: state industries have to become private—in a process Stiglitz calls “briberization,” due to the high incidence of bribes offered to elites in power to coax them into selling off water and electricity companies.
2. Capital market liberalization: this insures that investment capital flows unhindered in and out of the country.[[31]](#footnote-31) Unfortunately, as it happened to Indonesia and Brazil, money flows out much more than it flows in. As a nation’s reserves begin to dry up, the IMF seeks to draw speculators back to the country by demanding a hike in interest rates “to 30 per cent, 50 per cent and 80 per cent”—with predictable results, adds Stiglitz: “demolished property values, savaged industrial production and drained national treasuries.”[[32]](#footnote-32)
3. Market-Based Pricing: all subsidies on basic foodstuffs, water, fuel and domestic gas must be lifted. This of course, says Stiglitz, leads to step three and a half: “the IMF riot.” Thus the riots of Indonesia (1998), of Bolivia (2000 and 2001), of Ecuador, and so on. Every country report announces coldly that “social unrest” will result in the short term. What is more, a secret report on Ecuador reveals that the plan to make the dollar the national currency “has pushed 51 per cent of the population below the poverty line.” As noted with regard to the Bolivian riots, these are usually dispersed with the aid of “bullets, tanks and tear gas,” further driving away investment capital and allowing foreign corporations to “pick off remaining assets, such as the odd mining concession or port, at fire sale prices.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Who are the biggest winners? “The Western banks and US Treasury,” who are able to skim off large profits from all the turmoil.
4. Poverty Reduction Strategy, i.e., free trade—according to rules laid out by the IMF and WB.[[34]](#footnote-34) Just like the Opium Wars of the nineteenth century, the west has many ways to force down barriers to their products in Asia, Africa and Latin America, while at the same time “barricading their own markets against Third World agriculture.” And here Stiglitz (with great emotion, recalls Palast) rejoins Shiva in decrying the effect of the WTO’s intellectual property rights regime (TRIPS)—“the new global order has ‘condemned people to death’ by imposing impossible tariffs and tributes to pay to pharmaceutical companies for branded medicines.”[[35]](#footnote-35)

The first of the double walls blocking humanity’s future, then, is this “social-economic malaise,”[[36]](#footnote-36) that was resolutely resisted in the Zapatista-related movements of the 1990s, in the general strikes in France at the end of 1995; in the anti-globalization protests in Seattle (Nov. 1999), Washington and Sydney (April 2000),[[37]](#footnote-37) in the climax of the country-long Zapatista coalition march that ended in a mass gathering in the capital’s Zócalo Plaza;[[38]](#footnote-38) and finally in the millions who marched in January 2003 to protest the upcoming US war in Iraq. Yet our crashing into the wall of global injustice is still avoidable. Commenting on the breakdown of the WTO talks in September 2003 (the poor countries walked out), Benjamin Mkapa, president of Tanzania, still believes free trade could benefit the poorest regions of the world:

In our increasingly interconnected world, global stability is of interest to everyone. But it can only be assured where global governance is manifestly just, where it is premised on a value system that recognises all players as equal stakeholders, worthy of a place at the negotiating table and the dining table. It also helps when the whole world is seen as being committed, in practical terms, to the war on poverty.[[39]](#footnote-39)

This will not happen until power is redistributed, not only among countries, but within them as well. The struggle of the Fourth World, then, is to promote a democracy, as Majid sees it, which gives people “the right to determine their own cultural and economic agendas.”[[40]](#footnote-40) This in turn will require some serious rethinking of the foundations of contemporary capitalism, and particularly the central notion of corporate identity. Jeffrey Kaplan shows that until about 1840 US state legislators ensured that corporations were severely limited: in time and in the scope of their activities (only for projects of public utility). But this quickly changed in the following decades. De Tocqueville’s worry about the emergence of “an industrial aristocracy” in America—more destructive than its European counterpart—would crush democracy:

