



Kotahitanga and Koinonia in Shalom as the Objective of the Mission of God

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Evangelical theology and the missions that flowed from it was born in an era of high colonialism, shaped by enlightenment dualism and scientific method, under the influence of industrialization. As evangelical Christianity's centre of gravity shifted south, global North dominance over its theology and missiology persisted, translated into new tongues. This paper, sensing a tipping point in evangelical thought as we emerge out of global pandemic disruption, proposes an alternative framing of church and missions from the collectivist perspective shared by those less affected by the influence of Western industrialization and individualism. It proposes that both the means and the objective of the mission of God should be common unity in-Christ. It shifts focus from the Great Commission to the Great Commitment, which emphasizes being one and holding fast to that unity for the joy that awaits those who persevere in mutuality. Along the way, the demonstration of whole-of-life covenantal community in-Christ serves as our witness to the world, which provides those of us in-Christ with an opportunity to explain the hope that we have and invite others to join us in the experience of God's shalom goodness.

Toward the end of Michael Green's examination of evangelism in the early church, he argues that "Evangelism was the prerogative and the duty of every church member... The spontaneous outreach of the total Christian community gave immense impetus to the movement from the very outset".¹ Alan Kreider parallels Green's seminal work with a deep dive into early church texts and counters some of Green's conclusions. Kreider's research reveals that participants in the early church did not, in fact, focus on "saving" people or recruiting them" in an evangelical sense. Rather, Kreider concludes, "the growth of the early church... was primarily because the Christians and their churches lived by a habitus that attracted others... living faithfully—in the belief that when people's lives are rehabilitated to the way of Jesus, others will want to join them".² For Kreider, the reason for the improbable growth of the early church can be found in the second part of Green's quote: the public example of "the total Christian community".

In this paper I posit that the wellbeing of covenantal communities³ of God's people in-Christ⁴ is the objective of God's mission, because these communities represent the shalom-kingdom of God made manifest in a perishing world. I speak of wellbeing in a wholistic sense where participants live out the full potential of their imago Dei⁵ in loving community; in reconciled, reciprocal, relational harmony with the triune God, with one's self, with one another in-Christ, with our environments, and with our histories.

The kingdom of God is a concept that has been much debated and developed in Protestant thinking over the past 50 years. To position my theology of God's kingdom, I hyphenate shalom to it. It is my view that God's rule and reign over the earth and all that dwell in it, is demonstrated by harmony—reconciled relational peace between all things. I hold that this aim is the backbone of the biblical narrative and the mission of

God revealed in it. This is an eschatological hope, but it is also meant for the people of God to live out now in covenantal communities, enabled by the Spirit of God, as an invitational witness to the inhabitants of their respective societies.

In my reading of Christian scripture, I see a clear boundary separating those in-Christ from those who are not. Those in-Christ form an in-group distinct from those who belong to multiple out-groups in wider society. In-Christ in-groups are familial communities, bound by the new covenant of God's grace, which celebrate "the diversity of the church as the very thing God most wants".⁶ The boundary, however, is open to all who would join such a community through relational allegiance⁷ to Christ. As the Psalmist declares, "open up, ancient gates!"⁸

My introduction is not complete until I locate myself. The perspectives in this paper arise as much from my



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ethnic heritage and experience as they do from reflecting on the Bible and formal study of others' ideas. I am a hybrid of Ngati Kahungunu, Ngati Porou, Kai Tahu, British, and Prussian heritage. Until my father, there is an unbroken line of Māori ancestry. My mother's family is originally from Britain. My upbringing and education were almost entirely industrialised Western, but I identify as Māori because I instinctively understand and live out the values of my Māori forebears, engaging the world with an indigenous orientation. I experience dissonance in my interaction with industrialised Western values, yet I appreciate the wealth to be found in these perspectives. The grace of God can be identified in all experiences of lived reality. It is in the tension of our differences that we are matured in-Christ. It is by holding and tuning those tensions in covenantal community that we express our unity. For Māori, this is understood as *kotahitanga* (indivisible oneness). Some New Testament writers express a similar concept in the Greek as *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*: connected partnership). I see both as referents to the shalom-Kingdom of God. Simultaneously, the means and the objective of the mission of God.

The Great Commitment

From the late 18th century, evangelical missions developed within a colonial imagination of expansion—that Christianity would spread by conquest. Evangelical missionaries did not carry an overt Conquistadorian posture, Christianizing by force if necessary, but there remained a paternalistic air of cultural, intellectual and technological superiority in their missionary motivations and methods⁹—which persists today. Michael Goheen rightly argues that missionaries “were children of their time, and they accepted the cultural assumptions and social, economic and political practices of their era. But that is not the whole story. Livingstone’s concerns to liberate Africans from debilitating cultural practices such as slavery (civilization) and from poverty (commerce) were admirable goals.”¹⁰ Similarly, missionary activity in Aotearoa New Zealand pre-1850s had many admirable attributes. It was evangelical missionary intervention that secured a treaty between Māori and the British Crown that is upheld today as the basis for right relationships between indigenous Māori and subsequent settlers.¹¹ Nevertheless, times have changed, as have assumptions and expectations in our current era.

