



# Missions in an Age of Authenticity: Towards a New Imaginary of Missions

*Presented at the Asia Missions Association Convention, Chiang Mai, November 14, 2019.*

*In this presentation Jay Matenga borrows from Charles Taylor's philosophy that speaks of our era as an Age of Authenticity. In addition, Jay introduces Christian Welzel's analysis of World Values Survey data that tracks social development in three phases culminating in the knowledge economy. Together, these hypotheses present a compelling picture of the values that increasingly inform globalisation even while the values of an old order continue to hold sway. Jay identifies four issues that arise from an Age of Authenticity and then proposes a new imaginary (narrative) for missions reflecting the experience of the refugee.*

**K**ia tau te aroha noa ki a koutou me te rangimarie, he mea na te Atua na te mātou Matua, na te Ariki hoki, na Ihu Karaiti. (Grace and peace to you [all] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ). *Tihei mauri ora!* (Let the vitality of life be!).

## 1. Introduction

**When I speak I introduce myself following the customs of my Māori forebears, in their language (used above as a brief greeting). When I do so I stand as the embodiment of the generations that have gone before me and, although I am a husband of but one wife, I have no children, so I am the end of a long line.**

I can recount my father's lineage back 22 generations to Tamatea Arikinui, the chief of the canoe that brought us as original inhabitants to Aotearoa New Zealand in the Great Migration from the Eastern Pacific around 750 years ago. On my mother's side are some of the first English settlers to New Zealand almost 180 years ago. So, I am a child of migrants.

My father's people have been genetically traced back through the Eastern Pacific up through South East Asia to the indigenous people of Taiwan. So, I stand here as a descendent of an Asian diaspora—the son of Asian migrants who settled the last piece of unoccupied land in human history. I am your younger brother and it is always nice to meet more family...

Tena koe. Namaste. Kuzu'zang pola. Sawadee Khrap. Chum Reap Suor. Komusta. Anyang Haseyo. Ni Hao. Neih hou. Kōnbanwa... Gidday.

Of course, we do not need to engage in genetic gymnastics to identify ourselves as family. We are in Christ and that is all the identity we need to obligate ourselves to one another as family. That does not mean we need to think and act the same, but it does mean we

acknowledge our deep and indivisible unity as children of the Most High and Living God. This unity is made visible through our love for one another. As the Apostle John wrote, "No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us." (1Jn 4:12)

Which brings me to my topic. I was invited to speak at the 2019 Asia Mission Association Convention on the topic of "Globalization and Mission". However, I chose to address that topic by way of the title, "Missions in an Age of Authenticity".

Authenticity represents a values-set, and is a by-product of globalisation. It is an English word closely associated with identity, integrity and individuality but can equally be detected as an accelerant of group-pride that reinforces one's belonging to a people, tribe or nation. It signifies that you are genuine and true in who you say you are, in your identity.

For my title, I borrow from the work of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor who suggests that the Western world has been undergoing a transformation from traditional values, through secularism to the point where, since the civil unrest of the 1960s, we have come to an Age of Authenticity.

Taylor defines this as,

a generalized culture of... expressive individualism, in which people are encouraged to find their own way, discover their own fulfillment, "do their own thing". (Taylor, 2007. p299)



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It encapsulates the dominant values of an age of multiplying choices, of increased freedoms, resulting from closing ourselves off from access to a transcendent 'Other' who might dictate how we should live. Taylor reckons we have been "disenchanted" and during the Industrial era we have focused the entirety of our knowledge and experience on the material world. According to Taylor, we have "buffered" ourselves—collectively and individually—against influences outside of ourselves. No longer are we "porous" or open and vulnerable to others and transcendent or supernatural actors—be they other people, authorities, gods, demons, spirits, non-negotiable religious doctrines or whatever. And herein lies the great malaise of secularism and individualism. We become intolerably isolated.