In 1886, without comment, the United States Supreme Court ruled for corporate owners in *Santa Clara v. Southern Pacific Railroad*, allowing corporations to be considered “persons,” thereby opening the door to free speech and other civil rights under the Bill of Rights. By the early 1890s, states had largely eliminated restrictions on corporations owning each other, and by 1904, 318 corporations owned forty percent of all manufacturing assets.[[41]](#footnote-41)

However, as Kaplan shows, there is now a groundswell of resistance to this concept of corporations with “human” rights both on the part of states that are trying to overturn these legal definitions and on the part of townships on a more local level.[[42]](#footnote-42) If this kind of reversal is possible in the US—though the movement is yet at its infancy—it is all the more urgent that global corporate capitalism be challenged where it is causing the most intense human suffering. But this challenge will have to be tackled together with its twin—the second wall Mitzman highlights—the severe degradation of our collective human environment.

*Then this excerpt, taken from the Conclusion chapter (pp. ), just before the last two-page section of the book, “Parting Words.”*

I leave the last word to Native American theologian George E. Tinker, whose vision of “reimaging creation” serves as a needed hermeneutical tool borrowed from the indigenous peoples of the earth.[[43]](#footnote-43) As I intimated in Chapter 2 [not included here], Fourth World peoples like those of Chiapas hold a key that can smooth the transition between modern and postmodern, human rights for individuals and human rights for communities, while at the same time subverting to some extent the current nation-state division of the world.

For Tinker, liberation theology has been a useful model to point out and attempt to redress the oppression of the poor and marginalized. Yet their analysis is drawn “from the modes of discourse of the Western academy.” Tinker notes that any idea of development implies a particular view of humanity. Latin American liberation theology “identifies the preferential option for the poor with socialist and even Marxist solutions that analyze the poor in terms of class structure. This overlooks the crucial point that indigenous peoples experience their very personhood in terms of their relationship to the land.”[[44]](#footnote-44) The “non-person” of their theology is thus reduced to a social class. In addition to their being up-rooted from their land, this developmental strategy puts the means of production into the hands of the poor, which in turn leads them to become exploiters of the native peoples and their natural resources.[[45]](#footnote-45) Hence, the historic double oppression of the indigenous peoples—by the First (and Second—until 1989 at least) and Third Worlds:

We share with our Third World relatives the hunger, poverty and repression that have been the continuing common experience of those overpowered by the expansionism of European adventurers and their missionaries five hundred years ago. What distinguishes us from them are deeper, more hidden, but no lessdeadly effects of colonialism, which impact our distinct cultures in dramatically different ways. These effects are especially felt in the indigenous spiritual experience, and our struggle for liberation is within the context of distinctive spirituality.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The challenge for Christian theology, he argues, is to reclaim a doctrine of creation that was lost in the modern era. This theology will also integrate the image of the world shared by all native peoples: “Respect for creation and the recognition of the sacredness of all in creation is a deeply rooted spiritual base for American Indians, rooted in the soil of the tribal cultures of North America . . . . It is a matter of relatedness and interdependence that finally results in a necessary relationship of interdependence with all nature.[[47]](#footnote-47) As a Lutheran he deplores the “christomonism” of his and other Protestant churches, whose first article of faith is almost always something like, “God’s reconciling act in Jesus Christ.” Obviously this is central to any affirmation of the Christian faith. The question is whether this is an appropriate starting place. “To make fall/redemption the beginning point in theological proclamation generates traumatic experiences of spiritual and emotional dislocation for American Indians which some people survive and many do not.” On the other hand, when the proclamation of the gospel is made on the common ground of creation as sacred and good, “it can generate genuine healing and life-giving response.” Moreover, he continues, affirming the necessary balance and harmony of all living creatures has implications for justice and peace among all peoples as well:

On the one hand a proper prioritizing of First Article/Creation concerns will enable the churches to appreciate and value the inherent spiritual gifts that manycultures, especially indigenous, tribal, fourth-world cultures, bring with them to Christianity. . . . Secondly, . . . We will discover that respect for creation can become the spiritual and theological basis for justice and peace just as it is the spiritual and theological basis for God’s reconciling act in Christ Jesus and the ongoing sanctification in the Holy Spirit.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Tinker throws the gauntlet to white Christians of the west. The challenge, I might add, equally applies to Muslim countries in their treatment of minorities, religious or ethnic. Beyond that, he points us to the spiritual vision of humanity’s trusteeship that encompasses all people, and particularly in the specificity of their ethno-cultural identity and religious convictions. How can this deep respect for the human person possibly harmonize with neoliberal development schemes (usually benefiting the elites and dominant tribal or ethnic groups), which are mostly imposed from the outside? How then can it survive the aggressive designs of the corporatocracy, the maws of McWorld as people’s natural resources are pillaged, their people empoverished and indebted to foreign masters? Indeed, governments cannot solve all these problems alone. They will need to be supported, and at times confronted by citizen groups advocating for marginalized, dispossessed and despised persons and communities.

Ruling as God’s representatives on earth will involve this kind of intervention on behalf of the “Fourth World,” however these people might be defined locally. It will also involve adopting and developing a holistic theology of eco-justice, built on God’s good creation and waiting in expectant hope for its fulfillment—partially now as we are called to spread his Kingdom on this earth and fully at the end of the age. This is where Christianity and Islam also converge in surprising ways. First, I offer an excerpt from Jesus’ Parable of the Sheep and Goats (Mat. 25:31-40 NIV):

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. [[49]](#footnote-49) For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Then the King (obviously God in the story) turns to those who had not cared for those in need and says, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (v. 45). And they were sent to an eternity away from his presence.

In the book of *aùädïth* collected by Sahih Muslim, we read in a similar manner that God feels directly implicated by the way Adam’s progeny treat one another—a direct consequence of our common creation-caliphate:

Abu Huraira reported Allah’s Messenger (may peace be on him) as saying:

Verily, Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, would say on the Day of Resurrection: O son of Adam, I was sick but you did not visit Me. He would say: O my Lord; how could I visit Thee whereas Thou art the Lord of the worlds? Thereupon He would say: Didn’t you know that such and such servant of Mine was sick but you did not visit him and were you not aware of this that if you had visited him, you would have found Me by him? O son of Adam, I asked food from you but you did feed Me. He would say: My Lord, how could I feed Thee whereas Thou art the Lord of the worlds? He said: Didn’t you know that such and such servant of Mine asked food from you but you did not feed him, and were you not aware that if you had fed him you would have found him by My side? (The Lord would again say:) O Son of Adam, I asked drink from you but you did not provide Me. He would say: My Lord, how could I provide Thee whereas Thou art the Lord of the worlds? Thereupon He would say: Such and such servant of Mine asked you for a drink but you did not provide him, and had you provided him drink you would have found him near Me.[[50]](#footnote-50)

As Stassen and Gushee emphasize, holistic character ethics, especially the ethics of Jesus, lead to *practices* that cement God’s reign in one’s life, family and community. Thus prayer and politics cannot be separated.[[51]](#footnote-51) We are back to the Muslim concept of *tawùïd.* As Jesus taught, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my father in heaven.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Solemnly and resolutely donning the mantle of our God-given trusteeship, we seek with God’s grace active in our hearts to align our own will with God’s will for ourselves and our world—with a special concern for the poor and needy. Seyyed Hossein Nasr rightly observed, “Every practicing Muslim, which includes the vast majority of the population of the Islamic world, could not but agree that his or her highest wish is none other than the prayer uttered by Christ, ‘Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.’”[[53]](#footnote-53)

