



Contemplating Powers

A Piece of a Conversation

A record of a response to a friend and interlocutor, Stan Nussbaum, a US American independent mission innovator, researcher, and writer with wide international experience. Stan maintains a website here: <http://www.syncx.org/>.

In this paper Jay officially archives his response from an email conversation with Stan who expressed concern that Jay's promotion of Indigenous perspectives in missions may be too dismissive of the existing Industrial paradigm. Stan argued that there remains a place for individualist values in the missions community (and conversation). For example, Jay is known for finding the concept of "team" too individualistic, with unhelpful assumptions, and instead prefers the metaphor of family as a better (and biblical) metaphor for World Christian cooperation, especially in the realm of cross-cultural missions. Stan also asked Jay's opinion about a paper he was working on for the US Evangelical Missiological Society, a paper that borrows heavily from Don Richardson's redemptive analogy concept (e.g. Peace Child) and applied it to the US cultural context, proposing that the "public awareness campaign" could serve in a similar way as a concept that could convey gospel meaning.

Kia ora koutou (life and wellbeing to you all). As is my habit, being of Māori heritage I am obliged by indigenous custom to formally greet those I am communicating with. So, this paper begins with a shortened version of what is usually a much longer protocol in person. I greet you first in my native tongue, followed by a translation...

Kia ora koutou katoa. Nga mihi nui kia koutou katoa. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa. He iti noa tāku kōrero, nā, me iti noa ōku mihi. I roto i te poto, ko āku whakapapa iwi: kō Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, kō Ngāti Porou, Kō Ngāi Tahu ōku iwi. Kō Jay Mātenga tōku ingoa. Tihei mauri ora!

Life and wellbeing to you all. I bring you greetings, three times I respectfully acknowledge all readers. Space is limited here and so must be my greetings. To keep it short, I have identified my three primary Māori tribes from my father's heritage. [On my mother's side, my English heritage can be traced back to the first settlers in Aotearoa New Zealand, with a Woiwurrung Aboriginal great great grandmother (according to family oral history) from my maternal grandmother's Australian line]. My name is Jay Mātenga. Let us acknowledge the vital breath of life!

Power, Nationalism, Mutuality, and New Creation

Firstly, I think I need to speak to your impression that I'm seeking to level a critique at individualistic Christianity and, by extension, missions. I am not. At least, not intentionally. I'm merely trying to point out some limitations of that perspective, some constraints, that can help give voice to a collective perspective in the melody line, to better enable a counterpointed harmony (to borrow the musical metaphor I am wont to use a lot). How individualists conceive of their relationship with God is something best left to individualist theologians and missiologists in their contexts—it's the imposing of those conceptions upon the rest of us that I am critical of. It is my opinion that all biblically faithful perspectives are valid within their contexts (even the concept of "team"), but

they become less helpful in translation to other contexts, and that's the point I'm trying to emphasise.

Based on that framing, I'd suggest your concerns about Christian nationalism in the USA is best addressed from within the USA. The issues of nationalism in other nations will be based on different cultural assumptions. A USA solution is not so relevant for, say, Tonga, nor a Tongan solution for USA. There might be helpful overlaps, but that's probably as far as it goes. This is the problem with expecting "democracy" to be a universal good. What we get is the appearance of democratic systems, but their underlying foundation is still whatever traditional social structure pre-existed the system imposed upon them by the colonial powers—without the smaller tighter boundaries that enabled such systems to



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function in the past (e.g. chiefs over tribes, rather than tyrants over nation-state geographies).

When it comes to thinking about politics theologically, there will be different contextual factors that will inform theological analysis to find appropriate ways forward for a given context. Some pan-cultural meta-theological issues remain the same for Christ followers though—for example, we are not called to be controllers of cultures but co-creators of Christ’s alt.reality (New Creation) within cultures as a positive influence from the inside, a blessing.