An expansionist reading of texts such as Matthew 24:14 and 28:18-20, for example, places an obligation on readers to Christianize the entire world. It is easy to assume this as a divine right, to interpret it to mean imposing our cultural understanding of the ways of

Christ onto others¹², and to see this as a task to be achieved. The evangelical modern missions movement has built an eschatology and missiology around such texts to motivate believers to engage in this kind of global witness. So much has been invested in these interpretations of scripture that they are fiercely defended by the evangelical missions-industrial complex.¹³ Yet, resources to sustain such an investment are diminishing. It is beyond time for evangelicals to invest in a new biblically based imaginary¹⁴ for missions.

Evangelical missions and sending churches maintain a strong preference for what are now archaic ideologies tethered to the myth of “The Great Commission”,¹⁵ with its implicit emphasis on human agency, rather than viewing such texts as promises that God will fulfil. If we insist on holding such sentimental attachments, we will experience increasing dissonance between the biblical text and our lived reality. I contend that any indication of progressive territorial expansion understood from Matthew 28:18-20 or Acts 1:8 is eisegesis. It is read back into the text. Today’s post-colonial climate makes such a reading thoroughly reprehensible.¹⁶ Those who would argue that this is just pandering to the fashions of our age need only to look back in history to where the Great Commission myth emerged to find that it too is a child of its time, interpreted as a result of Enlightenment-informed industrialised colonisation.

Rightly understood within its biblical context, Matthew’s pericope tells of the resurrected Jesus releasing his disciples to minister beyond Israel so that the Matthew 24:14 promise could be fulfilled. With this, Jesus rescinds what he earlier told the disciples, “Don’t go to the Gentiles or Samaritans, but only to the people of Israel”.¹⁷ Rather than giving authority to take the nations (as some would say it), the passage speaks of Christ’s authority to make God’s promises available beyond Israel. He lays out the scope of the disciples’ ministry as now anywhere—to the Gentiles and no longer limited to Israel. He then gives a synopsis of the method of their ministrations as means to incorporate new followers into God’s covenantal community.¹⁸ This reading is considerably less “Doctrine of Discovery”¹⁹ than the Great Commission proponents suggest.

In Acts 1:8, Luke’s record of Jesus reiterating the permissive scope of the disciples’ ministry (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth) was to answer the disciples’ “Are we there yet?” with a firm “No, there is more to be done”. It was not a prediction of the gospel’s spread in concentric circles from Israel. If it were, and if Christ’s return was contingent on it, he would have been permitted to return in the mid 1850s, by which time at least 60 percent of the indigenous

population came to faith in Christ in Aotearoa New Zealand,²⁰ closely followed by the majority of the Pacific Islands—at the literal ends of the earth from Jerusalem.

With all the analysis and recategorizing of the taxonomies of tribes, languages, peoples and nations²¹ by evangelical strategists, to determine the task remaining (as helpful as those things can be), we are in danger of completely missing the objective of God's mission. Christ never meant for his followers down through the ages to focus on the commission to his first disciples.²² Instead of a Great Commission, I believe Christ meant for us to focus on the Great Commitment, which is found neatly in his prayer of John 17:18-20. When his hour had almost come, our great intercessor prayed for all of his followers throughout all time, and within that prayer he reveals the means of the mission of God: unity.

Unity in its sociological sense is not mentioned by John in Jesus' prayer, but it is illustrated by our Lord's petition that we be one as he and the righteous Father are one. Here, the Greek word used is simply, *ἓν*—the primary number, one. The simplicity is deceptive. Consider the diversity of the multitudes in Revelation 7:9 as one—a singularity. Yet nothing in the Revelation references to the multitudes (Revelation 5:9, 7:9, 11:9, and 13:7) suggests homogeneity or uniformity, perhaps apart from symbolic attire and palm branches in 7:9. The recipient of the revelation clearly saw a heterogeneous people of God, worshipping before the throne, yet we have reason to believe that they are one. This is the eschatological aim of the mission of God—a covenantal community in glorious diversity, unified in our worship of the one true God. Unified as worship of the one true God.²³ Harmonious together in our thunderous declaration that "Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb!"²⁴ And in that vision, there we all are, proof of that fact.

