

THEOLOGY FOR THE *21*-FIRST CENTURY

CENTER OF THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY



God *and* Globalization

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VOLUME 4

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# GLOBALIZATION AND GRACE

Max L. Stackhouse  
Foreword by Justo González

THEOLOGY FOR THE <sup>21</sup>TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY  
CENTER OF THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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THEOLOGICAL ETHICS AND THE SPHERES OF LIFE

MAX L. STACKHOUSE, GENERAL EDITOR  
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*The world is presently going through a monumental social, political, and economic shift that has implications for faith, ethics, human understanding and social well-being. It is clear that the categories of analysis by which most of us have understood the social worlds around us are at least partially obsolete. How are we to understand the new, complex global civilization toward which we are being thrust? What are the ways that religion, theology and ethics, in close interaction with our social, political, and economic situation can help guide globalization?*

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Vol. 4: *Globalization and Grace:*

*A Christian Public Theology for a Global Future*

By Max L. Stackhouse with a Foreword by Justo González



God *and* Globalization

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VOLUME 4

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GLOBALIZATION  
AND  
GRACE

Max L. Stackhouse

with a Foreword by  
Justo González



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*Dedicated to my students  
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a wonderfully wide-seeing, wide-reaching collection  
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and the peoples of the world —  
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MLS

*November 2006*



## FOREWORD

It is now eight and a half years since a group of twenty scholars met at Princeton's Center of Theological Inquiry for the first of a series of conversations on "God and Globalization." The group included noted specialists in such fields as economics, anthropology, missiology, psychology, philosophy, world religions, and Christian theology. As we met, I wondered why I had been invited into the conversation. As a historian, I have worked mostly on the events that were shaping the Graeco-Roman world eighteen centuries ago, and on their aftermath in succeeding centuries. This group was analyzing what is taking place in our time, and trying to discern what it may mean for the future of humankind and of religion. They were discussing the complex issues of economic development as they play out in today's world; they were experts on the various cultures and religious traditions mingling and clashing today; they were wondering about the church's mission in the new global society of the twenty-first century. I listened to the conversation as an interested human being whose lot it is to live in this global society, but I wondered what my contribution could be to the conversation we were launching.

We were dealing with the radically new phenomenon of globalization. Certainly, history does not repeat itself, and we would err were we to believe that what took place in the first centuries of the Common Era will tell us what will happen in its twenty-first century. We must certainly avoid the common error of thinking that the first centuries of church history were an idyllic time, and that were we simply to repeat what was done then all would be well. The church of the New Testament and of the patristic age was as divided in its views about the world and society as we are. They had personality, institutional, and theological conflicts just as we do. Any guidance they could give us would be as dubious and ambivalent as there are different responses today to the challenges confronting us. Thus, a simplistic look at the history of the church would not be of much use for us today.

On the other hand, I have long been convinced that history is not merely about the past. There are patterns in history — otherwise, we would have no means whereby to discern the future, or the consequences of our present actions. What reason would I have to expect the sun to rise in the east tomorrow morning, except that it has a long history of doing so? Every sunrise is different. I cannot and should not expect tomorrow's sunrise to be exactly like today's. But today's and yesterday's sunrises do give me a glimpse as to what to expect tomorrow and how to prepare for it.

History is not just a matter of antiquarian curiosity — of collecting data for the sake of the collection itself. History is read and written from the present, and out of the future for which one hopes or which one fears. And history is also read and written as an attempt to bring the past to bear on the present and on the future. Thus, the field itself of church history as it is written today shows the impact of the globalization our group was discussing. The books on general church history that I studied half a century ago were written from a perspective in which the North Atlantic represented the final and best form of Christianity. Now church history must be written differently, not because the past has changed, but because we are looking at it from the perspective of a church whose centers of strength and vitality are no longer confined to the North Atlantic.