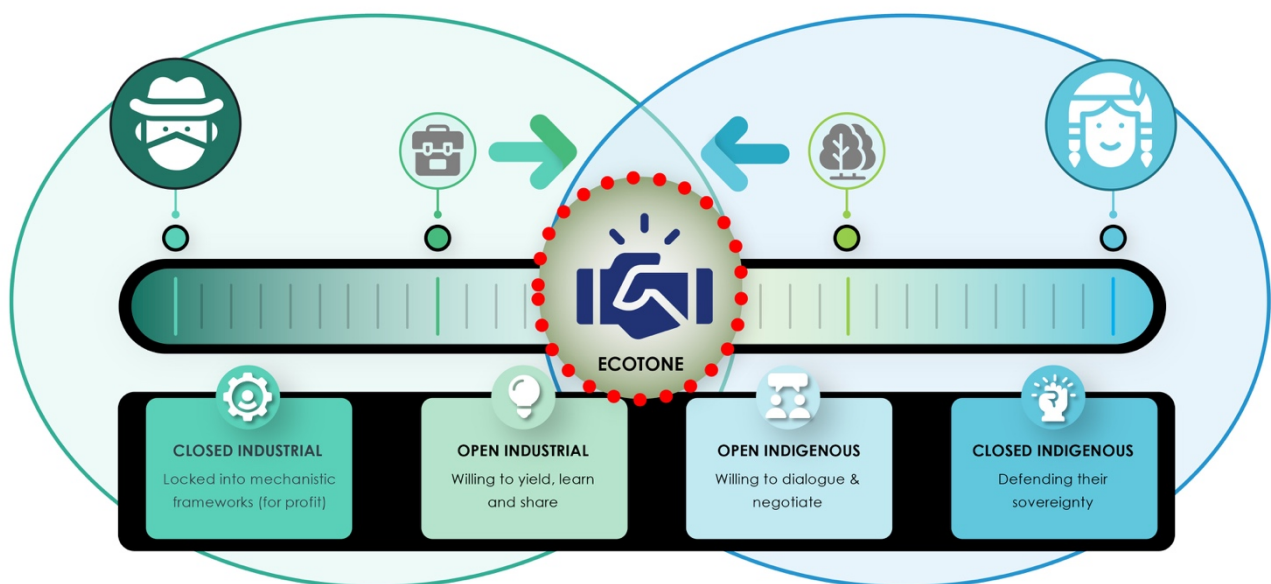
I’ve recently created a graphic (below) to illustrate my thesis that co-creating New Creation is a process of harmonising difference within a reconciliation zone/space that I call an ecotone, borrowed from environmental biology. The ecotone is the point of tension (tone) between knowledge ecologies (eco) like the marshlands and mangroves, where waterways meet the land. In such spaces lay hybrids and unique species that have adapted to the overlapping and intersecting environment. As with the geographic so with the epistemic. Theologically, I see this as the place where the Jew (indigenous in the faith) meet the Gentiles (settlers in the faith), creating a new Humanity through the process of reconciliation—to God in the first instance, which enables a reconciliative blending to one another and our environments flowing out as a result of the first, a blessing.

On the extreme edges of the spectrum, you have those closed to the idea of co-creation (nationalists, revolutionaries, etc). The more you move to the centre, the more open you become until you arrive in the ecotone space where difference co-exists as a transformative unity in harmonized tension. Shalom. Kingdom of

Heaven/God. New Jerusalem. New Creation. Utopia. A vision of ultimate good and mutual benefit forged in the fusion of difference. Hybrid but not homogeneous. Whatever the aspirational (and eschatological) vision, it is only possible under the Lordship of Christ and by the power of the Spirit who is the only power able to hold the diversity in unified tension. The dynamic, like an atom, is the creation of a gravity through mutual yielding of power and preference that ultimately draws us, centripetally, to Christ and shapes us collectively into His likeness as we draw closer to the Christ-centre.