To Be One

It is easy for those from individualist/industrial backgrounds to gloss over or fail to comprehend the significance of this reality for us in-Christ. "But what of our autonomy?", individualists quickly counter, "What of the abuse we might experience by the collective overriding of our will?" Fans of popular science fiction might immediately conjure images of assimilation illustrated by Star Trek's villainous Borg Collective. My response is, what of it? What part of "may they be one" suggests autonomous being? Autonomy is a philosophical illusion. The New Testament writers go to great lengths to remind us of our connection to, and obligation for, "one another". Yes, abuse can happen in a collective, but that is most likely because of the misuse of

power by a few, not because of the many constraining me to conform for the benefit of all.

In contrast to those comfortable with feeling separated from others as a distinct buffered self,²⁵ collectivists feel unease in that state. We are most contented when we are we, not I. As a Māori, I do not exist apart from my *whānau* (family), *hapu* (family group), *iwi* (tribal affiliations) and *tupuna* (ancestors). I may not be physically co-located, but I am continually, psychologically, and spiritually connected. Referring to the Nguni Bantu principle of Ubuntu, African theologian John Mbiti expresses it this way, "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am."²⁶ In *te ao Māori*, the Māori world, we use various phrases to express a similar reality, but these can be clustered under the broad term of *kotahitanga*—the way (*tanga*) of being or positioning (*ko*) as one (*tahi*).

As with the Greek *ἓν*, the central part of the concept of *kotahitanga* is *tahi*, the numeral one. Singular—in harmonious alignment as one people, of one mind, with one commitment, for one aim: the wellbeing of generations and their environments. For Māori, this is an aspirational goal, and one not easily attained let alone maintained. It does not suggest the absence of disagreement or conflict, but such things are supposed to happen within the elasticity of sustained commitment to the group. Supposed to. Like all cultures, there are utopian visions and then there are the lived realities, which are, at best, mere shadows of what could be. It should not be so for those of us in-Christ, however.

What many consider a future utopian fantasy is what Christ expects of his new covenant community at all times. As the Apostle Peter affirmed, "all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and (God) will grant you (God's) blessing".²⁷ And to the Corinthian believers from the Apostle Paul, "I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose."²⁸

This is not easy, but it is both expected and achievable in-Christ. It is easy to assume that the trials of the early church were a consequence of the hostile societies around them. It is worth noting, however, as the quote from Paul attests, that most of the tensions, trials, and testings addressed in the epistles are experienced within



the covenantal community in-Christ. Re-read the book of James from that perspective. It is a revelation.²⁹

How is this singleness of mind, humility, common wellbeing, and harmony supposed to happen? More to the point, why does it not appear to be the norm in our local churches? From my experience, it clearly does not happen through sheer force of collective will. It is not created through common cognitive assent of, and commitment to, a set of doctrinal propositions. You might find the appearance of unity under a strong hand of leadership, but rarely does strict control allow the fruit and gifts of the Spirit to freely manifest in a group. Adherence to the law of God could not create it,³⁰ so why should the clearly articulated and enforced rules of an organised community or institution? No, it is not by any human means that we are able to dwell with one another in harmony, it is by the transformative enabling of the Holy Spirit of the living God.

Returning to our Great Commitment passage, Jesus prays to the Father that we would be one “just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.”³¹ This evokes an image of a Celtic knot. It is indicative of inseparably intertwined relationships. There is no mention of the Holy Spirit in the mix here, but John implies that the in-ness, the intimate connectivity, is the work of the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit of God that connects us. To fully understand this, we need to concede God’s immanence within God’s creation. For Māori, a spiritual connection between all things and beings is a requisite aspect of kotahitanga. For Māori followers of Christ, this is sanctified in-Christ by the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.

Hold Fast

In order to understand kotahitanga in its sanctified potential,³² we need to appreciate the significance of spiritual connection. Here, our understanding of kotahitanga is aided by the biblical term *κοινωνία*—koinonia and its derivatives. Koinonia is most often translated as fellowship or partnership,³³ but in its biblical usage it means something much richer than mere transactional relationship. It does not imply a contract. It speaks of the intimacy of an enduring covenant. Koinonia denotes a reciprocal relationship connection between persons—their mutual communication,³⁴ communion,³⁵ and collaboration.³⁶ It signifies interdependent participation and sharing for common wellbeing.³⁷

The importance of this is easily lost in the industrialised West because partnership, or even fellowship, is too readily interpreted in transactional, functional or

utilitarian ways. It is too easy to assume it means occasional intercourse between autonomous beings for individual gain. But this is not how the New Testament writers understood koinonia. No more potently is this made obvious than when Paul writes, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship (*κοινωνία*) can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people’. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord...”³⁸ We are yoked, connected, harmoniously linked, in agreement, together in-Christ and we are, collectively, distinctively, inseparably the dwelling place of the living God. We are eternally connected by a spiritual union. This is a bond that is not easily severed. Our co-habitation in the Spirit is a holy thing. The threat of excommunication by collective agreement of a local covenantal community in-Christ should be a horror. Contrary to humanitarian universalism, the Bible is clear that those who are not in-Christ by way of faithful allegiance are excluded from this holy habitation, but they are openly invited to join us through allegiance to Christ (and the penitent excommunicated may return).