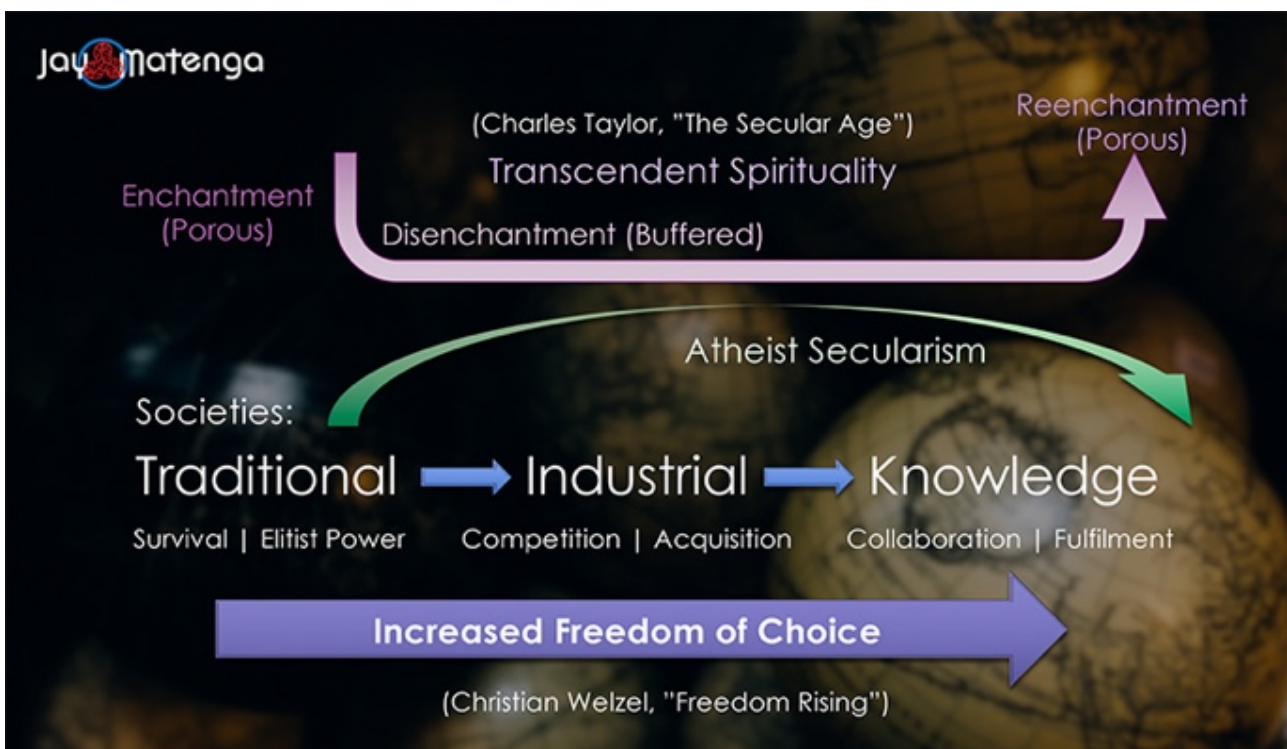
I say 'we' because I think Taylor helps to identify the atmosphere of globalisation in which we all live and breathe and have our being. This wind might be blowing from the West but it is affecting all of us like those throughout Southeast Asia are affected by the transboundary haze of agricultural fires. The whole world is being affected by the question, "what does it mean for me (or us) to be authentic?"

In his book, "Freedom Rising" (Welzel, 2013.), Christian Welzel identifies this age as one of increasing emancipative values as humans move from traditional, through industrial to knowledge-based societies. Both Welzel and Taylor identify a drop off of pure secular values as we leave the industrial behind in favour of knowledge economies and the Age of Authenticity. Do not miss the importance of this—we are not heading

into a secular or atheistic future. A yearning for transcendence is returning (if it ever really left). We need look no further than popular media to detect this. These days, supernatural fantasy sells fiction.

After the second revolution in Egypt, much was being made about Muslims leaving their faith because of the way their religion was being destructively applied. Media pundits claimed that former Muslims were becoming secular. One of my Egyptian elder friends scoffed at the thought. He told me, "Egyptians are the most religious people in the world. They will never be secular." He saw this as a perfect opportunity to invite Muslims to Christ. I have heard it said about many other cultures for whom religion and spirituality are integral to their identity. The Age of Authenticity provides space for religious people to amplify their convictions. The challenge for missions is to present Christ as the ultimate fulfilment of their yearning to connect well to a transcendent and eternal reality.