The “world” sees only competing powers as the way to rule. Postmodern philosophers like Foucault would argue that harmony only comes when power is met with equal power—oppressors kept in check by resistance. But that model merely flips the oppressor and oppressed in perpetual oscillation. In some ways, Western democracy sees the left and right political spectrum in this way—capitalism and socialism holding each other accountable, assuming voters are roughly equal on either side of the spectrum, with the swing votes largely determining which one would hold sway in any given historic moment according to the whims of the market, because it’s usually economic self-interest that wins the day. This is a grossly reductionist example of course, but perhaps helpful for illustrative purposes. There is little harmony to be found in such a competitive model. Just lots of change — disruption > stabilisation > discontent > rebellion > disruption. The progress myth may suggest this as an evolutionary spiral towards goodness, but like all myths it can be found wanting, and in tribal societies it doesn’t even hint at progress for the people, just perpetual destruction.

An Intercultural Spectrum



In contrast I believe the advent of Christ proves the efficacy of the opposite action. Instead of competition we ought to rely on giving way. The idea of mutual yielding is best captured in the attitude of Christ that Paul exemplifies to the influential Roman believers addressed in Philippians 2:5-11. There the identity of Jesus is acknowledged, but as your example dramatically illustrates (in the inverse), it wasn't used to impose power or control. Rather, the God Jesus relinquished power and became a servant. You'll know this as kenosis. The politics of Christ's New Creation is lovingly kenotic. This is made possible within human groups this side of eternity through a process of perpetual reconciliation. Perpetual reconciliation because impositional power inevitably occurs (due to the Genesis 3 event). But when accidentally imposed it needs to be repealed (*cf.* 1 John 3:9). This is something of a self-regulatory function within the believing community that provides a measure of internal accountability.

Mutual yielding only happens when it is truly reciprocal. Anything less and it leads to abuse. The temptation to impose a perspective/position/power is rightly met with resistance to avoid this—appropriate tension. Once equilibrium is re-established, mutual yielding continues. Obviously, someone's opinion, albeit modified, will ultimately be accepted and applied for the good of all, but their 'ownership' of that opinion or idea tends to get lost in the process. It becomes the idea of the collective. Even so, often in collectivist cultures the originator of the idea can receive special honour for his or her wisdom, with the collective's confidence in the leadership potential of that person growing (a state only maintained by that person's willingness to remain humble about it).

Is this antithetical to the individualist context? I don't think it needs to be. The collective singularity of the body of Christ is, after, a collection of individuals and individual expression should be encouraged to maximise the creative potential of the whole, but it does require the individual to yield to the collective, which can be intensely counterintuitive for the independent person used to a high degree of autonomy. In this paradigm perhaps collectivist cultures have some advantage, but one of the many challenges collectivist people face is to learn to become individuals who intelligently contribute their unique agency, gifts, and talents, rather than just lazily following the directives of a hierarchy or hero-champion.

Your diagnosis of the problem in your SYNC blog post is understandable, but I think you are conflating a North American understanding of democracy with political contexts where it is never going to work the same way. That's not to approve of the despots who manipulate and

dominate the system for their own gain, just to say that different solutions need to be found and applied from those that may work in democratic contexts that have a social contract rooted in a long history of Judeo-Christian influence, which has enabled them to work (at least until that foundation was undermined).

Redemptive Analogies, Concept Fulfillments, Metaphors, & Myths

I've liked Don Richardson's thesis since the first time I learned of it in the Perspectives course back in 1990. I've met Don since as a colleague of his son Steve back in my Pioneers leadership days. I must confess to being a bit of a 'fan boy'. His was my first exposure to the idea of contextualisation and still forms the basis of much of my thinking. So, when I read your proposed EMS paper, I immediately had problems with your adoption of a Public Awareness Campaign as a redemptive analogy. My gut reaction was that it felt like you were trying to mix two qualitatively different things: myth and method.