The Māori concept of whanaunga, close relationship, may help illustrate the depth of connection implied by koinonia in scripture. Whanaunga is commonly related to whanau, the Māori word for family; but whanaunga (without the macron) literally means “to incline towards”³⁹ others. It is a manifestation of kotahitanga and usually refers a person’s web of relationships that extends beyond the bounds of blood relations, although it may not necessarily include everyone in the wider tribal affiliation. In my doctoral research I asked Māori respondents to express in their own words what whanaunga meant to them. Arthur Baker,⁴⁰ a retired missionary and minister, expressed it metaphorically:

You know [gesturing toward the stew pot from which we had just ladled our meal], all the components put together make the whole. Leave the doughboys (dumplings) out of the boil-up and you don’t know what you are talking about, it isn’t even a boil-up bro! Don’t pour that fat out of the water, I don’t care what the doctor said, you’ve got to let that meat cook in that oil, a bit of mutton brisket and whatever. Let that grease go through the puha (watercress) and have those Dakota Reds or Rua (potatoes) because they are firm and they are good for the third or fourth boil-up. That’s the boil-up in

its essence. You can't take anything away from it otherwise its only in part. You can't have it in part, this thing is the whole thing, you know? You have the action of the rewena (fermentation) amongst all those that are gathered here. And the whānau thing begins to activate and it permeates the whole. It's a spiritual thing, you know? This principle, it's spiritual.⁴¹

I know interpersonal relationships are tough. The Spirit of God at work in the covenantal community of God's people in-Christ can be likened to the fermentation process of a perpetual stew. It permeates everything and combines the flavours so that even though the elements of the stew are discernible, they are transformed in the interaction to become more than they would be alone, before they were added to the pot—and exposed to heat. The crucial point here is that we need to see the benefits of heat in relationships—to remain in the tension (of clashes and conflict) and hold fast to the relationship we have with one another in-Christ so that the transformation process may happen.

Again, the spectre of abuse haunts us when we are asked to persist with uncomfortable relationships. As a working definition, I view abuse as a disproportionate use of power forced upon another. Power, in a relationship sense, is the capacity to influence; to exert one's will upon another. When will is imposed without others having an equal capacity to negotiate or resist that power, it establishes an imbalance that opens a pathway to abuse. We see this all the time in our experience, wherever we happen to live. It is innate to fallen human nature that we want to exert influence over others and creation. It is the pattern of this world. To paraphrase Paul, "What wretched people we are! Who will rescue us from our bodies of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"⁴² We need to look no further than the cross of Christ to see another way to hold fast in our experience of community in-Christ: the way of surrender.

We should not simply surrender to destructive powers in the world. On the contrary, we must make a clear stand for righteousness and justice, and it is very appropriate for followers of Jesus to resist destructive forces by way of non-violent means and social engagement. The surrender here is the surrender to one another in mutual loving kindness. It is the readiness to surrender, for the good of the covenantal community, our rights, privileges, preferences, and capacity to exert influence. Is this not, after all, what ἐκένωσεν (ekénōse) means? In Philippians 2:7 Paul speaks of Jesus emptying himself or making himself nothing. Scholars call this hard-to-define act of Christ, this ekénōse, "kenosis".⁴³

To understand it, we need to back up to Philippians 2:6 and realise just what Christ Jesus surrendered: "Who, being in very nature God"⁴⁴ Imagine the power and privilege of divine royalty that Jesus had at his disposal. Yet he chose not to avail himself of it. Instead, according to the will of the Father, he became a servant, humbly surrendering to the will of others to be killed. This attitude, Paul says, is what should be normative for covenantal communities in-Christ.

Jesus' injunction to deny ourselves⁴⁵ is not meant as a repressive denial of our essential self, our person, ethnicity, customs, heritage or history. Rather, when it comes to our covenantal community in-Christ, it is a kenosis of the rights, preferences and privileges we enjoy by being in very nature a New Zealander, a Māori, or whatever national, cultural or familial norms form part of our identity, which shape us and give us the liberties we enjoy. Surrendering these is a sacrifice, a mutual giving way in one-anothership, a collective submission that allows the Spirit of God to then lead us all. Where there is dominance it should be tested, questioned, assessed by the community. Perhaps it is what the Lord wills, but perhaps it is not. The community grows in Holy Spirit-led discernment of these things, and proceeds as the group perceives it is the will of God.

