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Mission and global governance: A Convergence of pneumatology and human flourishing

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to connect a thread of ecumenical pneumatology with a view of Christian mission actively engaged with global governance. This thread starts with the Holy Spirit working in creation, continuing in and through human history, and finally bringing the whole created order, human and nonhuman, into Christ's New Heavens and New Earth. A special emphasis is given to the Indian missiologist Samuel Rayan (1920-2019) and German theologian Jürgen Moltmann. In this light, efforts after WWII to found the United Nations, draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), work for peace and development, and especially the current global convergence behind the Sustainable Development Goals – all these efforts, despite their dysfunctions and weaknesses, should be seen as signs of God's Spirit sowing values already stamped on human beings at creation and marked for redemption and renewal in the Kingdom to come at the Parousia. Christians can be found at all levels of global governance, from politicians and diplomats at all levels of the G7, G20 and various UN summits, to those working at the UN, or in various NGOs or in the business community. Many more are needed.

Keywords

missiology, global governance, United Nations, Samuel Rayan, Jürgen Moltmann, pneumatology, Sustainable Development Goals, human flourishing

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Introduction

David J. Bosch reminded us in his classic tome on mission theology, *Transforming Mission*, that we worship a God whose very act of creation was at the same time the launching of his mission to redeem humanity. Since the World Council of Churches' 1952 conference in Willingen, Germany, we have grown accustomed to using the Latin phrase, *Missio Dei*.[1] Bosch wrote, '[i]t is not the church which "undertakes" mission; it is the *Missio Dei* which constitutes the church.' Since the Church partakes in the Kingdom of God Jesus came to inaugurate, its mission is holistic, or as Bosch has it, 'multifaceted': it includes 'witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualization, and much more' (Bosch, 1991: 512).

This paper seeks to add 'governance' to Bosch's 'much more' category of God's mission activities in our world. More specifically, I am interested in global governance. What is global governance? At least two academic journals have been studying this issue from many angles, starting with Brill's Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations since 1995; and Springer's Global Public Policy and Governance since only 2020. My own introduction to the subject came from an interview I conducted with John Kirton, the founder-director of the G7 and the G20 Research Groups based at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto.[2] On this topic, he directed me to one of his books co-written with a Russian colleague, *Accountability for Effectiveness in Global Governance* (Kirton and Lorionova, 2018).

In their first chapter, Kirton and Larionova present global governance as a three-tiered entity:

1. The highest tier is leaders-level summitry, that is, the plurilateral summit institutions (or PSIs) such as the G7 (since 1975), the G20 (since 2008), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa; since 2009); also, the various UN summits, including those on sustainable development and climate change.
2. '[T]he vast array of long-established intergovernmental organizations that are broadly multilateral like the World Bank or regional like the European Union (EU), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the African Union (AU)' (Kirton and Marionova, 2018: 3).
3. NGOs, the business sector, and the wide variety of civil society organizations that seek to impact human flourishing in a positive way.

I will come to the topic of mission and global governance near the end of this paper. The first part – and most substantial – explores some recent developments in the theology of the Holy Spirit, or pneumatology. I note a renewed interest in the relationship between the Holy Spirit and creation and his activity in the world – even outside the church – preparing the way for the coming rule of Christ in the New Heavens and the New Earth. Followers of Jesus can join what the Holy Spirit is already doing, bringing people together for advancing peace and justice in our world, and thereby foreshadowing and witnessing to some of the values and characteristics of the Kingdom to come.

Part two argues that it is possible to consider the international effort to define human rights after World War II and gather the nations under the United Nations umbrella as something God in the Spirit initiated and watched over.[3] Already the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (also called the Rio Earth Summit) represented member states coming together after the Cold War to tackle some of the greatest challenges common to humanity: climate change, loss of biodiversity, and extreme poverty. This led to the eight Millennial Development Goals (MDGs) hammered out on the heels of the Millennium Summit in New York, which represented the greatest meeting of world leaders in history. The MDG process (setting goals for 2015) in turn led to a new initiative, building on lessons learned in the first phase and new research done in the intervening years: the 2016-2030 seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). I will seek to connect the work of the Holy Spirit to that global effort to effect greater human flourishing for all, regardless of race, class, ethnicity or religion.

I then offer some concluding remarks about a mission theology and practice that promotes human flourishing through global governance.

Recent developments in pneumatology

Finnish theologian Veli-Matti Kärkäinen has offered us a valuable, wide-lensed introduction to contemporary pneumatology. He begins his work by noting that '[a] renaissance concerning the doctrine and spirituality of the Holy Spirit has stirred much interest and even enthusiasm from all theological corners' (Kärkäinen, 2002, 2018: 1). Behind this resurgence of interest, he discerns three main reasons. The first reason is that when the Eastern Orthodox churches joined the World Council of Churches (WCC), they passed on to the wider church their ancient and rich pneumatological tradition, going back to early church fathers (Kärkäinen, 2002, 2018: 2).