A redemptive analogy is something deep within a cultural psyche that can help frame meaning around Christ's death and resurrection (and all that that represents). It is a eureka moment in the (probably subconscious) minds of a people, where who Jesus is and what Jesus did starts to make sense in the very depths of their soul and spirit. It becomes relevant to them—an initial point of enlightenment, if you will. A concept fulfilment is that redemptive understanding applied in the behaviours of a culture, suggesting that it can satisfy their deepest longing for what they consider to be the good life. Once embraced, Jesus becomes the fulfilment of that eschatological vision, and the Holy Spirit provides the power for that fulfilment to manifest in the communal life of a people. Such longings and expectations are often only articulated in myth and legend, and even then, they can be hidden within narratives and not easily explicated.

The Industrial world, in counterpoint, doesn't put much stock in myth (even though there is myth a plenty!). Industrials too easily relegate such things to metaphor, where the Indigenous will consider the stories much more literally, as experiential reality, even if that reality doesn't appear to be physically possible according to our senses and science. Such stories are real in every meaningful way because they speak deeply into our psyche, help us make sense of our lived experience, and are intimately respected (and defended) for it. Paul Hiebert would have called this a worldview (or, for an individual, a mazeway) but anthropology has moved away from such rigid constructs. I prefer cognitive schema for an individual or cosmivision for a larger



group. It represents deep subconscious assumptions we make about reality, coded into us with our genetic heritage, and reinforced by the beliefs articulated and practiced in the contexts of our upbringing. That is the place where analogies of cosmic consequence lie.

Rev Māori Marsden, a well-respected Māori theologian trained in the ways of the Indigenous shaman, is quoted as saying that before the missionaries came, we saw the mountain, but the top of the mountain was shrouded in cloud. When the missionaries translated Scripture, taught us how to read (yes, I do believe literacy is very important, even for oral cultures), and introduced us to Christ, the cloud lifted off of the mountain and what we saw in part we could now see in full. The laws and lore of the *tohunga* (shaman) and the elaborate rituals we had to abide by to live safely in the land (without breaking *tapu/taboo*) were like what Paul refers to in Galatians 3:24—a guardian or school master until we could be made right with Christ through faith. The meaning of a mountain and the mystery of the unknowable (the cloud) are deeply entrenched in the Māori cosmivision. Rev Marsden’s analogy is a powerful introduction to the validity of Christ’s claims to fulfilment of all Māori expectations. It was this dynamic, accompanied by spiritual power encounters, that resulted in the gospel being accepted by over 60% of the Māori population between 1840–1880. Sadly, the behaviour of foreign settlers who claimed to be so-called Christians harmed the ongoing growth of Māori Christianity.

I say all that to emphasise the significance of redemptive analogy to resonate very deeply with the culture of the people, as a starting point for gospel-challenged change toward New Creation. Does the concept of a Public Awareness Campaign resonate the same way? Maybe it does in your context. I am not judging the suitability of it. I’m just concerned that it doesn’t seem to match what Don found among the Sawi. US America does have its deeply ingrained analogies though, and that’s precisely what Christian Nationalism is utilising. The USA’s mythos of divine exceptionalism and manifest destiny are powerful analogies. Can they be redeemed? Perhaps not. Perhaps they have been coopted too much already, with the idea of City on a Hill/New Jerusalem/Kingdom of God/New Creation appropriated in a way that is not compatible with faithful readings of the whole narrative of Scripture. This is a hermeneutical problem. An analogy can be helpful to draw out meaning in Scripture that might otherwise be overlooked, but it can also too easily bend an interpretation of Scripture in a direction passages never intended to go.

As a theological proposition, Penal Substitutionary Atonement is quite a powerful redemptive analogy. It does not represent the entirety of the work of Christ on the cross. It is a perspective drawn out of the analogy of law within European societies, one that also provides a concept fulfilment of a particular utopian future for the privileged (“saved”). While supporting evidence for it can be found in the sacrificial life of Israel, and the core concepts are developed by early church fathers, it is much more an interpretation than a central fact of the work of Christ on the Christ required to be accepted for salvation. In its penal formulation it is an interpretation that made sense to the reformists for their cause in their context, and then adopted by much of Protestant Western Christianity thereafter. In this sense, PSA is more of an analogy than a universal doctrine. It’s helpful but not essential, as you noted well in your explanation of the Peace Child concept.