Within the tensions of different heritage, family backgrounds, value sets, personalities and preferences, we affect each other in a mutually transformative way. We are shaped as persons through our interpersonal relationships. The science of interpersonal neurobiology confirms this.⁴⁶ This could be understood as a hybridization process and seen from a humanistic angle as a beneficial outcome of living in any close community. However, the Holy Spirit magnifies the impact within covenantal communities in-Christ. The greater the diversity in the community the greater the potential for transformation into the likeness of Christ, as the Holy Spirit helps us process the epistemic rupturing⁴⁷ that occurs in our interpersonal interactions. As the Apostle James wrote to a fledgling church wrestling with internal economic disparities, "when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing."⁴⁸

James' "you" is plural, but a joyous positive outcome for each disciple in the group can be assumed. What aspect of faith is being tested here? From the context of the whole epistle, I believe it is faith in the promise of unity for the covenantal community in-Christ. Read in this way, James infers that if we hold fast to our unity in-



Christ and patiently allow the maturing process to happen through the tensions (troubles and testing) that we experience within the fellowship, then an interpersonal hybridization process will eventually mature the community. It is by this process that we each develop the character of Christ and a collective mind of Christ emerges, growing to know what Paul describes as God's "good and pleasing and perfect (complete) will",⁴⁹ with which we can experience and demonstrate the shalom-kingdom of God to a relationally damaged world.

For Joy

We arrive now at the implications of this covenantal community as it relates to the mission of God. In our Great Commitment passage, Jesus makes it very clear that this experience of "perfect unity"⁵⁰ will result in the world believing (v. 21, trusting) and knowing (v. 23, experiencing) that the Father lovingly sent the Son. It is by our unity that the world will trust and experience the loving mercy of God. Our loving one-ness in-Christ is our witness to the world. It is the basis from which we can then articulate the good news—that our God reigns, and our covenantal community in-Christ is living proof of this fact. It is good news for others precisely because they too can be liberated to live in the shalom-goodness of harmonized relationships made possible by the Holy Spirit under the rulership of Christ for the glory of the Father.

Walter Brueggemann provides us with a succinct definition of the shalom-kingdom of God when he says, "The central vision of world history in the Bible is that all of creation is one, every creature in community with every other, living in harmony and security toward the joy and well-being of every other creature".⁵¹ For Māori, this promises fulfilment of long-held ideals. The power of our renewal in-Christ extends much wider than to the interpersonal aspects of the reconciliation that Christ offers. It includes our relationships with God's creation as well as our interactions in wider society.

We need accept God's immanence in order to fully comprehend the way we are connected. The existence of vital life force flowing from God to sustain all that God has created. As an indigenous follower of Christ, I diverge from classic evangelical thought, wedded as it is to Western materialism and borderline deism. When I mention this I am usually confronted with negatively charged accusations of animism. What the accusers mean is the worship of the created order, of spirits and ancestors. But that is an illogical leap. A relationship with something does not need to imply worship. Worship requires a level of allegiance where the

worshipper becomes subordinate to and controlled by the object being worshipped, seeking that object to work supernaturally on the worshipper's behalf.⁵² In response, I insist that it is the dualist who becomes the ultimate idolater if the Creator is removed from creation and creation is reduced to its materialistic utilitarian value.⁵³ Objectifying creation in this way opens it up to great abuse, from which we are now reaping devastating consequences. Such a destructive attitude is antithetical to the shalom-kingdom of God.

The reason to start the Great Commitment passage in verse 18 of John 17 is because it reminds us that we are sent into this world with which we have a spiritually interconnected relationship. While Matthew 28:18-19a permits Jesus' disciples to make the gospel of the shalom-kingdom of God made known everywhere, John 17:18 confirms that we are each, through the ages, deployed. Implied with this is an obligation on us all, within our covenantal communities, to seek instructions about where it is that we should go. We must remain cognizant of the fact that there remain many parts of God's world where the experience of God's good shalom in-Christ is not yet known. Whatever the locality one is called to, whether historically Christian or not, for as long as we happen to be there our responsibility is to demonstrate the shalom-kingdom of God through what is described above as *kotahitanga* and *koinonia*, through covenantal communities in-Christ, so that the world in that place will have an opportunity to believe and know. This is how the Father sent the Son. Furthermore, there is little use living out the alternate reality of the shalom-kingdom of God if the people around us are not invited to experience the goodness of it themselves, to "Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!",⁵⁴ which results in all of creation shouting for joy⁵⁵ as the children of God are revealed.⁵⁶

This is our *εὐαγγέλιον* (*euangélion*), our good news. Our experience of this life in-Christ, informed by scripture, is our gospel. It is not something we impose upon others. It is the hope we must be ready to gently and respectfully share when we are asked to explain what it is that enables us to demonstrate the shalom-kingdom of God in our covenantal communities in-Christ⁵⁷—our acceptable act of worship to God.⁵⁸ There is therefore now no separation between demonstration and explanation of the gospel. I call this a whole-of-life gospel perspective. Where many speak of wholistic or integral mission, I fear a Western compartmentalised perspective of reality still holds sway, as if it can be separated into constituent parts and siloed activities.