1. Anthony J. Hall, *The American Empire and the Fourth World: The Bowl with One Spoon*, vol. 1 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Walter Ullmann, *Medieval Papalism*, quoted in Shiva, *Biopiracy*, p. 1. Also cited in Hall, *The American Empire,* pp. xxviii-ix, 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. At the beginning of the second dynasty, the Abbasids who moved their capital from Damascus to Baghdad, the great majority of the empire’s population from Spain to the Indus River was still non-Muslim. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, for example, emphasizes the effect of the new high culture of the Abbasid imperial court and the accompanying economic expansion of the cities as the main reasons for the accelerated rate of conversion during the 8th and 9th centuries C.E. (*The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 1, The Classical Age of Islam, The University of Chicago Press, 1974, paperback ed. 1977, pp. 303-5). For Ira M. Lapidus, the traditional western belief that Islam was “spread by the sword” is no longer tenable: “It is now apparent that conversion by force, while not unknown in Muslim countries, was, in fact, rare. Muslim conquerors ordinarily wished to dominate rather than convert, and most conversions to Islam were voluntary” (*A History of Islamic Societies*, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 198). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *American Indian Holocaust and Survival* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), pp. 42-3; quoted in Hall, *The American Empire,* p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., p. 26. Hall is quoting Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 5. Hall adds that the “genocide” is even better understood in light of the “extinction of more than three-quarters of the 2,200 or so Aboriginal languages and dialects spoken in the Americas in 1492” (p. 27). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Ibid.,* p. xxix. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Another irony in the Iraq war is the naming of key weaponry after the native freedom fighters who best resisted American military genocidal policies. Hall cites the agile “Apache” and “Black Hawk” helicopters. Black Hawk was an Aboriginal leader who spearheaded a resistance movement in 1832 in the Illinois area. His capture and incarceration marked “the final pre-emption by the United States of the sovereign aspirations of the Indian Confederacy” (ibid., p. xvi). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Retrieved online at <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/index.htm> (emphasis mine). Halls draws the parallel between the parading of the defeated warrior Geronimo by Theodore Roosevelt in his inaugural procession down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington (and the denial of rights generally to the native population) and the refusal of the Bush Administration to allow the Guantanamo Bay detainees the right to a fair trial in a US court. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Ibid.,* p. 310. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Ibid.,* p. 315. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 30; cited in Hall, *The American Empire*, p. 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 3; cited in Hall, *The American Empire*, p. 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996). See also David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (Hartford, CT: Kumerian, 1995). A lay theologian of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Rasmussen held the Reinhold Niebuhr Chair of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan, New York, until he retired in July 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The “agricultural revolution” started with the neolithic villages of the Middle East about 10,000 years ago. It was a multi-ethnic enterprise. The industrial revolution, and its heir, the “information revolution,” originated in Europe and expanded with the power of transformed raw materials, growing scientific knowledge, and therefore, superior weaponry. Colonialism ensured that this domination by one race/culture would be perpetuated—thus the mushrooming of “neo-Europes” all over the globe (*ibid.,* pp. 73-4). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Ibid.,* p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Larry Rasmussen’s contribution to the “Union Theological Seminary (New York) Faculty Panel of 9/20/01 on the Twin Towers Disaster,” The Missionary Society of Connecticut (UCC) wep page, last updated, January 11, 2003: <http://www.ctconfucc.org/resources/fromgroundzero/rasmussen.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. David Fickling, “World Bank Condemns Defense Spending,” in *The Guardian,* online edition, Feb. 14, 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/globalisation/story/0,7369,1147888,00.html>. The article ends with a damning statistic: “One sixth of the world's six billion people owned 80% of its wealth, while another sixth earned less than a dollar a day.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Hall, *The American Empire*, p. 