Drawing on data from the World Values Surveys, Welzel claims that those of us who live in knowledge economies now live in an era of unprecedented choice. His hard-data analysis correlates well with Taylor's philosophical observations. Welzel is a little more optimistic than Taylor concerning the positive effects of an Age of Authenticity though. He argues, the emphasis on freedom is not selfish but coupled with an emphasis on equality of opportunities... On the one hand, emancipative values imply more tolerance of deviant behaviours that leave other people's personal integrity untouched... On the



other hand, emancipative values mean less tolerance of behaviours that violate other people's integrity. (Welzel, 2013. p5)

All of which gives rise to the challenging context we find ourselves in with regard to Christian mission in a post-colonial global context. In an Age of Authenticity, a missiology of imposition is reprehensible. Imposing our views on others is deemed to violate their integrity. It offends their Authenticity. It diminishes their dignity. Evangelism with any hint of proselytism will be increasingly prosecuted—largely because evangelistic fervour is assumed to offend the values of Authenticity held by the one on the receiving end.

With this, I lay the foundation of my presentation. Missions in an Age of Authenticity requires a radical reorientation of our missions praxis and a recalibration of our missiology. Born out of (arguably) the height of the British colonial era, the modern missions movement and its missiology were infused with colonial expansionist assumptions. Colonial values coloured the lenses through which the Bible was interpreted—as every culture is wont to do. It was not necessarily wrong for its era, as the many wonderful by-products of protestant missions attest (*cf.* Woodberry, 2012), but it is becoming increasingly unhelpful for ours.

We no longer live in the industrialized colonial era, which Taylor curiously termed an 'age of mobilization'. We need to move from an impositional missiology to an invitational missiology. I will return to that as I progress with this article.

Going forward, I will highlight four issues of the Age of Authenticity. They are not isolated categorisations, nor do they sum up the values of the age in question. Treat them as mere windows into a new reality. A glimpse from four different angles. The windows we will peek through are: Empathy, Movement, Fragmentation, and Dignity.

I will then conclude by proposing a new imaginary (a paradigmatic narrative) for missions in an Age of Authenticity. The elements of this direction will not be new to many readers, but perhaps it will stimulate some fresh thinking in light of what we learn about the era that is now upon us.

## 2. Empathy

The Age of Authenticity is generating intensified empathy, somewhat in reaction to the homogenizing attempts of global cultural values as well as perceived internal and external threats from specific cultural values seen as foreign.

Welzel considers empathy to be a solidarity mechanism. It can be expressed positively or negatively (depending on one's view). As a negative example, Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko have mapped the typical process by which average, middle class people can become radicalized. In the mind of the empathiser, there comes a growing identification with a particular group where the "I" becomes "we"...

We are a special or chosen group (superiority) who have been unfairly treated and betrayed (injustice), no one else cares about us or will help us (distrust), and the situation is dire—our group and our cause are in danger of extinction (vulnerability). (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008. p416)

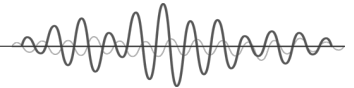
Note the perceptions of superiority, injustice, distrust, and vulnerability. This level of empathy with an in-group can take a negative turn remarkably quickly, whether for a disenfranchised minority within a nation or for the majority in a nation whose authenticity is threatened by those they consider outsiders. For those whose Authenticity is threatened, the attack may be felt against their lifestyle, livelihood, economic viability, dominance in society or all of the above.

We see the dark side of empathy at work in a globalised world in rising tribalism and nationalism, radicalism and terrorism. From a missions perspective it is experienced in the push-back against Evangelical expressions of the Christian faith because our faith is perceived to be foreign and an unwanted imposition against what it means to be culturally Authentic for that group or nation. It is experienced as persecution—ironically, by the indigenous believer often more than the foreign missionary.