A whole-of-life perspective understands that our world is an indivisible and interrelated whole: spiritual, material, and psychological, and the gospel offers hope for the realignment of all of it to God's righteous ways—the shalom-kingdom of God, the place of great joy.

Conclusion

So, I have written this paper at the height of new waves of COVID-19 infections around the world. In a crisis such as this we can no longer be content with just giving lip service to what we believe. It is time evangelicals put aside conceptual debates about prioritisation or polarisation of proclamation over demonstration. If there is no demonstration (amongst ourselves and flowing out for the benefit of our societies) our proclamation is impotent. The gospel is power precisely because it speaks of how to enter and experience this tangible new way of life together in-Christ.⁵⁹

In the Africa Bible Commentary, Congolese theologian Kuzuli Kossé observes that “The unity that God brings extends to all believers of all nations, denominations, and times. Tribalism, ethnicity and denominationalism are hindrances to the unity of God's people and must be resisted”.⁶⁰ There is a place to celebrate the riches of God's grace in our cultural and individual diversity; also, in the myriad expressions of faith often represented by denominations. Yet, we must not let these things divide us. A fractured and frail world rent apart by differences of values and opinions, and dissension and malice, desperately needs to see demonstrations of harmony in diversity. This is an act of spiritual warfare, standing against the schemes of the evil one,⁶¹ who seeks to steal kill and destroy life.⁶² Our experience, demonstration and testimony of the shalom-kingdom of God in covenantal communities in-Christ should manifest life in fulness, which the powers of hell cannot conquer.⁶³

Most theologians will agree that we live in a now/not yet experience of God's shalom-kingdom. However, that should not provide us with an excuse to lower our expectations of what life in covenantal communities in-Christ can be. It is hard work to achieve, but not in the sense of applying will and exerting energy to make it happen. Rather, it is in the sense of remembering to surrender and submit to mutuality, to lean into “the unforced rhythms of grace”⁶⁴ that Christ offers in our one-anotherness. If we do not experience the shalom-kingdom of God in fulness yet, it is because we are too eager to take control, to dominate. Our wilfulness is our downfall. On the other side of eternity this will not be a problem. There, we will all, with gloriously transformed being, enjoy the blissful mutual submissiveness that leads to life in all fulness in-Christ.

It is for this eschatological vision and approximate lived experience now that we must focus on the Great Commitment as the starting point and goal of our participation in the mission of God, living out the shalom-kingdom of God wherever we are located. That is, to be one (kotahitanga), and to hold fast to that notion (koinonia), for the joy set before us in God's shalom-kingdom. This is the same joy that Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, had in sight when he endured the cross, scorning its shame, to sit down at the right hand of throne of God... to await his covenantal-community's homecoming.⁶⁵ So, let us likewise fix our eyes, and patiently persevere with one another as the people of God in-Christ, attracting the world into our reality.

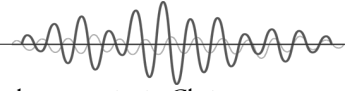
Footnotes

1. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, Cambridge England, Hodder & Stoughton, 2003, Kindle loc. 4326.
2. Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*, Grand Rapids United States of America, Baker Academic, 2016, Kindle loc. 3526.
3. I use “covenantal communities” to articulate my ecclesiology, to avoid implicit institutional assumptions about the local church. While I develop its meaning a little differently, I source the terminology in the work of Sherwood Lingenfelter who writes, “...covenant community is a partnership between people and God, framed in the voluntary submission of people to work together for the mission of God, under the lordship of Jesus Christ. These covenant relationships must be formed in worship—an experience of the people of God, submitting to God and to one another in a public commitment to holiness, unity, and mission.” Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership*, Grand Rapids United States of America, Baker Academic, 2008, Kindle loc. 887.
4. I prefer to hyphenate “in-Christ” to emphasize connection, participation and unity. Being in-Christ is not merely conceptual, it is our locality in a fully integrated way—as the branch to the vine (John 15:5).
5. A Latin phrasing of the image of God, present in all humans, as described in Genesis 1:27. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss theological perspectives of the imago Dei. Suffice it to say, humans exhibit attributes of God in our whole conscious being: spiritual, emotional, intellectual, relational, affectual, perceptual, functional, etc. I contend that the full potential of our imago Dei is only possible through regeneration by the Holy Spirit, which is gifted to us as a result of our