Secondly, the phenomenal spread of Pentecostal churches in the previous century, including the impact of the charismatic movement in most mainstream churches during its second half, has spurred a greater interest in the Holy Spirit generally. From another direction, the influential Catholic theologian Karl Rahner crafted a theology connecting the human spirit with the Holy Spirit, and prompted people to join in the mission of the Son and the Spirit in the world. His views helped steer the Second Vatical Council in the direction of greater openness to the work of the Spirit in other religions (Kim, 2007: 39).[4]

Finally, the enormous growth of the church in the Global South (Latin America, Asia, and Africa) has meant that new perspectives and charismatic practices have also had their impact in Europe and North America. This paralleled a new theological emphasis on the doctrine of the Trinity, also in line with the *Missio Dei* paradigm: the Father sent his Son whose earthly ministry climaxed in his crucifixion and resurrection, and then he sent his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, to empower his church to be his witnesses worldwide. But that formulation Orthodox theologians find far too narrow. From the beginning, they disagreed with the Western Church's addition of the Holy Spirit's 'proceeding from the Father *and the Son*' (the *filioque* clause added in the

fifth-century to the Nicene Creed). As British missiologist Kirsteen Kim notes, during those debates 'the Orthodox stressed that their main interest was not inner-trinitarian relations, but the doctrine of the Spirit's 'going out' into the world to sanctify it, draw it together in Christ, and present it back to the Father' (Kim, 2007: 45).

Part of this Orthodox concern comes from their greater emphasis on the Holy Spirit in creation, not just at the beginning but in the world today as well. Following the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, the Spirit is 'the giver of life' and therefore, 'the mission of the church is life-giving, or the renewing of creation.' Kim points out that for the Orthodox heaven and earth are one both spiritually and organically, which also means that 'the creation participates in the uncreated energies of God the Holy Spirit' (Kim, 2007: 46). This position is much closer to many of the pneumatologies developed in the Global South in recent decades, as elaborated in the next section.

The Holy Spirit and creation

When the theme of the WCC's Seventh Assembly in Canberra (1991) was announced, 'Come, Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation,' the Orthodox were elated, feeling that they had finally been heard. It was the first time that pneumatology was at the center of ecumenical discussions, making spaces for sometimes heated debates regarding the spiritual beliefs and practices indigenous to many traditional cultures. Besides the Aboriginal leaders seeking permission from the spirits of their land, a woman theologian from South Korea, Chung Hyun Kyung, turned her intervention into a shamanistic ritual designed to bring healing of past traumas.

The Orthodox, in particular, expressed 'alarm' that these performances portrayed the Holy Spirit as acting in the world independently of the Church, and that his presence could be discerned 'in human movements, without regard for sin and error' (Kim, 2007: ix). Yet other attendees were supportive. An Indian theologian in particular, K.C. Abraham, defended Kyung. For him, these people had 'misunderstood' her; she was not making theological statements so much as expressing 'symbols and rituals, which celebrate their earthly roots and the oneness of their humanity' (Kim, 2007: xii). Abraham's attitude and worldview is representative of many Christians in the Global South. To bring up the notion of a plurality of spirits, some good, some evil, is also to open the door of dialogue to other religious traditions. I now turn to a compatriot of K.C. Abraham, Samuel Rayan.

In an obituary of Samuel Rayan S.J. (1920-2019) in *Mission Studies*, Felix Wilfred begins with these words: 'Samuel Rayan stands out as a tall figure on the landscape of post-independence India' (Wilfred, 2019: 1). A Jesuit theologian who identified with the masses of poor compatriots, Rayan also 'was a theologian who could inspire generations of students with his passion for justice and his dream of an egalitarian society mirroring the kingdom of God.' Though he is mostly known as a powerful advocate for a specifically Indian liberation theology, Rayan often connected these themes with the powerful movement of the Holy Spirit in society. In a book devoted to the Holy Spirit, Rayan's first chapter ('Beginnings: The Creator Spirit') deals with the Holy Spirit in creation.[5]

After briefly showing that the Holy Spirit's presence and action are central to the gospels and the Book of Acts, Rayan turns to Genesis 1, where in the second verse he sees a pattern that can be traced all the way to the heavenly Jerusalem at the end of Revelation: 'The whole of creation took place under the presidency of the hovering Spirit of God. When God's Spirit brooded over the waters, chaos changed into cosmos' (Rayan, 1978: 2–3). Cosmos is defined as 'something ordered, beautiful.' This is what the Spirit does for us: 'The Spirit can likewise effect this change in human hearts. The confusion, the chaos, the lack of beauty in our hearts can be transformed into a world of order, beauty, and peace' (Rayan, 1978: 3). But this is also 'a historical process,' often step by step, with many setbacks along the way, in the lives of individuals and in the world at large.