As we ask different questions of history, it provides different answers. When in the nineteenth century it became fashionable for European aristocrats to conduct archaeological digs in Egypt, they excavated palaces, royal tombs, and magnificent temples. They were trying to discover what life in ancient Egypt was like, but what they were actually studying was the lives of those who in that ancient society held positions similar to theirs. Thus they carted away sand and rubble from ancient palaces, and dumped it on the most convenient place. Today, archaeologists seeking to understand the daily life of ancient Egyptians often have to begin by carting away all the debris that earlier archaeologists piled on the remains of the villages where the people lived who built the palaces and temples. Ancient Egypt itself has not changed. What has changed is the sort of question posed to its remains. And that change reflects a change among the archaeologists themselves — their social class, their understanding of society, etc.

Thus, for me as a historian our conversation about today's globalization has implied an ongoing circle of interpretation that leads

from today's globalization to a reinterpretation of the history of the church, then from that reinterpretation of the past to a reinterpretation of the future, then back to the present, and so on in an endless but fruitful circulation.

As I now reflect on our conversation of the past eight years, I am ever more convinced that no other time in Western history illustrates processes similar to today's globalization better than the founding of Greco-Roman civilization in the four centuries immediately before, and the four centuries immediately after, the advent of Christianity. Clearly, what was happening then was not exactly the same as today's globalization. For one thing, it was not truly "global," for it involved only a relatively small area of the world around the Mediterranean basin. Nor did it involve the means of communication of today's globalization — means that are unprecedented both in their scope, as mass media, and in their speed, as through the Internet. And it did not involve the ecological perils of the present process — perils that make today's globalization a matter of enormous consequences not only for human life, but for all life on the planet. Yet, even while acknowledging those differences, there is a sense in which one may interpret first the Hellenization, then the Romanization, and finally the Christianization of the Mediterranean basin as a sort of globalization. It is in this sense that the history of those times may illumine some aspects of our present history.

To review that earlier history in a few words, it suffices to remember that late in the fourth century B.C.E., Alexander the Great had launched his vast campaign of military conquest. As is the case with every imperialist enterprise, his had an ideological justification: to bring the advancements and the benefits of Greek culture to the rest of the world. In this he succeeded to an amazing degree. Three centuries after his death, Greek was still spoken over vast reaches of his former empire. Even in Egypt, with its millennial civilization, those who spoke Greek and who followed Greek social customs were considered superior to those who spoke Coptic and followed the ancient Egyptian traditions. This process of "globalization" did not stop as the various Hellenistic kingdoms founded by Alexander's successors disappeared. Rome came to take their place, building an empire largely on the remains of the Hellenistic kingdoms, and on the foundation of the measure of cultural unity brought about by Alexander's conquests.

Thus, to reflect on that earlier “globalization,” on the way it was seen by various participants, and on the role of Christianity within it may help us understand more clearly some of the issues facing us as we enter the global world of the third millennium. How is this process to be evaluated? How does it affect people’s lives and allegiances? How are we to look at the development of Christianity within our own historical context?

The first three volumes in this series on “God and Globalization,” as well as the volume with which Dr. Stackhouse now brings the project to completion, make it clear first of all that globalization is not a simple matter. In those volumes, and particularly in this one to which I am now honored to write a foreword, it is clear that there are different and contrasting ways to define, to explain, and to evaluate globalization. Indeed, Dr. Stackhouse and our other colleagues have given us a carefully nuanced view of the present globalization, avoiding oversimplifications that would reduce globalization, for instance, to an economic or a political phenomenon, or that would simply condemn it outright as a process of worldwide impoverishment, or would bless it as humankind’s greatest hope.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, evaluations of the globalization that was then taking place were similarly complex and contradictory. Some were quite positive. One of many that could be mentioned dates from the year 143 C.E. — or the year 896, counting from the foundation of Rome. The great capital city of the world was celebrating the anniversary of its founding. At the Athenaeum, a young man from Smyrna — Aelius Aristides was his name — spoke of the glories and benefits of Roman rule:

Praise of your city all men sing and will continue to sing. Yet their words accomplish less than if they had never been spoken. Their silence would not have magnified or diminished her in the least, nor changed your knowledge of her. But their encomiums accomplish quite the opposite of what they intend, for their words do not show precisely what is truly admirable. . . .