- deliberate allegiance (see also footnote 7) to Christ through faith—putting on the new nature, as Paul describes in Colossians 3:10.
6. Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God's Design for Life Together*, Grand Rapids United States of America, Zondervan, 2015, Kindle Loc. 1389.
 7. See Matthew W. Bates, *Salvation By Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King*, Grand Rapids United States of America, Baker Academic, 2017.
 8. Psalm 24:7, 9 (New Living Translation). The open gates of a city are an invitation to all, and a confident expectation of peacetime. In the context of this Psalm, made possible by the King of glory residing. A wonderful image of the shalom-Kingdom of God.
 9. Space does not permit me to elaborate on colonial philosophical associations with evangelical missions thinking. For a detailed explanation, under the heading of “Mission and Manifest Destiny”, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, United States of America, Orbis Books, 2011, Kindle loc. 7107ff.
 10. Michael Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History and Issues*, Downers Grove United States of America, InterVarsity Press, 2014, Kindle loc. 2366.
 11. For a balanced exploration of this history, see Keith Newman, *Bible and Treaty: Missionaries Among the Māori—A New Perspective*, Rosedale New Zealand, Penguin Books, 2010.
 12. Much has been done via pre-field missions training to mitigate excessive ethnocentricity, yet condescending attitudes continue in missions—regardless whether missionaries are from traditional or new sending nations. More needs to be done to shift missionary attitudes.
 13. Industrial complex terminology was first used by Dwight Eisenhower with reference to a partnership between the military and private enterprise. My phrasing builds on Scott Bessenecker's who developed Eisenhower's idea and applied it to Christianity as the “Christian-Industrial Complex”. Scott Bessenecker, *Overturning Tables: Freeing Missions from the Christian-Industrial Complex*, Downers Grove United States of America, InterVarsity Press, 2014.
 14. I use this term with direct reference to Charles Taylor's, “social imaginary”, that is, the way that we collectively imagine, even pre-theoretically, our social life...”. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge United States of America, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007, Kindle Loc. 3358.
 15. The so-called “Great Commission” is an accessory to the biblical text—an imposed interpretation. By naming the phrase as myth I am not placing the actual text (Matthew 28:18-20) in the same genre. It is important to note that “Myths are not lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape its meaning.” Mary Midgley, *The Myths We Live By*, Abingdon United Kingdom, Routledge, 2003, Kindle Loc. 78.
 16. This became glaringly obvious in what Ed Stetzer called “our John Chau moment”, by which he meant the negative public (and Christian) response to the death of missionary John Chau on North Sentinel Island in 2018 (as heard from Ed Stetzer at the 2019 Missio Nexus Future Mission conference, Orlando Florida, <https://missionexus.org/future-mission/future-mission-speakers/>).
 17. Matthew 10:5-6, New Living Translation.
 18. In light of the biblical narrative, making disciples everywhere by teaching and baptizing is Matthew's shorthand for habituating new followers of Christ into the new social ethic of the Kingdom of Heaven, into God's shalom, all over the world.
 19. Evangelical missionaries would dispute any link with the papal Doctrine of Discovery established in mid-15th century Catholicism, but the territory-taking authority (legal doctrine) and assumed superiority (dominance framework) over indigenous peoples echoes through evangelical missiological assumptions and reading of Scripture. For a thorough introduction to the harm perpetrated by this doctrine, see the United Nations Economic and Social Council's report from the Ninth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, New York, 19-30 April 2010. Accessible here: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/E.C.19.2010.13%20EN.pdf>
 20. Allan K. Davidson and Peter J. Lineham, *Transplanted Christianity: Documents Illustrating Aspects of New Zealand Church History*, Palmerston North New Zealand, Massey University, 1995.
 21. Curiously, this list appears in a different order in each of Revelation 5:9, 7:9, 11:9, and 13:7 but each time it is merely a way of speaking of all human inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 13:8).
 22. Although missions practitioners have made much of “The Great Commission” since the emergence of the so-called modern missions movement since the late 18th Century, David Bosch notes that Matthew 28:18-20 was given little attention by biblical scholars until the 20th century. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Kindle loc. 1565.
 23. I recommend reading Romans 12:1-2ff. from an interpersonal relationship perspective, where our acceptable act of worship is the sacred giving (sacrificing) of ourselves in mutual relationship with others in-Christ. This is a worshipful act of obedience to God's will that we love one another, which is illustrated as normative behaviour for followers of Christ throughout the entire New Testament. This is as non-conforming with the world as you can be. It is transformative (proven of late by the science of interpersonal neurobiology). It is a necessary state for us to achieve a collective mind that will know God's will, that we might act on it for our mutual wellbeing and public witness. Throughout the rest of Romans 12 Paul develops this line of thinking by illustrating normative behaviour for those of us in covenantal community in-Christ as perpetual worship of God, celebrating and making room for the gifts we are each given.