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Ibid*., pp. 240-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Indian activism picked up after WWII, but it wasn’t until the sixties, with the birth of the civil rights movement for African Americans, opposition to the Vietnam War, and the spread of ecological consciousness that “Red Power” came to the foreground. Some of the defining moments in the movement, according to Hall, were: (1) the founding of the National Indian Youth Council at the University of Chicago in 1961; (2) the fish-ins of the mid sixties in Washington state, given a high profile through actor Marlon Brando’s involvement; (3) the 1969 occupation of Alcatraz Island in the San Francisco Bay which drew activists from all over North America; (4) the 1969 Pulitzer Prize awarded to the Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday for his *House Made of Dawn*; (5) the 1972 cross-country pilgrimage, Trail of Broken Treaties, which ended up with partial destruction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C.; (6) the sometimes violent conflict at Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge reservation (South Dakota) in the summer of 1973 (*ibid.,* pp. 238-99). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *Ibid.,* p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Ibid.,* p. 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Mitzman, *Prometheus Revisited*, p. 158. The scandal in this case is that the privatization imposed by the IMF had brought in a British firm to do the job, International Waters Ltd, controlled in turn by US giant Bechtel. The riots forced the state to cancel their contract. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Greg Palast, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy: An Investigative Reporter Exposes the Truth about Globalization* (London and Sterling, VA: Pluto, 2002)*,* p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999). Palast calls it “a long, deep kiss to globalization” (*The Best Democracy*, p. 44). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Palast heard Giddens lecture “an earnest crowd of the London School of Economics” and quotes him as declaring, “Gobalization is a *fact*, and it is driven by the communication revolution” (*ibid.,* p. 46, emphasis his). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Ibid.,* p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Palast explains, “He was not allowed quiet retirement; US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, I’m told, demanded a public excommunication for Stiglitz having expressed his first mild dissent from globalization World Bank-style” (*ibid.*). Stiglitz teaches at Columbia University and won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Mao points to the abundance of quality mangoes in Uganda. The fruit sector, then, deserves to be diversified, i.e., juice-processing plants should be built; but without foreign investment, this could never happen. “Yet foreign investors have neglected this productive sector, preferring instead to invest in services like mobile phones, cheap electronics, and gigantic supermarkets. Consequently, Uganda still imports mango juice from the Middle East” (“Unevenly Yoked”). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *The Best Democracy,* p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *Ibid.,* p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. On the connection between free trade and ethnic violence see Yale law professor Amy Chua’s *World on Fire: How Exporting Free-Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (2004); see also how she connects this to Iraq: “Our Most Dangerous Export: Imposing Free-Market Democracy on Iraq Has Unleashed Ethnic Hatred,” *The Guardian*, February 28, 2004, online, http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,1158215,00.html [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Palast, *The Best Democracy,* p. 53. Palast asks him if any country managed to escape this fate. He answered that Botswana had, but only because they rejected all of the IMF’s conditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Mitzman, *Prometheus Revisited*, p. xix. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Hall says that the quarter-million march on Sydney Harbor Bridge represented “one of the many significant rituals in the worldwide movement emphasizing the need for major initiatives, both domestically and internationally, to reverse the destructive course of the ongoing Columbia conquests through various forms of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples” (*The American Empire*, p. 143). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Hall notes that this gathering was attended by Hollywood icons Robert Redford and Oliver Stone, and leading intellectuals from Spain, Portugal and Canada’s Naomi Klein who likened the event to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s march on Washington (*ibid.*). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. “Giving Everyone a Place at Global Dining Table,” in *The Guardian*, February 16, 2004, online, [www.guardian.co.uk/business/story/0,,1148792,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/story/0,,1148792,00.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Unveiling Traditions*, p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. “Consent of the Governed: The Corporate Usurpation of Democracy and the Valiant Struggle to Win it Back,” *Orion*, Nov.-Dec. 2003, pp. 54-61, at 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. He illustrates this by pointing to the movement of small farmers in Pennsylvania who are successfully tackling the pressures of large agribusiness corporations on their territory (*ibid*.). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Tinker is a Native American from the Osage-Cherokee tribe. He has authored two books in the 2000s, *Spirit and Resistance: Political Theology and American Indian Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004); *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008); [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. “The Full Circle of Liberation,” in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North,* pp. 218-24, at p. 