Empathy is intensifying 'difference' in the world as the like-minded rally behind walls of hostility in defence of their perceived Authenticity. We see this where a majority group in a nation demonises minorities in their midst and forces conformity to the dominant values in order to reinforce their ideas of Authenticity. I do not need to mention the regimes of the world where such action is intensifying. You will know full well.

This is the underside of Authenticity. I believe it is an aberration from the harmony that an Age of Authenticity seeks to create. My hope is that divisive empathy represents the last thrashing of an old order and that it will not last long. We see some hope in younger political leaders of the new era promoting a much broader perspective—an empathy for those we consider to be 'other' on the basis of human rights and religious freedom.

As the Age of Authenticity matures into an era of greater liberty it can have great appeal. However, as I



noted above from Welzel, it does challenge Evangelical claims to exclusivity and requires some reorientation of our presentation of the faith. 'We are right and you are wrong' is no longer an appropriate perspective. We can be right within our faith community, but in an Age of Authenticity we are not permitted to say others are wrong. That is deemed to be hate speech. Rather, we would do well to live out the rightness of our faith such that it attracts others to it. For this is what the early church found to be the most effective strategy for God to add to their numbers daily (Acts 2:46-47).

Those with ears to hear will recognise the negative-empathy of the old order happening within the global Church and even in our Evangelical expressions of it. Our passion for particular faith convictions are resurrecting dividing walls of hostility. There is a Pharisaic spirit rising in the church that draws hard and fast doctrinal lines to distinguish who is 'us' and who is 'them'. When morality becomes fixed, ethics are eclipsed. Behaviour is elevated above meaning and people are oppressed because of it. We fail to appreciate nuances of cultural interpretation permitted in the outworking of the ethics of God in Christ. The love of God in Christ has many expressions. The life of Christ in the church has many legitimate manifestations. Perhaps the values of an Age of Authenticity will help us to develop a deeper empathy for the 'other', for those whose allegiance to Christ alone makes them our brothers and sisters.

As members of the global missions community, we have a glorious opportunity to show the world the unifying power of God's Spirit and manifest the peace of Christ, who tore down the walls of hostility between us by way of the cross (Ephesians 2:14). The missions community is a unique space for developing intercultural maturity that finds harmony in the midst of diversity in Christ. I could develop that much more but, for now, let us consider...

### 3. Movement

The Age of Authenticity has seen a marked increase in the movement of people around the world—a phenomenon that has defined the theme of the convention that requested this paper. People are fleeing hostile home environments in search of safety. People are pursuing economic and educational benefits for themselves and their future generations. People are seeking self-fulfilment in places other than their place of origin. Whether being pushed or being drawn, people are having to cope with life in foreign lands as they seek what it means to be Authentic in another geography.

For the vast majority of the people on the move, the shift from the land of their forebears is permanent. Since World War II, for the vast majority of the followers of Christ in missions, the move from the land of their upbringing has been temporary. In the colonial era, missionaries made life-long decisions to emigrate to the colonies permanently as Christ's representatives. If they went back to their land of origin at all, it was relatively brief and infrequent. In the colonies was the prospect of a new life for successive generations, untethered from the constraints and conditions in their land of origin that might have been less than desirable. Today, missionaries from traditional sending nations are usually deployed to nations where living conditions are much harsher than their land of origin and the desire to return back to the comforts of home is compelling. Anecdotal evidence I am collecting suggests that the average length of 'career' missions service, from traditional sending nations at least, is now about 6 years.

Not so from new sending nations to more developed nations following the phenomenon known as reverse missions. In most cases the living standards are reversed, making permanent migration somewhat more desirable. The challenges, however, are no less taxing. Cultural adjustments still need to be made. Living as outsiders far away from extended family is still painful. Yet the joys of seeing a people come to Christ who are not your people is still thrilling, and the spiritual and intercultural transformation that happens while they are adapting is still a valuable outcome.