You have everywhere appointed to your citizenship, or even to kinship with you, the better part of the world’s talent, courage, and leadership, while the rest you recognized as a league under your hegemony. . . . And as the sea, which

receives from its gulfs many rivers,...so actually this city receives those who flow in from all the earth....

Thus like an ever-burning sacred fire the celebration never ends, but moves around from time to time and people to people, always somewhere, a demonstration justified by the way all men have fared. Thus it is right to pity those outside your hegemony, if indeed there are any, because they lose such blessings.<sup>1</sup>

In this judgment, Aelius Aristides was not alone. Indeed, later historians such as the noted Edward Gibbon have wholeheartedly agreed with him:

If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus. The vast extent of the Roman Empire was governed by absolute power, under the guidance of virtue and wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, not all whose lot it was to live in those supposedly blessed times had the same positive feelings toward Rome and her rule. Toward the end of the reign of Domitian, just as Gibbon's "happy times" were being inaugurated, an exile on the isle of Patmos of whom little is known — except that his name was John, and that he was a Christian — depicted Rome as a harlot seated on seven hills and drunk on the blood of the martyrs. To John, the Roman legions were like a "beast from the sea," and those who served Roman rule in his native Asia Minor were the "beast from the land," serving the beast from the sea. (One may well imagine that John would have said that Aelius Aristides, a man hailing from Smyrna and rejoicing that Rome had included among its collaborators in its way to empire, represented precisely what John meant by the "beast from the land.") And, lest we think that this was the case during the reign of Domitian, but conditions eased thereafter, we should be reminded that Eusebius tells repeated stories of persecution during the reign

1. *Roman oration*, 4.6, 59, 62, 99. Translated by J. H. Oliver, *The Ruling Power: A Study of the Roman Empire in the Second Century Through the Roman Oration of Aelius Aristides* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1953), 895–907.

2. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1850), 1:95.

of the same Antonines whose government Gibbon so praises — in particular, Marcus Aurelius, in many other ways one of the wisest of ancient Roman emperors.

No matter how widespread were the benefits of a common civilization, there were those who were excluded from them. Some, like the Christians whom Domitian and others persecuted, were excluded because the globalizing powers saw them as subversive. In the particular case of Christians, their staunch monotheism stood in the way of Rome's policy of bringing people together by intermingling their gods and religions. The resistance of Jews is well known — first, resistance against Hellenism in the Maccabean rebellion, then resistance against Rome in a long sequence of revolts leading to hundreds of crucifixions in Galilee, to the revolt of 66 C.E. that Titus crushed in 70 C.E., and finally to the rebellion of Bar Kochba. In Egypt, there were similar rebellions in 152 and 172–73 C.E.

Others were excluded simply because they lived in areas that the new cosmopolitan civilization considered marginal. The very word, to “civilize,” meant to “citify.” Both Rome and its Hellenistic forerunners were convinced that the greatest of human inventions was the city, and set out to build and improve cities throughout the Mediterranean basin, thus bringing the benefits of city life to countless thousands — much as many today seek to take the benefits of democracy and capitalism to countless millions. In North Africa, the Berbers were never quite assimilated into the Roman Empire, mostly because they refused to give up their traditional ways of life. The very ideology of “citification” marginalized rural areas and those who lived in them. The produce of land formerly devoted mostly to feeding the local small farmers was now diverted to cities. In an ever increasing degree, what was to be planted was not determined by the needs of those living on the land, but rather by the needs and the interests of those living in cities. In Asia Minor, for instance, land formerly devoted to cereals was now diverted to producing wine and olive oil, with the result that the price of wheat rose by 1,200 percent, and the price of barley by 800 percent. When Emperor Domitian sought to put a stop to the process by limiting the acreage used in vineyards and olive groves, the protest of rich landowners was such that his edict was rescinded. It is as a protest against such conditions that a voice in the book of Revelation cries out: “A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of barley

for a day's pay, but do not damage the oil and the wine!" (Rev. 6:6). Something similar was happening in Egypt, where entire rural villages disappeared as their inhabitants either moved to the cities — even though this was repeatedly forbidden by law — or fled to uninhabited areas, there to live as small farmers, as brigands, or as monks — for in the early years of Egyptian monasticism there was little difference between a fugitive and a monk.