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. He uses strong language: “Many liberation theology and socialist movements promise indigenous peoples nothing better than continued cultural genocide. From an American Indian perspective, the problem with modern liberation theology, as with Marxist political movements, is that class analysis gets in the way of recognizing cultural discreteness and even personhood. Small but culturally unique communities stand to be swallowed up by the vision of a classless society, an international workers’ movement or a burgeoning majority of Third World urban poor. This too is cultural genocide and signifies that indigenous people are yet non-persons, even in the light of the gospel of liberation” *(ibid..* p. 220). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *Ibid.,* p. 218. Tinker’s book, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), is a moving, well-researched documentary on the American missionary movement among their own native peoples. In it, the American church (both Catholic and Protestant) is indicted for an intentional cultural genocide, along with an unintentional literal genocide of American Indians. The Euro-American colonial enterprise continues today, albeit in different forms. He hints at one solution at the very end: theology was a necessary ingredient for the European conquest of the Indian peoples. Presumably, the way to healing would also be through theology. Here the hermeneutical insight is capital: Christians (and I would add “Muslims”) must be allowed the freedom to articulate their faith within their own cultural context, through their own worldview lens. The second (and last) explicit piece of advice for well-meaning white Christians is the following: “American Indian peoples need their white friends today more than ever. What we need, however, are genuine friends, not self-proclaimed friends who know what is best for us. We do not need so-called friends who would invite themselves in to pillage the remaining treasures of Indian spirituality, or well-meaning liberals who would try to show us how to make the system work for Indians. Rather, we need friends who will join in the struggle against the continuing imperialism of Western, European-American culture. Genuine friends do not invade one another, physically or spiritually. Genuine friends do not prescribe for one another. But genuine friends do stand beside one another, supporting one another in times of need and crisis" *(ibid.,* pp. 120-1). This is also a good piece of advice for western Christians relating to Muslims. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Tinker, “The Integrity of Creation: Restoring Trinitarian Balance,” in *Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church,* ed. William R. Barr (Grand Rapids. MI: Eerdmans. 1997) pp. 202-13, at p. 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. *Ibid.,* p. 207. CPT has also maintained a presence with the Christian indigenous group Las Abejas (the Bees) in Acteal (Chiapas), Mexico, which in the midst of military and paramilitary fighting has staunchly clung to its non-violent principles (45 were massacred in a church in Dec. 1997 while on their third day of a fast for peace). CPT has also sought to relieve the plight of tens of thousands of indigenous coffee farmers who have been driven from their lands by the violence and are now refugees in the highland county of Chenalho. Lynn Stoltzfus and Scott Kerr were invited by Las Abejas to attend the third National Indigenous Congress at the end of the Zapatista March, which reached the capital city on March 11, 2001. Forty out of the 56 indigenous peoples of Mexico attended the congress. Stoltzfus shows that the challenge to bring about peace is intimately tied to cultural and economic issues: “In the economic sphere, indigenous people have traditionally had communal ways of owning and managing land and natural resources. In Mexico, the government has dismantled communal landholding structures as a part of neoliberal economic reforms. Indigenous peoples have a cultural tradition of respect for the natural world and are working to preserve, protect and manage natural resources for the benefit of their communities. Without ways of protecting their communities and resources from the economic pressures of the market, the traditional indigenous ways of relating to the land will not be able to continue. For the Zapatistas, the Abejas and the other indigenous people represented at the National Indigenous Congress, peace is something that cannot come without maintaining their cultural and economic ways of life. In many ways, the dominant economic and cultural systems have been at war against the indigenous culture for 500 years, so any peace that does not deal with this violence will not be a true and lasting peace” (Lynn Stoltzfus, “Chiapas: Peace and Indigenous Rights,” CPTnet, March 17, 2001, httn://www.cnt.ors/archives/2001/mar2001/0014.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Notice again the interlinking of the themes of creation, kingdom of God, and re-creation. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *Al-Jämiœ al-Saùïù by Imam Muslim,* trans. Abdul Hamid Saddiqi, “Merit of Visiting the Sick,” no. 6232, section MLXIII, Book 30, Vol. 4 (Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1971). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Their last section is entitled, “A Passion for God's Reign,” with three chapters: “Prayer,” “Politics,” and “Practices” *(Kingdom Ethics,* pp. 447-91). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Mat. 7:21, NLT. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. *The Heart of Islam,* pp. 305-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)