I found Howell’s appeal to *Christus Victor*, which you also cited, unhelpful in this regard. Christ’s death and victorious resurrection provides little motivation for change in many Indigenous contexts. It might speak to Jesus having power over oppressing spirits, but it also reinforces the use of power to vanquish foes, which I’m not convinced is the central point of Jesus’ resurrection either. So *Christus Victor* could be one reason why despots claiming Christ’s anointing find validation for their behaviour. *Christus Auctor* (Christ as Ancestor) on the other hand, as the ever-watching powerful Interventionary, is much more appropriate in my context. The blood of Christ as our ancestor (by faith) is what binds us, different as we are, into a singular family, a common tribe. Blood is the unifying factor for family and tribe. We overcome the evil one who exists to divide and destroy by the blood of the lamb because it is what creates us into a unified family of different (a hat tip to Scot McKnight)—a witness to the resurrection power of the Spirit. The same sacrificial blood that purifies sin in the temple is also the blood that creates inclusion into a group, with an identity that nobody can dispute. Seeing Jesus as *Christus Auctor* reveals a whole new level of meaning from Scripture that sits comfortably alongside the blood of *Christus Victor*—not to neutralise but to counterpoint the meaning, filling out the harmony and probably mitigating potential excesses of each. Admittedly, one could call on the ancestors to help one succeed similar to claiming Christ’s anointing to lead, but the idea of ancestral influence is also applied as a moral guide within collectivist cultures. A bit like the panopticon of Bentham’s prison, which is the paradigm used today of the surveillance society. If you are being watched, you will behave.

Does the Public Awareness Campaign God create a similar effect? Will it resonate with deep meaning and promise satisfaction for unconscious desires? Maybe it does in your context, but it feels like you'd need to do A LOT of work to make it make sense to the masses. You call it a redemptive analogy, but I couldn't help but read it as an attempt to sanctify (or perhaps redeem) a methodology. It may hit the right note at a cognitive level. It may even be successful at altering some behaviours (as Smoky the Bear did). But can it reach deep into the psyche of North Americans and satisfy their unfulfilled longings? Longings, not lusts. Money, power, fame, pleasure are hardly things the gospel provides (unless it's a false prosperity gospel, that heretical North American export). What is the appropriate deep longing of the American people? Does the concept of a campaign scratch that existential itch? From what I see in the metanarrative of Hollywood post-sexual revolution, such a longing might be for BE-longing. The metanarrative of community or (non-traditional) family is prevalent in most successful storylines in my lifetime. These analogies and fulfilment types being played out in fantasy realms seem to speak of a yearning for permanent intimacy and acceptance. Surely the gospel speaks fulfilment to that.

If an awareness campaign is helpful as a metaphor for God's purposes, I'd suggest it would be as a model to convey something deeply meaningful to a people within a context. A campaign, therefore (as I see it) is a container but not the message per se. It is a method of conveyance for the deep existential truths of the gospel. *Mission* is the reason why it's conveyed. *Gospel* is the contextualised content. *Evangelism* is the means of conveyance. *Faith* is the point of acceptance of the message and activation of the liberating gift therein. *Church* is the manifest outcome of acceptance and the way of perpetuating the campaign. *Discipleship* is the message lived out in life-on-life transformation with the effects bearing witness to and becoming examples of New Creation. *Sin* is that which breaks relationship faith within the community, requiring repentance, reconciliation, and restoration to the community.