Rayan trains his focus away from the individual again: 'The Spirit must also hover over the world, renewing it. The world tends to always return to the chaotic (cf. Gen. 6)' (Rayan, 1978: 4). As with the flood, the waters overwhelm the earth and extinguish all life on it; then they recede and the ark holding a microcosm of earthly life comes to rest on dry ground. The Spirit, now in charge again, brings life back to the earth and its creatures. The same applies to political life, which was meant by the Creator 'to liberate people' and offer 'greater possibilities for the growth of the human spirit.' But in our world tainted of sin, 'The many political systems that we have evolved have something of light, but very much of darkness. All of them depend on the use of power, of pressure, and the control of people; on exploitation, threat, and destruction' (Rayan, 1978: 5).

That constraint, Rayan avers, is more subtle in some nations, but because of technology, crowded and inhumane megacities, pollution that destroys life, and the threat of war and even nuclear annihilation, we keep returning to chaos. Our only salvation 'is to live under the influence of the Spirit and to collaborate with the Spirit to renew the earth, to regenerate society, to create fresh thinking, and rebuild our value systems.' Then he adds this key phrase: 'For the Spirit is the initiator of fresh movements, the One who guides the course of history, sustains the life of the church, and warms the hearts of all people' (Rayan, 1978: 5).[6]

The Holy Spirit's activity in human history

Samuel Rayan's assertion that the Holy Spirit 'guides the course of history . . . and warms the heart of all people' goes against traditional Western theology, whether Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant. In his sixth chapter ('A New Thrust'), Rayan calls Jesus' ministry 'imaginative,' and ties this to the Holy Spirit's work:

> The Spirit of God is never conservative. God is love, and his Spirit is like love, rich in fantasy and full of surprises . . . It is important that in our own mission as Spirit-bearers we understand all the new possibilities that have been opened to us. (Rayan, 1978: 52)

Thus, Jesus breaks a number of social barriers, bringing together tax collectors and zealots, enlisting the help of women of ill repute side by side with women courtiers of Herod, touching lepers and healing people in every kind of setting, including in a synagogue on the sabbath. He deliberately shatters class, gender and religious barriers, all in the name of God's reckless and all-encompassing love. Still today, Jesus 'is the

meaning of human history,' because he is leading it to its appointed climax' (Rayan, 1978: 112). He is the 'ultimate meaning of human beings and their world; and human beings are the meaning of things, of parliaments and corporations, moon-flights and United Nations' (Rayan, 1978: 113). And this, specifically, is the work of Jesus' Spirit.

In his penultimate chapter ('Crisis'), Rayan shows that the history of God's people in the Old Testament 'is a long list of crises where we can readily detect the intervention of the Holy Spirit' (Rayan, 1978: 125). From the Exodus to the books of Numbers and Judges, and the intervention of prophets from Samuel to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Amos and others – every one of these men 'was created by the descent of the Holy Spirit and by him enabled to meet the moment of crisis' (Rayan, 1978: 127). This pattern of the Spirit becomes even more obvious and pervasive in the gospels, the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament. Then this searching question:

> Coming to our own times we should ask if the Spirit is not at work in the many movements that characterize our world today. In this century how many lands that were once in the grip of colonial powers have striven for independence. The first great struggle, the struggle of India, has been followed by the collapse of practically the entire colonial system. Where is the God of Exodus and the Spirit of freedom at work? (Rayan, 1978: 131)

He then raises the same question about the global youth movements around 1968 that stood up against war and the excesses of the capitalist system. Even the cry, 'Make love not war,' is 'profound theology, however deviant it may become.' Then he adds, 'It is an echo of the gospel. War belongs to the subhuman; love it is that humanizes the brute in us' (Rayan, 1978: 131). He mentions the Civil Rights movement and the worker movement that developed at about the same time.

All this said, we will always need a large dose of discernment, he cautions. Just because the Spirit is involved in society at large does not mean all is sweetness and light. He explains, 'In this earthly life of ours the brightest light has a touch of darkness; our greatest holiness is somehow touched with selfishness' (Rayan, 1978: 133). All efforts at renewal and reform are tainted by 'sorrow and sin.' Yet in all those movements in which we may discern the touch of the Spirit, we can witness a move 'toward humanization.' But for Rayan, the Good News of Jesus, the liturgy of the Church and the mission all Christians are called to 'have political dimensions and are a social challenge' (Rayan, 1978: 134). If they do not touch people's work, their ability to provide for their families, and their freedom to contribute to the overall well-being of their society, then our efforts have 'little value.'