Yet negative feelings about the process that today we would call "globalization" did not come only from those who were marginalized, but also from many who were at the very centers of power and influence. In this regard, the life and opinions of Tacitus are illustrative. Apparently, his family was not of Roman origin, but had come from Cisalpine Gaul, and had received Roman citizenship as part of the process whereby Rome progressively expanded such citizenship to people from neighboring areas. Nevertheless, Tacitus became a man of wealth and influence, to the point that by the year 97 C.E. he attained the consulship. Thus, he had profited from Rome's "globalizing" influences both by being allowed to become part of the Roman aristocracy and by then receiving much of the wealth that flowed from the provinces to the capital. Yet, when he later wrote his memoirs he complained about the manner in which that globalization itself was having an impact on Rome, which to him was a "cesspool for all that is sordid and degrading from all over the world."<sup>3</sup> Tacitus could rejoice in the manner in which Roman power had expanded throughout the world, but he bemoaned the impact that this was having on Rome itself, as the rest of the world came to the capital city. (At this point it would be interesting to draw comparisons with today's anti-immigrant stance among many who have profited and still profit from the economic consequences of globalization, but resent others invading their cultural space and, so to speak, "globalizing" the traditional centers of colonial and neocolonial power.)

Similar views were expressed regarding the transformation of agriculture. In ancient Rome, the land had been held by citizens who were also small farmers. However, as it became necessary to have a standing army, and then as city life took preponderance over the rural, Roman citizens ceased cultivating the land, employing slave labor in ever larger farms. Pliny the Elder — a friend, or at least an

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3. *Annals*, 15.44.

acquaintance, of Tacitus' uncle — sees a sign of decadence in the abandonment of agricultural labor on the part of Roman citizens, who are turning soft by the ease of city life<sup>4</sup> — though Pliny himself does not seem to have ever had a hand on a plow. And Columella decries the growth of *latifundia* and the use of slave labor<sup>5</sup> — even though his own lands were managed by a slave overseer, while he lived in the city. Clearly, thinking Romans were concerned over the concentration of land in a few hands, which was one of the many results of growing Roman power. (Are there parallelisms here with some of the reports one reads about the farm crisis in the United States, Japan, and elsewhere?)

In brief, it is clear that the evaluations of the “globalizing” process in the centuries around the advent of Christianity were no less contrasting and even ambivalent than are similar evaluations of today's globalization. Aelius Aristides believed that Rome was a gift to the world; John of Patmos was convinced that Rome was an oppressive harlot. Tacitus was proud that Rome had become an imperial power, but resented the presence in Rome of those whom he considered sordid and degrading aliens. Pliny and Columella yearned for times past when the land was held by small farmers, yet profited from the benefits of emerging *latifundia*. Furthermore, one can look beyond these various evaluations and see further ambiguities in them. John of Patmos complained about the power of Rome, yet it was thanks to that power that pirates had practically disappeared from the Mediterranean, and that the means of communication existed that allowed Christianity to spread. Aelius Aristides rejoiced in the new life that Rome had brought to cities such as his native Smyrna, but he had to come to Rome to prove his worth as an orator. Tacitus complained about the foreign “scum” invading Rome, but his own family was not Roman in origin. (And here again one is reminded of today's ambiguities, as when I use a computer to write essays warning the rest of the world about the dangers of runaway technology.)

How did all of this affect common people in their daily lives? It is difficult to tell, for common people left few records. Yet, it is possible to glean some information from what records there are — Christian and other writings, Egyptian ostraca and papyri, tombs

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4. *Natural history*, 1.18.13.

5. *De re rustica*, 1.7.

and funerary remains. From these records, it would appear first of all that the material life of most people was not much altered. In spite of all that we hear about Greek becoming the *lingua franca* of the Eastern Mediterranean basin, there is ample evidence that once one left the centers of urban life the ancient languages survived. In rural Egypt people continued speaking Coptic, and most of the surviving written materials from that area are in Coptic. In the book of Acts (14:11–18) we are told that the people in Lystra spoke only Lycaonian, and that this led to a serious misunderstanding as to who Paul and Barnabas were. In Judea and much of Syria Aramaic was still the most common language — and it was also the language used for trade further east.