That God uses people on the move to extend Christ's Kingdom is a truism. According to Matthew 28:19 Jesus assumed His disciples would be mobile. In this regard, missions includes Jesus' followers among the refugees and migrants, overseas foreign workers and international business people, ambassadors and entrepreneurs as they pursue their spiritual Authenticity in new vocational locales. There is still very much a place for spiritual specialists in missions, but there is only so much that temporary engagement can achieve. The sad reality today is that the effect of temporary cross-cultural engagement is often more impactful on the missionary than the host culture. This should not surprise us in an Age of Authenticity.

Returning again to Welzel's analysis, we find a hypothesis that human societies develop through three major phases: 1) The traditional phase, which prioritises survival and maintaining elitist power as the main drivers; 2) The industrial phase, which prioritises competition and acquisition as the main motivators; and, 3) the knowledge phase, which prioritises synergistic cooperation and inner fulfillment as the

main influencers, ideally toward mutual thriving (Welzel, 2013). Welzel argues that as many of us have moved from industrial- to the knowledge-based economies we have experienced,

a change in strategy from seeking better material conditions to seeking deeper emotional fulfillment.

This signals a shift from acquisition strategies to thriving strategies. (Welzel, 2013. p10)

When I first read this, it was something like an epiphany. In it, I saw recent missions history reflected as missions has shifted from long-term material development motivations to the short-term emotional-fulfilment pursuits that, I would argue, inform those signing up for short-term missions trips and probably a good number of those engaging in so-called longer-term missions too. This is not necessarily a wrong shift, but if our agencies are structured to assist the former motivations of development and acquisition (that is, elevating living standards among those we seek to reach), how might we need to change things to assist with the fulfillment-oriented aspirations of God's people on the move in an Age of Authenticity?

As I will discuss in a moment, I think helping seekers find their fulfillment in Christ and a renewed identity as part of the People of God is an admirable missions pursuit. Fulfillment is a legitimate by-product benefit for the missionary too. We must always consider, however, that the people we conduct missions for are not necessarily living in an Age of Authenticity as well. They may still be shackled by the choice limitations of a Traditional era, or (more likely) enamoured with the acquisition potential of an Industrial era. While they may be feeling the effects of the haze of Authenticity from the West, it is more likely to choke them as to emancipate them.

Discerning how to appropriately minister at the need level of others is a primary skill in missions. We must learn to be agile because the world around us is constantly changing. As futurists say, we are living in times of unprecedented "volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA)" (Johansen, Bob. 2009. p2). It does not help that we try to understand the world as a sum of constituent parts. We need to learn to comprehend reality as a fluid whole, yet what we are faced with is...

## 4. Fragmentation

As people move and mix and resist and reinforce their collective identities, we are seeing a fragmentation only recognisable because of globalisation. We could maintain some semblance of historic identity while we remained in relatively self-contained geographic zones.

Global industrialisation has forever changed that. Fragmentation is a virus carried by Western thought as it has spread globally. It infects our theologies, missiologies, economies, politics, family life and relationships. It insinuates itself into our lived experience and compartmentalises reality.

I introduce fragmentation as part of a discussion of the Age of Authenticity because one of the drivers of Authenticity is to bring the fragments together. As Welzel has found, with the knowledge economy has emerged a greater desire for synergistic collaboration and cross-discipline conversation. Open source, collaborative systems, wiki sharing, and crowd sourcing are digital manifestations of the Age of Authenticity that have promoted new paradigms of interactive sharing. Disruptive companies like Air BnB, Uber and Grab are bringing customers in direct touch with suppliers via their digital platforms. The Age of Authenticity desires to reintegrate our reality—ideally for mutual flourishing, but human nature being what it is, someone will always seek to capitalise on it (I'm talking to you Google, Facebook, Amazon and Alibaba).

I chose fragmentation as a subtitle rather than unification because it is more relevant for missions—unification is also closely aligned with empathy, so I wanted to shift the focus. Lingering fragmentation from the old Industrial order manifests in classic missions polarities and it frustrates our attempts to hold the whole together. Is it evangelism or social action, short term or long term, donation based or self-supporting, church-planting or business, people or creation care... no, it is all. The idea that "if missions if everything missions is nothing" is a strawman argument—it has no substance. Clearly not everything can be missions. Drone bombing an oil reservoir is not missions. Conducting an illicit business is not missions. But so many things can be considered missions activity so let us celebrate that fact and affirm that which glorifies God.