Some six years after Samuel Rayan's book on the Holy Spirit, a group of thirty-seven evangelical theologians from the Global South gathered for the second global conference of the International Fellowship of Mission Theologians, held in Tlayacapan, Mexico (28 May to 1 June 1984). In a 2016 edited book on pneumatology in the Majority World, veteran missiologist C. René Padilla (2016) is given the last word. Writing about Latin American pneumatology in particular, the Honduran missiologist remarks that its orientation is toward the Holy Spirit's power for Christians' practical living and the hope that he offers, 'especially in the context of poverty and oppression'

(Padilla, 2016: 165). Protestant pneumatology, Padilla notes, stemming from its European and colonial origins, is only concerned with the church and individual redemption and sanctification. He then counters with the following: 'If, on the contrary, the intermediary God is present in creation and history, all issues that affect human beings, regardless of race, sex, or socioeconomic status in the present world, become a matter of Christian concern' (Padilla, 2016: 169). Then he offers his translation of a passage of the 1984 Tlayacapan Declaration:

> The Spirit's creative work can be seen in all the spheres of life – social, political, economic, cultural, biological, and religious. It can be seen in anything that awakens sensitivity to the needs of people – a sensitivity that builds more just and peaceful communities and societies and that makes possible for people to live with more freedom to make responsible choices for the sake of a more abundant life. (Padilla, 2016: 169)

Notice too other examples of issues of concern to the church as it embraces the mission of the Holy Spirit in the world, including environmental sustainability, as we would put it today, and governance:

> It can be seen in anything that leads people to sacrifice on behalf of the common good and for the ecological wellbeing of the Earth; to opt for the poor, the ostracized, and the oppressed, by living in solidarity with them for the sake of their uplift and liberation; and to build love relationships and institutions that reflect the values of the Kingdom of God. These are 'life sacraments' that glorify God and are made possible only by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Padilla, 2016: 169-170)

I now turn to Jürgen Moltmann, a Western theologian, but who has also been a keen student of Orthodox and Majority World theologies. He personally knew Samuel Rayan and no doubt read some of his work – and this, mostly because of his longstanding involvement in the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Already in the 1960s, Moltmann turned his attention to the Trinity and likely for that reason was instrumental in launching the ecumenical discussions with the Orthodox churches on the issue of the *filioque* clause (Kim, 2007: 58).[7] Three decades later, he made sure that the German edition of his book *The Spirit of Life* (1992) would be published just before the Canberra Assembly. In it, he acknowledged his debt to Orthodox theology and interacts at many points 'with theologies of liberation and with Pentecostal charismatic perspectives' (Moltmann, 1992: 60). With the Orthodox, he emphasizes the interdependent work of all three persons of the Trinity and the special role played by the Spirit in creation. Yet he breaks with them by putting the kingdom of God in historical perspective and recognizing that each divine person plays a predominant role in each phase. Thus, the Holy Spirit is active now in creation and in preparing it for its complete renewal after Christ's return. The Spirit is also involved in human history, working inside and outside the church to highlight and dispense those values that will be fully operational in the future kingdom.

Moltmann's (2019) most recent book fleshes out this idea in contemporary terms. Written against the backdrop of 'a world in peril,' *The Spirit of Hope* offers Christians

– and people of other religions looking over their shoulders – a path forward in order to bring a greater measure of peace and justice in our troubled world. In light of ecological doomsday realities already upon us which disproportionately impact the world's poorest and the ever-present threat of nuclear warfare, hope may never have been so urgently needed. This and more, writes Moltmann, leads us to rethink our theology.

From the beginning of his career Moltmann focused on an eschatology of hope. He now calls us to 'a new ecological theology' for the same reason.[8] The modern theological paradigm saw the Genesis 1 creation account as a mandate for humankind to dominate and exploit the earth for its sole benefit. But in this age of fast shrinking biodiversity, ominous climate change, and weapons of mass destruction, we can easily imagine the extinction of homo sapiens. Moltmann quips,

Will this human planetary sickness pass because the human race does away with itself, or will it pass because the human race becomes wise and heals the wounds which it still continues to inflict on the planet earth down to the present day? (Moltmann, 2019: 16)

'Creation care' is the wrong place to start. In fact, it is creation that cares for us: 'The earth can live without us human beings, but we cannot live without the earth.' Hence, we must reinterpret Genesis one and two. From a pneumatological perspective, 'God did not breathe the divine Spirit into the human being alone, but into all God's creatures' (Moltmann, 2019: 19). As we read in Psalm 104:30, 'When you send your Spirit, they [all creatures] are created, and you renew the face of the earth.'

Hence, Moltmann urges us toward 'cosmic humility' in our theology of humanity: we are 'part of nature' and like all other creatures, we 'hope for life.' The above psalm also teaches that 'if the character of human beings as image of God is due to the Holy Spirit which dwells in them, then all created beings in which God's Spirit dwells are God's image and must be respected accordingly' (Moltmann, 2019: 19). Then he adds the following, skillfully weaving creation and re-creation at the eschaton:

At all events, human beings are so closely connected with nature that they share in the same distress and in their common hope for redemption. Men and women will not be redeemed from transience and death *from* this earth, but *together with* the earth' (Moltmann, 2019: 19, emphasis in original).