In those centuries long ago, the globalizing tendencies of Hellenism were powerful — probably as powerful in the Mediterranean basin then as the current globalization is powerful throughout the world. Yet, this did not do away with cultural differences, and certainly did not lead to the imposition of Hellenistic — or later, Roman — culture as a universal culture. In his excellent study of early Gnosticism, Hans Jonas offers an enlightening summary of the process of globalization as it took place in the Hellenistic world and in the centuries that followed. He proposes

... a division of the Hellenistic age into two distinct periods: the period of manifest Greek dominance and oriental submerision, and the period of reaction of a renascent East, which in turn advanced victoriously in a kind of spiritual counter-attack into the West and reshaped the universal culture. We are speaking of course in terms of intellectual and not political events. In this sense, Hellenization of the East prevails in the first period, orientalization of the West in the second period, the latter process coming to an end by about 300 A.D. The result of both is a synthesis which carried over into the Middle Ages.<sup>6</sup>

Then, as one looks at the Mediterranean basin at the time of Hellenization and Romanization, one is struck by two seemingly contradictory characteristics. On the one hand, there is the obvious fact of cosmopolitanism. While an Athenian in Socrates' time

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6. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 18.

experienced a “world” that was generally limited to Athens and its surroundings, that person’s descendants two generations later would experience the world as extending as far east as the Ganges; and still two centuries later Athens would be no more than one among the many medium-sized cities in the Roman Empire. To be “cosmo-politan” means to be a citizen of the universe, and it was thus that people were increasingly understanding themselves at the dawn of the Christian era.

On the other hand, cosmopolitanism was accompanied by individualism. The world had become so wide as to be beyond one’s grasp. In the title of one of his novels Latin American author Ciro Alegría described the experience of native peoples coming to grips with the reality of other cultures and powers by saying that *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* — The World is Wide and Alien. People in the centuries of Hellenization and Romanization had to live in a wide and alien world, and they responded by creating their own smaller worlds, their own definitions of reality, their own value systems, and even their own religions.

It is in the field of religion that one can see some of the most profound changes as a result of Hellenistic and Roman expansion. Before such expansion, religion was closely associated with nation and with place. The Athenians had their gods, as did the Romans, the Egyptians, and the Syrians. These gods were quite distinct, reflecting different cultural and social values and traditions. People were their devotees by the mere fact of having been born in a particular land or city. An Egyptian’s religion centered on gods such as Isis, Osiris, and Horus. A Roman’s religion focused on Saturn, Jupiter, and Neptune. An Athenian would be devoted to Athena, and a Jew to Yahweh. This changed radically with the advent, first of Hellenism, and then of the Roman Empire. People traveled from one area to another. They settled in cities far away from their own. It was difficult to worship the ancient gods, often closely connected with particular sites and regions, in far away lands. Even in their own native areas, people encountered and interacted others who worshiped other gods. The very process of “globalization” led to a sort of globalization of the gods, creating equivalencies that overshadowed the former differences among local gods. Thus Neptune was equated with Poseidon, Mars with Ares, Venus with Aphrodite, and so on. Who was, for instance, the goddess worshiped in the famous temple in Ephesus? Was she the ancient mother

goddess worshiped by Lydians and others long before Alexander's conquests? Was she a meteorite fallen from heaven (see Acts 19:35)? Was she the Artemis that was often represented as a woman with many breasts? Was she the Roman Diana? She was all of these and many more. She was actually the combination of a number of ancient goddesses now joined in one — and thus in Acts 19:27 Demetrius is stating no more than the truth when he claims that she is worshiped “by all of Asia and by the entire world.”

This intermingling of religions also led to the possibility of people collecting religions and religious insights from a number of different sources, and even creating their own personal religion out of bits and pieces from a number of traditions.