My missions passion does not need to be your missions activity. We need to move on from the zero-sum competitive impulse of the old era and embrace an integrated synergy concerned with mutual flourishing that is promoted in an Age of Authenticity. None of us engages in what is commonly understood as 'wholistic missions', it is impossible. We each can only play our part. While doing so, however, we should simultaneously advocate for integral missions (or *misión integral* as Señor Padilla would have it). We should resist seeing missions atomised into constituent parts, like water through a spray pump, where the whole is broken up and dispersed. In such a process I cannot help but see the enemy's attempts to divide and conquer.



Although it holds potential for integrated synergy, the Age of Authenticity seems stuck at the moment in hyper-individualisation mode. Like the negative expression of empathy seen in rising nationalism, I suspect this is residue from the Industrial era's compartmentalisation and commodification of reality. I believe we will move on as a new generation of leadership emerges. The raw material is there for us to build with.

The Church can lead the way on this, but we need a new narrative of common unity in diversity to combat the divides separating us who co-exist in Christ and co-create in missions. As we see gaps widening in the world through ethnic, economic, digital and generational divides, and notice the fragmentation of reality, remember that Christ has given us a ministry of reconciliation precisely for this reason. Paul makes this clear in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, and in Colossians 1:17 he declares that Christ holds all things together. The social imaginary (or shared narrative) of the Age of Authenticity may not produce the utopia it is looking for, but it does allow us to point to Christ as the fulfillment of that imaginary.

It may sound very imperialistic to outsiders, but within our faith community we must believe that the ministry of reconciliation we have been given will eventually draw all of creation together under Christ. Like lifting up a flattened paper napkin from a pinched centre; as we lift up Christ and reconcile to God, so it pulls us toward one another, even from the outer edges. This is our greatest witness to the world, which Jesus prophetically prayed in John 17:20-25. Fragmentation be no more. Which leads me to the final issue I will highlight arising out of the Age of Authenticity...

## 5. Dignity

In order to manifest this supernatural unity promised in our Scriptures, I believe we need to resurrect dignity as a core value. In an Age of Authenticity, dignity is championed as exceptionally important. It is central to the declaration on human rights and has become the bedrock of morality when there is no transcendent authority to appeal to. How quickly the world has forgotten that the very concept of dignity belongs to the Judeo-Christian tradition and is rooted in humanity being made in the image of God as good. The interruption of sin corrupting that good is conveniently forgotten and the world attempts to paste the fragments of human experience back together again as many tried with the fabled humpty dumpty. In our churches and missions we can show a more effective way to those who would care to follow.

One of my rules of life is to "never diminish the dignity of another". I fail more often than I like, but there I have set the bar and I am committed to learning how to affirm the dignity of others in ways appropriate to their culture. This commitment is deeply rooted in my honour-culture genetics. An intuitive comprehension of honour is in my bones, passed down from my ancestors, affecting the way I see and interact with the world. I resonate strongly with other honour cultures even though, as I said, I may fail to understand how to act honourably in cultures I am unfamiliar with. Still, some basic principles of respect apply, and I try to observe those.

At this point, I would like to put this out there, not to disrespect those who have brought the values of honour cultures to the attention of the Western world, but in hope of shifting the conversation a little—please, may I implore you who speak about honour, to never, never, no longer, put shame on the same spectrum as honour. It does not belong there. The opposite of honour is not shame. It is dishonour. Shame is only ever a consequence of dishonour. Saving face is defending honour, not (primarily) to avoid shame. It diminishes our dignity to identify our cultures as being motivated by shame avoidance. We are motivated by honour and it is right and good and Biblical to do so.