24. Revelation 7:9, New Living Translation.
25. Charles Taylor observes that the possibility of the full autonomous self requires a disconnect from anything other than one's own mind, within a boundary of self-determination, often including being spiritually impermeable. He calls this the "buffered self" where, "This self can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it." Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Kindle Loc. 862.
26. John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Nairobi Kenya, Heinemann, 1989, p. 108-109.
27. 1 Peter 3:8-9, New Living Translation, compare this theologically with Psalm 133.
28. 1 Corinthians 1:10, New Living Translation.
29. Read Romans 12 for Paul's expectation of how we should behave as a culturally diverse covenantal community in-Christ—this is our most λογικός (logical) expression of worship to God.
30. As an example of the lack of power within the law (or ourselves) to help us keep the law, Paul writes, "But the people of Israel, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law instead of by trusting in (God). They stumbled over the great rock in their path." Romans 9:31-32, New Living Translation.
31. John 17:21, New Living Translation.
32. This is a deliberate allusion to Jesus' prayer in the Great Commitment passage, "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified." John 17:19, New International Version. To be sanctified (made holy) is to be set apart for sacred purpose. Māori understand this well as tapu, from which we derive the English word taboo. We are to be a set-apart people in-Christ, dedicated to the purposes of God—a welcoming and hospitable in-group. See also Colossians 3:12 and 1 Peter 2:9.
33. See Acts 2:42; Galatians 2:9.
34. See 1 John 1:3, which alludes to the oneness of John 17:20, 21.
35. See 1 Corinthians 10:16.
36. See Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13; Hebrews 13:16.
37. See Romans 15:27; 1 Timothy 5:22; Hebrews 2:14; 1 Peter 4:13; 2 John 11.
38. 2 Corinthians 6:14, New International Version.
39. Joan Merge, *New Growth from Old: The Whānau in the Modern World*, Wellington New Zealand, Victoria University Press, 1995, iBooks glossary, p. 529.
40. In keeping with kaupapa Māori research methodology, I gave all of my research participants the option to either be anonymous or named in the research. After the interviews each one chose to be named. Their knowledge belongs to them, it is part of their mana (their dignity/honour), and I share it as a treasure gifted to me so that their mana might be extended through my influence as an act of reciprocity for their generosity.
41. Jay Matenga, *Mutuality of Belonging: Toward Harmonizing Culturally Diverse Missions Groups*, Doctoral dissertation, Pasadena United States of America, Fuller School of Intercultural Studies, 2017, p. 73. Accessible from: <https://jaymatenga.com/pdfs/Mutuality-of-Belonging.pdf>.
42. Paraphrasing Romans 7:24-25a.
43. Frederick Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago United States of America, The University of Chicago Press, 2000, κενόω entry.
44. Philippians 4:6, New Living Translation.
45. See Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, and Luke 9:23.
46. See, e.g., the seminal work of Daniel Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*. 2nd ed., New York United States of America, Guilford Press, 2012.
47. By this I mean the disruption that happens when our way of understanding the world is radically challenged. See, e.g., the research in pedagogy of James Loder, *The Transforming Moment*. 2nd ed., Colorado Springs, United States of America, Helmers & Howard, 1989.
48. James 1:2-3, New Living Translation.
49. Romans 12:2, New Living Translation.
50. John 17:23, New Living Translation.
51. Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward A Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom*, Philadelphia United States of America, United Church Press, 1976, p15.
52. I am careful to also emphasize that witchcraft and idolatry are untenable for followers of Christ and should be repented of and renounced.
53. This concept is developed further by Owen Barfield, *Saving The Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*. Second Edition, Middletown United States of America, Wesleyan University Press, 1988.
54. Psalm 34:8, New Living Translation.
55. See Psalm 98.
56. See Romans 8:19ff.
57. See 1 Peter 3:15.
58. Again, Romans 12:1.



59. See Romans 1:16-17, where I understand salvation to be access to an eternally living covenantal community in-Christ.
60. Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary: A One Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars*, Grand Rapids, United States of America, Zondervan, 2006, p. 1288.
61. See Ephesians 6:10-18.
62. See John 10:10. Jesus' reference to his followers as sheep is a wonderful metaphor of what covenantal communities in Christ should be, thriving under the loving care of the Great Shepherd.
63. See Matthew 16:18, New Living Translation.
64. Matthew 11:29, The Message Bible.
65. With reference to Hebrews 12:2.