Referring to Paul in Romains 8, he notes that we humans have 'the first fruits of the Spirit' and we too 'groan inwardly' as we wait for the redemption of our bodies and souls as God's adopted children. He continues, 'The Spirit who is now present is the beginning of the new creation, in which death will be no more, for it is the Spirit of Jesus' resurrection and the comprehensive presence of the risen one' (Moltmann, 2019: 20).[9]

In light of this, Moltmann urges us to forge a 'common earth religion' not just among Christians but with believers of all faiths, a theology that will enable Christians to work more closely and effectively with people of other faiths or no faith so that the human family may flourish as much as possible no matter the challenges ahead. 'Mercy and Solidarity' are values cherished by all religious traditions. What can we do together about the urgent need for nuclear disarmament, for drastically curbing the

global arms trade and reducing the tensions that lead to so many conflicts? How can we re-create our cities as 'places of hope'? Finally, how do we reinforce the institutions of global governance so that they function not by the dynamics of power and coercion but by the just participation of all nations, whatever their relative economic and political heft. In other words, how can we encourage a democratization of our societies from the municipal level to the national and even global level? Moltmann is clearly concerned about global governance.

Global governance and the UN's SDGs

Daniel, the teenage Hebrew who was taken into Babylonian captivity by Nebuchadnezzar was given the best education of his time and, empowered by God's Spirit, could not only interpret dreams but also rise to the pinnacle of a political career that spanned seven decades under both Babylonian and Persian kings. Those empires, though not global per se, arguably point in the direction of global governance.

In the wake of the unspeakable brutality of two world wars, we should see the founding of the United Nations and its commitment to build a better world on the basis of respect for human rights and peaceful means of conflict resolution between nations as a sign of God's grace. Is it not a sign of the Holy Spirit's involvement in human affairs writ large? As mentioned in the beginning, it is not just the UN, it is peacekeeping forces, it is many agencies attending to human need and always looking for more sustainable ways of eradicating poverty and protecting our common planet from the worst effects of climate change, along with many other functions and projects. At the highest level of global governance stand the plurilateral summit institutions (or PSIs) such as the G7, the G20 and BRICS, and multilateral organizations like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the like. Third-tiers players, just as important because they are in the tens or hundreds of thousands, are all manner and sizes of NGOs, the business community, and other civil society organizations.

From MDGs to SDGs

That almost all of these stakeholders have signed on to the Millennial Development Goals (MDGs) and since 2015 to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is truly remarkable. Multiple studies over the last few decades have focused on human well-being. How do people flourish? For instance, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, now with thirty-six member states) published its fourth edited work on human well-being based on a study of thirty-five nations that used fifty indicators.[10] Yet the most influential person behind UN-based development theory is Columbia University's Jeffrey D. Sachs, Director of their Center of Sustainable Development in the Earth Institute. He served as Special Advisor to the last three UN Secretaries-general (2001-2018) and is now an SDG advocate for Antonio Guterres. He also wrote the most authoritative book on the SDGs, *The Age of Sustainable Development* (2015). In his introductory chapter, Sachs lists the SDGs four goals: 'economic prosperity; social inclusion and cohesion; environmental

sustainability; and good governance by major social actors, including governments and business' (Sachs, 2015: 4).

Among the functions a 'good' state carries out are:

provision of social services such as health care and education; the provision of infrastructure such as roads, ports, and power; the protection of individuals from crime and violence; the promotion of basic science and new technologies; and the implementation of regulations to protect the environment. (Sachs, 2015: 3-4)

Multinational corporations are also held accountable, particularly as they operate in poorer nations where corruption is rife, and where they are often found evading taxes, laundering money and degrading the environment.

I have no room for a detailed discussion of the seventeen SDGs. I will only make two points: first, the MDGs were successful in many ways, and second, the SDGs are much more comprehensive. In other words, human flourishing, beyond the necessities of food, clean water, housing, medical care and the like, is also about supportive and meaningful community.[11]

John W. McArthur, Director of the Brooking's Institution's Center for Sustainable Development, published a study in 2017 he had conducted with Krista Rasmussen, a researcher from the UN Foundation.[12] In a summary piece they published in *The Guardian*, McArthur and Rasmussen report that, thanks to the MDGs, 'at least 21 million extra lives were saved due to accelerated progress,' and mostly on the African continent. Major accelerations were recorded in the treatment and prevention of malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and child mortality in general. Maternal mortality 'experienced more moderate acceleration' (McArthur and Rasmussen, 2017a). Also, 471 million extra people were pulled out of extreme poverty, but for most of the indicators the fastest and greatest improvements could be seen in low-income countries (LICs) rather than in middle-income countries (MICs). Hence, on the positive side, research shows that, 'especially on matters of life and death, 2015 outcomes were not on track to happen anyhow' (McArthur and Rasmussen, 2017b). But they add that 'outcomes on basic needs were mixed' and the differences in trends in various locations beg for more research.