The honour/shame construct is another consequence of the Industrial attempt to fragment reality into constituent parts, where mismatched pieces are put together. It may be a convenient academic structure, supposedly to sit alongside innocence/guilt and power/fear, but to see shame ranked on the same tier dishonours me and shows me that you really do not understand the deep spirituality embedded in a lived reality guided by an honour awareness. I'd suggest guilt and fear continuums or spectrums are inadequate constructs too, if for no other reason than they attempt to separate out a holistic, often deeply spiritual, lived experience into components that do not exist separately.

But, please do not stop talking about honour and learning from honour-based people. The Bible can only be fully understood through a relational honour lens. I commend Jackson Wu's "Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes" (Wu, 2019) in this regard. Although Wu reveals his Western ethnicity when he plays down the genetic influence of honour cultures too much in favour of his conviction that an understanding honour can be acquired. Yes, it can, to a point. But there is a degree of understanding that is passed down through generations that cannot be so easily comprehended. It is not a cognitive type of knowledge.

To minister in an Age of Authenticity, the values of honour need to be amplified in missions. Even more so as the hyper-individualistic aspects of the era are erasing shame from popular vocabulary. Almost anything goes now, so long as it is not obviously detrimental to the functioning of society. Welzel's emancipation theory helps explain this best. As we have seen, there is more tolerance of deviant behaviours that leave other people's personal integrity untouched... (and) less tolerance of behaviours that violate other people's integrity. (Welzel, 2013. p5)

Live and let live. Integrity equals Authenticity. You are no longer permitted to point to another person's behaviour and declare it shameful if it is true to their chosen identity and affirmed by the group they identify with. In an Age of Authenticity, there is therefore now no condemnation effectual for those who belong to other in-groups.

Projecting shame on to others for their behaviour is not the same as others feeling shame in themselves though. Inner shame is the wood that fuels the fire of all manner of identity crises. A whole industry has developed within psychology to diagnose and treat inner shame disorders—usually without realising there is a dimension to shame that transcends our psyche. We know, of course, that the only antidote to the sense that “I am wrong”, in addition to “I did wrong”, is the work of Jesus on the cross and subsequent pledge of allegiance and obedience to Him as Lord.

In missions and evangelism today, we must offer that option to people from a place of deep respect for them as made in the image of God. We do so as an invitation not an imposition. The very act of their willingness to engage the invitation is an act of repentance. Confession of one's need and inadequacy is a necessary part of the process, but our objective is not to condemn. Rather, our objective is to see the Spirit of God restore their honour in Christ. From that rebirth issues forth a whole new and honourable life.

For me and my father's people honour is social currency. It is personally achieved and communally ascribed. It is fiercely defended but rarely spoken of by oneself. If it is lost it is very hard to regain. It can be traded without being diminished. In fact, the more you give honour the greater your honour grows. For us, honour is integral to other essential values such as generosity, hospitality, affection, nurture, stature, status and voice; all of which are designed to enhance relationships. We can learn a great deal from honour-cultures to inform how we should conduct missions in an Age of Authenticity.

In summary then, globalisation has ushered in an Age of Authenticity that can fragment us into empathetically

supporting some groups at the expense of others as people move around the world. An honour-based ethic, rooted in Christ, as revealed in the Scriptures, can address these issues and move missions forward in this global context. I have highlighted some implications for missions as I have discussed each of the major issues of our era: Empathy, Movement, Fragmentation and Dignity.

In closing, let me propose a new imaginary, a new narrative that can guide us forward and help us bear much fruit in missions in an Age of Authenticity.

## 6. Imaginary

In this new era it is unacceptable to objectify the other. That is what we do when we try to impose our moral expectations on another group. No amount of arguing that our rules apply to their life will make a difference. We have lost any authority we may have had to do that in the previous era. Enforcing our will on their reality is tantamount to totalitarianism. The best we can do is hold out a hand if they wish to take it so we can lead them to the fulfilment they seek in Jesus. That may seem too passive for some Evangelicals, but we are offering a gospel of grace not of force.

I recently had cause to contemplate how we frame our understanding of spiritual warfare in light of the values of an Age of Authenticity. The ideology of this age aspires to be anti-war. I don't think it is a realistic ideology, but it exists nonetheless—perhaps more so amongst progressives, but who wouldn't want to live in peace?