Having just bounced off of the "Seven Deadly Nouns" that you listed, I wouldn't choose to start there. Probably because I'm too lazy and it's just too hard to try to 'redeem' well entrenched concepts. Each of the seven concepts are so deeply ingrained in Evangelical culture that you are fighting an uphill battle trying to reinvent them. They are like old wineskins trying to contain the much-needed new wine for a new generation/context. That's why I'm pivoting away from Kingdom of God to New Creation. It's essentially the

same biblical concept but the alternative biblical phrasing elicits new imagination. Similarly 'co-create' rather than church, partnership, or even collaboration. Co-creation gives purpose to our togetherness within a covenantal (rather than contractual) relationship agreement sealed by the blood of the lamb. This is also why I loathe the use of "Great Commission" and do not believe it can be redeemed as a viable concept for the future of missions (contrary to the opinion of the Lausanne Movement). The final commissions of Jesus to His disciples have so much more to say to us about God's purpose for humanity than what is constrained by the Eurocentric colonial concept of "The Great Commission". I say, jettison it so we can move ahead with a bit more gospel imagination.

Obviously six of the seven are biblical words and deserve reinterpretation but I don't believe that can be done effectively within the concept of "mission". It must be handled within their biblical and historical contexts. They each lend themselves to better interpretation than we've done in the recent past and I feel even your reinterpretation holds too closely to traditional hermeneutic assumptions. What we need is a different hermeneutic key. Unlike my former prof. Chris Wright, I'm not a fan of a "missional hermeneutic of the Bible". I am much more invested in a "relational hermeneutic of the Bible". Neither may be any worse or better than the other. It probably depends on the context being educated. But I don't see the former helping us to move beyond 18th century conceptions of missions for the future of missions ahead of us. A relational hermeneutic would frame each of the six NT terms you list somewhat differently, but this isn't the time to unpack those. I will hold your paper in mind when I eventually write my first book (or series) on all of this subject matter. Unlike my doctoral thesis, I feel my thinking is almost mature enough now to commit some of the ideas down in a more permanent (and coherent) way—thanks in large part to folk like yourself who challenge me to work the angles better as I seek to form and articulate what I'm thinking.

All in all, perhaps I see the potential for your "Public Awareness Campaign for the Messianic Era" (PACME) to be the mouthpiece of New Creation. Every regime needs its reinforcing narrative—its metapraxis. It seems to me that PACME is a method that can transmit the narrative, but the narrative itself would morph according to the context into which it is transmitted—even within the many contexts that make up the United States. So, again, PACME as the vehicle not the content. One worrying association with PACME, which I think you manage to avoid, is for it to be reduced to a propaganda campaign. Jesus doesn't



need propaganda, He releases witnesses. Propaganda conveys a version of a truth, a spin on reality for the benefit of those in power. Witnesses are expected to speak and demonstrate their experience of reality. They

are quite different things. While a single witness can also spin an interpretation, multiple witnesses are hard to ignore, and triangulating the experience of myriad witnesses is impossible to dispute.

Concluding Thoughts

I trust there is something there of benefit to you, my friend. My apologies if this has come across like a big wet blanket. I fully concede that my reading of your work is likely influenced by my own biases, and I may have misrepresented what you were saying along the way. I also did not feel the need to give a blow-by-blow review of the blog post and article. That probably would have descended into more pedantry than you have in my response here!

As you ably concluded, redemptive analogies are not a panacea. They are an eye-opener (another one of Richardson's terms), merely the beginning of a growing understanding of a meaning of the gospel. In reality, redemptive analogies abound. Significant for me was the Foreigner 80's soft-rock ballad "I wanna know what love is". That was my big a-ha moment. The gospel, then, became a pathway for me knowing what true love is. Not the idealised version from Hollywood romances that rarely exists off screen. The gospel addresses all the big existential questions that lie beneath every psyche and culture. As it does so, we also learn what peace is. Love and peace are available in Christ in ways the world knows nothing of. No Nationalism (Christian or otherwise) will ever create either of those things. Control will only ever repress. But, if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed (John 8:36). Oh! There's your archetypal American analogy: freedom! You want freedom? Leave your political and financial allegiances and come to Jesus.

Arohanui ki a koe e haere ana ki te ao (love to you as you go into the world).