The SDGs include human rights, social inclusion, and good governance

The SDGs are much more comprehensive than their predecessor. Several MDG goals are expanded into several SDG goals, like 'eradicate extreme poverty and hunger' (MDG 1) becomes SDG goals one and two (see below). 'Ensure environmental sustainability' (MDG 7) becomes 'Climate Action' (SDG 13), 'Life below water' (SDG 14), and 'Life on land' (SDG 15). There are new topics too: 'Affordable and clean energy' (SDG 7), 'Decent work and economic growth' (SDG 8), 'Industry, innovation and infrastructure' (SDG 9), 'Reduced inequalities' (SDG 10), 'Sustainable cities and communities' (SDG11), 'Responsible consumption and production' (SDG 12), and finally, 'Peace, justice and strong institutions' (SDG 16).

Notably, one of the great improvements of the SDGs is a deliberate attention to social inclusion, human rights and good governance. None of these goals can be

achieved unless there is buy-in by stakeholders from every corner and level of global governance. Hence, the last SDG (MDG 8 was similar) is 'Partnerships for the goals' (SDG 17). The ideal is that state and private sectors combine forces, that wealthier nations fulfill their promises to invest in poorer nations' mitigation of climate change, that 'social inclusion' be a practice also adopted by various UN agencies working in LICs, motivating them to include all the NGOs with similar goals, whether secular or religious.[13]

What is social inclusion in the SDGs' perspective? Jeffrey Sachs defines it as a holistic vision of what a good society should look like. Five factors need to be present in order to ensure that well-being is evenly distributed in a particular society:

1. Reduce extreme poverty
2. Fix inequality: wide gaps between rich and poor must be drastically narrowed.
3. Ensure mobility: what are your chances of advancement if you were born into a lower class?
4. Eliminate discrimination: 'Are some individuals such as women, racial minorities, religious minorities, or indigenous populations disadvantaged by their identity within a group?' (Sachs, 2015: 11).
5. Deliver well-being for the present and future generations, fostering 'social trust, mutual support, and moral values.'

Good governance, then, requires political leaders who respect the human rights of their fellow citizens. We have witnessed many strongmen (like Turkey's Recep Tayeb Erdogan after the failed coup of 2016) or juntas (like recently in Myanmar) using violent means to repress peaceful demonstrations, imprison political opponents and journalists, or change the constitution to keep themselves in power. Human flourishing, many studies have concluded, includes the freedom to be active politically. Basically, 'people feel happier and more satisfied with life when they trust their government' (Sachs, 2015: 12). Put otherwise, even with a significant rise in Gross National product (GDP), unless social inclusion and environmental care are deliberately implemented, these economic gains 'will be followed by social instability and a rising frequency of environmental catastrophes' (Sachs, 2015: 27).

Even though I am barely scratching the surface of the SDGs, I hope to have shown that they represent the best current research on what makes people and their societies live their best lives. Social conflict, discrimination, and especially violence of all kinds robs them of that potential for peace and happiness. But lest the reader think I am hopelessly naïve, to say that the UN is dysfunctional in terms of actually applying its Charter and the UDHR (the two pillars of international law) is a great understatement. We all know that Western nations have disproportionate power in the UN Security Council and that other reforms are greatly needed at many levels.[14] In the literature, the veto power of only five nations is perceived as the greatest Achilles heel of UN leadership. Western nations brag about their democratic credentials and complain of often being stymied by autocratic states like China and Russia, but most

countries see this as hypocrisy.[15] Still, as Deborah Fikes, then permanent representative to the UN for the World Evangelical Alliance, told me in an interview, 'It's the only game in town.'[16]

Application: Pneumatology, mission, and global governance

My interest in pneumatology and global governance was sparked by the proliferation of global protests in 2019. As I followed what was happening in Sudan, then in Hong Kong, then in many other places, I could not shake the idea that the Holy Spirit was somehow involved in these desperate cries for freedom, human rights and social justice, and a decent life. In my reading, I discovered that though some of these protests (e.g., the yellow vests in France, subway fare protests in Chile, 2,800 farmer protests in India in 2020-21) were about economic issues, even those touched on deeper issues of government corruption, rising inequality, and whole sectors of the population without a voice in policy making. In the North Africa and Middle East region (MENA), the key complaints were about corrupt, authoritarian regimes run by the same elites since independence. Other protests were directly related to sociopolitical issues, like in Hong Kong, Iran in 2021-22, Sudan, Lebanon and Algeria.[17] Apparently, human flourishing cannot happen only on an individual level. It is also very much connected to community and governance.

The Bible is clear that this side of the heavenly Jerusalem human flourishing will only be experienced intermittently and partially. As Samuel Rayan reminded us, 'The many political systems that we have evolved have something of light, but very much of darkness' (Rayan, 1978: 133). Yet Jesus called us to be salt and light in our society. Peace and justice are worthy goals to be strived for, and thank God for inspiring leaders after WWII to found the United Nations with such a lofty Charter. Dwight D. Eisenhower, a top American WWII general said when he was president: 'If the United Nations once admits that international disputes can be resolved by using force, then we will have destroyed the foundation of the organization and our best hope of establishing a world order.'[18] Sadly, later presidents disregarded that wisdom.