Either way, when we frame our theology in militaristic terms it tends to create unease. Similarly, when we articulate our missions objectives as “tasks” involving the “taking of or expanding territory”, or see people as “targets”, or objectify groups of people as “homogeneous units”, people who share the values of an Age of Authenticity are repulsed. This is industrialised language of colonial domination and it belongs to a previous era. “But the Bible uses warfare language” you say. Yes it does, but I think we have been reading a little too much into *how* it uses military metaphors in the context of declaring (and reclaiming) God's Kingdom. The Age of Authenticity provides us with new lenses as we read Scripture from a collectivist, honour elevating hermeneutic. Imagine this...

Two realms co-exist in our world, one characterised by darkness, in rebellion, squatting; the other by light, lawfully living under the King. Barriers exist between them; both are effectively walled off. The gates in the walls of darkness are closed but they have been



irrevocably unlocked by the work of Christ, because those gates could not prevail against his rulership. The gates in the walls of light are now swung wide open. These entrances are hospitable and inviting.

The Spirit of God is at work amongst those who exist in the realm of darkness, leading them to the unlocked gates where they encounter well equipped hosts from the realm of light. The refugees fleeing the realm of darkness take the hands of those waiting to lead them to light and they are shown open gates. They are told that

although the gate is open, they may only enter if they pledge their allegiance to the King of glory who resides there, the Prince of Peace who makes the shalom reality of the realm of light possible. Each refugee from darkness bows the knee, confesses allegiance, steps across the threshold, is enveloped by the light that is the name of God and is inhabited by the Spirit of light. They commence training in the ethics of the new realm to become hosts ready to help others across the threshold between realms.

This is a missiology of refuge. The gates of hell do not prevail against those who desire to flee the realm of darkness into the realm of light that is made manifest as Christ's church (Matthew 16:16-19). Jesus has disarmed the powers and authorities that would see those gates shut (Colossians 2:15). If we see ourselves as soldiers of Christ, we are not an attacking or invading force, nor even a defensive force, for God needs no defenders. Rather, we are a protection force—we are Kingdom hosts. A 'pilgrim protection patrol' if you will, helping spiritual pilgrims find refuge just as we have found refuge—in the name of the Lord, a strong tower where the righteous flee to safety (Proverbs 18:10).

The weapons of our warfare (2 Corinthians 10:4ff) are designed to strengthen right relationships and help us live according to God's ethic of reconciled loving kindness, mutuality and reciprocity. Our weapons protect the realm of light and demolish strongholds that argue against God's grace and try to close the gates to the realm of light. Our armour (Ephesians 6:13ff) is also designed to help us stand guard against the realm of darkness, protecting the way to the open gates so more refugees can safely find their way to sanctuary.

This is the kind of spiritual imaginary that resonates with the Age of Authenticity. It can light the pathway to fulfilment in Christ and should not threaten the dignity of others. We can put flesh on it for any lived reality, as a source for solutions to real-world problems. The idea is to see people and their societies blessed by light-bearers in their midst, attracting more refugees into the realm of light. As with any allegory, fault can be found and in a future era it may prove thoroughly inadequate, but for now I submit it as open source for others to take and develop as they will.

Welcome to a new era of missions.

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As the *waiata* (song) by my *whanaunga* (relative), Canon Wiremu Te Tau Huata of Ngati Kahungunu, encourages us—let us make an effort to align ourselves together in unified fashion, all seeking mutual enlightenment and love.

*Tūtira mai ngā iwi*

*Tātou tātou e*

*Tūtira mai ngā iwi*

*Tātou tātou e*

*Whaia te maramatanga*

*Me te aroha - e ngā iwi!*

*Kia tapatahi,*

*Kia kotahi rā.*

*Tātou tātou e*

*Tātou tātou e.*

Look this way together, people

All of us, all of us.

Align together, people

All of us, all of us.

Seek after enlightenment

and love of others—everybody!

Think as one,

Act as one.

All of us

All of us.

The All Black rugby team supporters' version of this song can be seen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxorRtINRTc>



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