A letter attributed to Emperor Hadrian — but probably from an unknown author of the period — describes the religious atmosphere of Alexandria as follows:

There those who worship Serapis are Christians; and those who call themselves Christian bishops are devotees of Serapis. There is not a chief of the Jewish synagogue, not a Christian elder, nor a Samaritan, who is not also a mathematician, a diviner, and a masseur for athletes.<sup>7</sup>

A classical work depicting this situation is the eleven books of *Metamorphoses*, of Lucius Apuleius, also known as *The Golden Ass*. There, in a long and convoluted narrative that is in part a philosophical treatise, in part a picaresque novel, and in part a satire, the protagonist goes through a series of religious and magical experiences, eventually becoming a devotee and a servant of Isis and Osiris, although still retaining many of his earlier religious beliefs and practices. Even while enwrapped in fantastic stories, in the *Metamorphoses* we have a true indication of the attitude of many toward religion. The ancient religion — whatever it may have been — no longer sufficed. It was up to individuals not only to choose their own religion, but even to create it out of various religious traditions. As a result, the greatest threat to nascent Christianity did not come from physical and legal persecution, but rather from those who simply incorporated Christianity into their own systems of belief, quite often setting aside the centrality of Jesus.

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7. Latin text in Daniel Ruiz Bueno, ed., *Actas de los mártires* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1968), 252.

Thus, while today we speak of “Gnosticism” as if it were indeed a formal religion, it was in fact an amorphous group of beliefs and practices, with dozens of different schools and a myriad different shapes, combining occultism with ancient myths, as well as with what was then the best scientific view of the universe.

Here again one can draw parallelisms with our time. Globalization has brought about not only an encounter of religions, but also the tendency for people to create their own religions out of bits and pieces from others, often combining elements from world religions with materials derived from mysterious and supposedly ancient practices and wisdom. The revival of “Gnosticism” — which is in fact quite different from ancient Gnosticism — is only one aspect of this phenomenon. The same phenomenon is behind the huge gatherings that take place at the Mayan ruins of Chichen-Itza on the vernal equinox. People from all over Europe and North America travel there to see the shadow of a serpent climb up the steps of the great temple. They consider this a mystical experience. Yet, were one to ask them about their beliefs, one would find that they hold to a wide variety of religious and semi-religious positions, and that what stands at the very core of their religiosity is a nebulous openness to mystery, and the insistence on being able to define one’s own particular and private religion.

While what takes place at Chichen-Itza may reflect some of the fringes of contemporary global religiosity, it points to the one great common denominator in the globalization of religion: people feel free — and perhaps even obliged — to choose from each religion, modern and ancient, what they like, and to employ that material to create a religion of their own. When I was growing up in Latin America, a sign of the loss of authority on the part of the Catholic Church was the common phrase, *soy católico a mi manera* — I am a Catholic after my own fashion. Today, the “after my own fashion” is true in most major world religions. Methodists and Presbyterians are such after their own fashion. Many Hindus are Hindus after their own fashion. Even among Muslims, an increasing number are Muslims after their own fashion. In all these traditions, so-called fundamentalism — although often quite vociferous in claiming that it is the true form of the religion — is in fact a reaction against the changes that are taking place as a result of globalization.

In this context, it is important to realize that it is possible to see Christianity and its eventual success precisely as a response to the

new global conditions. In those conditions, ancient regional and national religions took a more global dimension in which birth and nationality were no longer as important as personal decision and initiation. The ancient Egyptian religion of Isis and Osiris, originally limited to Egyptians — and even to a certain social class among Egyptians — became the mystery cult of Isis and Osiris, to which one belonged, not through physical birth, but rather through a process of initiation. The ancient religion survived among more traditional Egyptians, but its more universal counterpart soon surpassed it. Can one then look at Christianity and see it as emerging out of Judaism, and eventually surpassing Judaism in the number of its followers, precisely because it was a religion that made the ancient worship of Yahweh, and many of the ethical demands and promises of Yahweh, available to others, no longer by Jewish birth, but now by conversion and the initiatory rite of baptism? In this regard, Christianity was one of many religions emerging at about the same time, and seeking to respond to the new global situation that was emerging.