In conclusion, I offer six practical steps the Christian church writ large could take to establish and expand God's kingdom in the arena of global governance:

1. Pray, individually and collectively, for a better discernment of what the Holy Spirit is already doing in the world around us.
2. Seek to better connect and support Christians working in various UN agencies and in other institutions of global governance. In my interviews, I learned that these can be lonely places at times. Also, Christians who have followed such careers may not have thought about the rich missional implication of their work. Besides the positive impact they can have on their colleagues, a wider theological and missiological perspective could lead them to more fruitful work for human flourishing in application of the SDGs.

3. Prioritize secular NGOs. This is in no way to disparage Christian NGOs. They clearly have an important role to play. I believe, however, that mission leaders should focus much more than they have on sending people into secular NGOs, including those that focus on civil and human rights, or environmental issues. Rayan was right to point to political involvement, and Christians worldwide likely represent a spectrum of political views. This too can enhance democratic governance.
4. Be intentional about promoting interfaith avenues for both dialogue and common advocacy. Christine MacMillan, a Canadian veteran of the Salvation Army, is a good example of this. Among the many leadership roles she has played both in the Salvation Army and beyond over the years, she founded and directed their International Social Justice Commission and made sure it was located just blocks from the UN building in New York City.[19] Part of her reasoning for this is that Christian mission in UN circles involves building friendships and common projects with people of other religious backgrounds. One such friendship is with Azza Karam, a leading academic on religion at the UN. A Muslim herself, she has also been one of the most influential people shaping the UN's policies around religion in the last twenty years.[20]
5. Provide teaching in the churches about mission and global governance. Little is known about this generally, and Christians (many evangelicals, in particular) have very negative views of the UN. Part of our missional calling, particularly in the United States, is to emphasize the global nature of Christ's body and a sense of solidarity with the world's poorest and most marginalized in the name of Jesus. Christian nationalism is unchristian.
6. Focus on the youth in our churches. MacMillan has an internship program in her New York center, and about a dozen interns from various Christian and secular universities are given the chance every year to observe close-up the UN agencies. I interviewed a recent college graduate who went through such an internship, Ruby (name changed), a committed Seventh-Day Adventist. She emphasized how MacMillan cared for each of the interns, and not just about their learning but about their own spiritual growth in the process. After the outbreak of the Russian-Ukraine war, MacMillan brought into their meeting one of her former interns who was now working for the UN in Ukraine. Ruby noted in particular, 'It felt that we were all one family, all part of God's kingdom, coming together to talk about how God is present in these worst crises . . . and how he shows us that in the worst of times we're still called to be that light, that hope, the salt of the earth.' After graduation, Ruby did a Masters in International Development in Spain for a year in conjunction with the UN Systems Staff College. Her goal was to receive this basic training for UN workers and find a field that she felt an affinity for, so as to pursue a career at the UN or parallel NGOs.[21] I came away from two interviews with her with admiration for MacMillan's leadership and pedagogy and with the conviction

that Ruby and her ilk will make wonderful contributions to human flourishing in some of the most challenging contexts of our present world.

However imperfectly, global governance continues to carry within it the potential of mitigating and even healing to some degree the great injustices of the past. More will certainly be accomplished by Christians from all nations investing their gifts and efforts in the task of improving our current institutions of global governance. In so doing, they will become instruments of peace and justice, witnesses in word and deed to the future advent of God's Kingdom in all its fullness.

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Notes

1. Specifically, it was a meeting of the WCC's International Missionary Council.
2. 25 July 2022. So far, I have collected over two dozen interviews with Christians working in various sectors of global governance. I hope to use the data in a forthcoming book on this topic.
3. Though some of ideas about the work of the Holy Spirit might seem unusual to some readers, nothing to my knowledge contradicts the Nicene Creed or other formulations of the Trinity in the Early Church Councils. Argentinian theologian C. René Padilla, seems aware of the hesitation of some when in the beginning of his chapter he emphasizes the fact that 'the work of the Spirit is inseparable from the work of God the Father and the work of God the Son' (Padilla, 2016: 167). Further, Padilla speaks for all his colleagues across the theological spectrum in the following sentence. He has just noted that all God's activity in the world he created is to bring glory to himself. He continues, 'In both the original as well as in the new creation—the topic of the history of salvation—everything proceeds from the Father through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, and everything returns to the Father in glory through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit' (Padilla, 2016: 169).
4. Kim (2007) emphasizes the novelty of this position – recognizing the Holy Spirit's work outside the church, directly impacting human spirits and preparing the world for its final renewal: '[Rahner] broke with dominant Catholic theological thinking since the Council of Trent in interpreting grace as the action of the Spirit of God in history to bring about the divinization of the world, which is experienced by man as spirit' (Kim, 2009: 39).
5. I avidly read this short book (148 pages) from cover to cover, more like a meditation on the Bible and the Spirit of God than like a brilliant work of pneumatology, which it also is. It was captivating, and certainly a tribute to his teaching skills as well.
6. Rayan connects the *ruah* hovering over the abyss of Gen. 1:2 and blowing life into Adam (2:7) to the virgin birth of Jesus (Luke 1:35). It's an interpretation that foreshadows the work of new creation in the eschaton through the Word become flesh: 'Here the virgin, representing the earth, representing the waters of the new creation, was hovered over by

the Holy Spirit, and the result was the new creation, Jesus Christ' (Rayan, 1978: 6).