Thus, as it was taking shape Christianity had much in common with the general religious tendencies of the time. It emphasized personal decision, and did not limit its scope to those who could claim a particular land of origin or a particular cultural or religious tradition. In this regard, it was not too different from Mithraism, the mysteries of Isis and Osiris, or the cult of the Great-Mother. If it was available to Romans, Egyptians, Greeks and others, so were all those other religions. If it sought to explain the most profound mysteries of life and death, so did they. What made it different was its Jewish origin, and its consequent emphasis on a radical and ethical monotheism. If there is only one God, one cannot simply collect religions à la Lucius Apuleius. If this is an ethically demanding God, one cannot condone all that society accepts; one's behavior must reflect the character of one's God. Radical monotheism admits of no other gods — no matter how attractive they may be.

But then, radical monotheism requires a global perspective. The Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation means that nothing exists beyond the scope and reach of the one God. A radically monotheistic religion must be global precisely because it admits of no other gods. This led early Christianity to respond to the challenges of its time in three apparently contradictory, but actually complementary fashions. First, it rejected the syncretism then in vogue. It would not allow Gnostics and others to turn Christianity into a source

for tidbits of religious wisdom which could then be incorporated into whatever polytheistic religion one wished. Second, it embraced within itself a wide variety of views and expressions. When the time came to make a list of authoritative books, it surprisingly decided to include in that list four books — the Gospels — that disagreed on many points, but all agreed on their central message. This made it possible to develop a church which considered itself to be one, even though Alexandrine Christianity, for instance, was very different from Roman and from Antiochene Christianity. Thirdly, by making use of the doctrine of the *logos* it showed itself ready to accept whatever truth could be found anywhere, and thus avoided the perils of what today we call fundamentalism. All of this allowed Christianity to become a truly global religion, expressing at once both the unity of the world in which it was formed and the diversity within that world.

Thus emerged a religion with a truly global vocation — a religion so global that when Constantine correctly diagnosed the Roman Empire as falling apart thought its inner tensions, he expressed the hope that Christianity would be the “cement” holding the Empire together. In this, he did not succeed, for soon the church itself was divided, and scarcely fifty years after Constantine’s death the ancient Roman Empire was being dismembered. But at another level he was right, for as the Empire collapsed it was Christianity that was able to provide both continuity with the past and whatever measure of unity did survive. But that is a story best told elsewhere.

In a way, the challenge before Christianity today is similar to the challenges it faced during its early centuries. It is an attractive quarry from which to draw stones for the building of one’s own “personalized” and “designer” religion. There are also within Christianity those who would make it a narrow religion, as if God had created only Christians. But, during the last hundred years Christianity has shown itself to be more than the religion of a particular civilization or a particular people. Today the centers of vitality for much of Christianity are no longer in the North Atlantic, but in places such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In each of these areas, Christianity has taken on much of the surrounding culture. It has seen such culture as one of the many gifts of the God who is the creator of all. From the point of view of some within the church itself, much of this is a betrayal and a denial of Christianity as they knew it before becoming incarnate in this our global age. Yet, as one looks at the

entire worldwide picture of Christianity, it is apparent that it is well placed to offer a genuine and valuable response to the challenges of today's radical globalization.

These challenges, however, are not limited to the question that so often worries Christians, about the competition from other religions, and whether Christianity will emerge victorious over them. They also involve the possibility of Christianity developing what this volume calls a "public theology" for the present global age. Thus, Dr. Stackhouse's exploration in the pages that follow of the shape of such a public theology is crucial to our response to the issues of globalization. At the same time, such public theology is itself a witness to the global nature of Christianity today. It is no longer a theology that the West offers the rest of the church for its guidance and instruction. It is a theology shaped by many Christians in many parts of the world, reflecting many cultures and traditions, responding to many different situations, in dialogue with many different worldviews and religions, with many different interpretations of many fundamental aspect of the faith, and thus truly global — or, to use a more traditional term, truly catholic! It is to that theology that this book witnesses, and it is as a witness to that theology that I commend it to the church at large.

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