7. Kim notes that his own theology evolved over the course of those discussions, and that it was becoming explicitly 'a mission theology,' seeking to change the world by following the promptings of the Spirit (Kim, 2007 58).
8. See Moltmann (1967).
9. Moltmann notes here his kinship with Orthodox theology, which 'has expressed this in its hope not only for the deification of humanity but the deification of the cosmos too' (Moltmann, 2019: 20).
10. See: OECD (2017), significantly, this study follows closely the result of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, commissioned in 2008 by French president Nicholas Sarkozy and chaired by Columbia University Professor Joseph E. Stiglitz, which sought to discover better tools for measuring human well-being beyond GDP.
11. Two professors (one psychiatrist and one psychologist) who currently lead the Harvard Study of Adult Development just wrote a book together, which I found just as enlightening as it was fascinating. It is the longest continuous study of its kind – since 1938. It started with 286 sophomores at Harvard College and 456 inner-city Boston 14-year-old boys, and followed them with detailed questionnaires to fill out every two years all through their lives. Many of their children and grandchildren have joined over the years. The conclusion? 'Good relationships keep us healthier and happier. Period' (Waldinger and Schulz, 2023: 10).
12. See McArthur and Rasmussen (2017b).
13. See Steiner and Christie (2021).
14. See for an engagement with civil society: Grugel and Uhlin (2012); a substantial and judicious discussion of how human rights are navigated within the multifarious organs and agencies of the UN from an international law perspective (Louise Arbour was UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2004-2008): Darrow and Arbour (2009); for a laundry list of scandals (the most well-known being the sexual misconduct of peacekeeping forces) and 'egregious ethical and management glitches' by a just retired advisor to five UN Secretaries-General on three continents: Bauman (2016).
15. Senior German diplomat Michael von der Schulenburg offers an example of needed reform of the UN Charter. He served at the UN and between 2005 and 2012 worked at the rank of Assistant Secretary-General in UN peace missions in Sierra Leone and Iraq. He argues that the Charter was drafted in 1945 to ban wars between nations and alliances of nations. But today's greatest threats to international peace are threefold: nations are falling into civil wars, many nation-states are failing, and nonstate actors like terrorists and drug cartels are belligerent. His top two solutions are, a) save the nation-state; and b) stop undermining the UN (which must readjust its Charter to give it tools to help heal imploding nation-states).
16. 13 December 2021.
17. For a very helpful mapping of all major global protests between 2010 and 2021, see https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/30/mapping-major-protests-around-the-world. As for the protests attended by more than a million people, from the largest (Hong Kong, 2 million, April 2019) to those just above a million: Algeria (February 2019), Chile (October 2019), Columbia (November 2019), India (September 2020), USA (May 2020). South Korea (October 2916) and Bolivia (October 2019) both had over 1.5 million protesters. This list was compiled in 2021, before the massive protests led by women in Iran after the police killing of the young woman Mahsa Amini – protests that lasted for months (see Johnston, 2023).

18. From website Brainy Quote, https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/dwight_d_eisenhower_112044.
19. Christine MacMillan, personal interview, Jan. 17, 2022. MacMillan is also senior advisor for social justice at the World Evangelical Alliance and chairs their Global Task Force on Human Trafficking and Health and Healing and represents the WEA at the UN. The WEA holds Special Consultation Status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC).
20. Besides being a Professor of Religion and Development at the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Karam has served in multiple high-level positions at the UN, including chair of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion; coordinator of the UN's Global Interfaith Networks of 600 faith-based organizations; and executive secretary for the UN Multi-Faith Advisory Council. She not only considers MacMillan a friend but a mentor as well. They both contributed to the 2021 edited book *Religious Soft Diplomacy and the United Nations* mentioned in note 13. Karam was given the first chapter, 'Religion at the United Nations: Challenges or Opportunities?' Karam also serves as general secretary for the largest interfaith organization, Religions for Peace International.
21. My first interview with Ruby was on 11/23/2022. I then interviewed her at the end of that school year on 6/5/2023. Besides all her class work, she had worked on a project that involved finance and governance, but focused on a pilot farm in Mozambique that was also feeding children who were attending a school on the property as well. This was for a course in Social Currency. Her cohort was then given the opportunity to visit the farm in Mozambique for a couple of weeks and write up the conclusions of their work. I found Ruby to be bright and articulate, with a very mature outlook on herself and the people around her. She is now applying for a job, in particular at the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) based in Geneva.

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