



UK AND IRELAND

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PARTNERSHIP

Inspiring Christlikeness

transform

Autumn
2023

Langham Partnership News



Faithful Preaching comes first in Fiji... p5

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Langham in the UK... p8**

If you would like multiple copies of this magazine for friends, church members, etc., please ask Liz Wright, address below.

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Have you considered including Langham Partnership in your will?

Like many mission organisations we can benefit greatly when friends make a final gift that continues to bless the ministries they have generously supported in life. Once you have made proper and primary provision for family and friends this can be a very effective way to go on making a difference to the church on earth when you have joined the church in glory! If you would like to consider this option in your will please let us know and we will send you a helpful legacy leaflet. Contact Simon Foulds: simon.foulds@langham.org

Hello!

Letter from the Editor

It's no accident that this magazine is called 'Transform'! This edition is packed with inspiring stories of God's transforming work around the world. For example, in Fiji, lives have been transformed through faithful Bible preaching, despite huge personal costs (**page 5**); in Central African Republic, indigenous leaders are being transformed through pioneering training (**pages 6-7**); and see the transforming impact of changing the dynamic between Majority World churches and their parent mission organisations in this thoughtful piece by Jose Laussu (**page 9**).

Be challenged by the Word from the World feature, when Majority World voices reflect biblically on a contemporary issue: this time a Sri Lankan professor tackles issues of wealth and poverty in South Asia (**page 4**). And be encouraged by the many opportunities Langham had this summer to spread the news of our work at conferences and conventions in the UK (**page 8**).

If you have any feedback about Transform (positive or negative!) please email transform@langham.org

With every blessing,



Victoria Marsay
 Media Producer for LPUKI



Langham Partnership's Vision and Mission

Langham Partnership's Vision is to see churches equipped for mission and growing to maturity in Christ through the ministry of pastors and leaders who believe, teach and live by the Word of God.

Our mission is to strengthen the ministry of the Word of God through:

- nurturing national movements for biblical preaching (**Langham Preaching**);
- fostering the creation and distribution of evangelical literature (**Langham Literature**);
- and enhancing evangelical theological education (**Langham Scholars**), especially in countries where churches are under resourced.

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Scholars

Equipping theological educators to train future pastors and leaders.

Preaching

Training local pastors to faithfully preach God's word.

Literature

Developing biblical resources to equip pastors and leaders.

Greetings from the National Director:

'You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others.'

(Matt 5 v14-16)

Dear Friends

Jesus' exhortation in the Sermon on the Mount is a challenge to all believers - the visibility anticipated is expected of each and all of us. Perhaps there's an institutional application as well? Some will remember that a while back the late Peter Maiden described Langham as 'the greatest story never told in the UK'! How can people in the broader UK and Ireland Christian community, let



alone in the population more generally, have such poor visibility of such an extraordinary international Gospel mission and ministry?

To slightly turn the imagery around, at this instant Langham's 'Vision' is to 'double its global impact over five years and sustain it at that level for a further ten years while our core income grows', hence our 'Magnify' growth campaign. In order for that to happen we must 'be seen' and be seen much clearer in an attractive and appealing way. In order for that to happen, we must 'be seen' in a much clearer and appealing way, so that Langham's three programmes can help better reflect and shed the Gospel light around the world.

So, we continue to need as much help as you can give! Thank you to those who are helping bring Magnify towards a successful conclusion and also to those who have attended our upgraded presence at this summer's conventions and conferences (**see page 8 for more**). Hopefully you have felt

encouraged to involve others, friends, home groups, churches...? We would welcome the invitation to speak and the opportunity to share resources which reveal Langham to a wider audience. There are extraordinary and encouraging stories to share!

This 'Transform' shares Langham's intentional and increasing visibility at recent conferences and conventions as well as preaching seminars in Central Africa (**see pages 6-7**). Thank you for helping make a ministry that could be distant and somewhat hazy into one that is immediate, with impressive impact and focus that can bring plenty of encouragement to the UK&I Church and beyond!

With thanks again and Christian greetings as ever,

Revd Canon John Libby
National Director, LPUKI

Join Langham Live to uphold our global family in prayer

Running for over three years now, our monthly **Langham Live** zoom calls continue to be a source of encouragement, joy and challenge for many supporters, staff members and Langham family worldwide.

We've gathered virtually to hear from and pray for brothers and sisters in countries such as **South Sudan, Turkey, Ukraine, Nigeria, Brazil, Uganda, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Indonesia** – and that's just the tip of the iceberg!

Each month, we hear from a Langham family member who is on the 'front line' of mission and ministry, after which we go to breakout rooms to pray intelligently in smaller groups. There is also time to share personal requests and enjoy fellowship together. The calls are just 45 minutes on the last Thursday and Friday every month.



To join us, please visit
uk.langham.org/langhamlive
to register and to catch recordings and blog posts from previous calls.



Word from the World

South Asia Bible Commentary contributor Dr Prabo Mihindukulasuriya, from Sri Lanka, reflects on the need for believers to think deeply about the ethical challenges posed by wealth and poverty...

South Asia is home to millionaires as well as to the largest concentration of the world's poor. Some 74% of our neighbours (more than a billion people) live on less than two dollars a day.

Recent economic growth has, however, given rise to an urban middle class who may be able to use their education and socio-economic independence to fight corruption, demand more responsible government, and create businesses that draw more people out of poverty. But this is not the only possible outcome.

Frustration with corruption, inequality, and the political system may result in educated young South Asians emigrating or investing their money abroad. If they choose to focus solely on improving the circumstances of their own families, the gap between rich and poor will widen. It is thus important that Christian communities across South Asia take time to **reflect on the Bible's teaching on poverty and wealth and apply it in the political and economic spheres as well as in their daily lives.**

In Genesis, the story of creation reveals that God provided abundantly for all human and animal life and created the natural resources that would support human industry and trade (Gen. 1:29-30, 2:11-13). But since the fall, we have tended to idolise wealth (Eccl. 5:10, Matt. 6:24). Resources have become concentrated in the hands of the elite, while the majority remain impoverished (Mic. 2:2, James 5:1-6). We have succumbed to the sins of greed, jealousy and indifference to the needs of others.

God wanted his people to model broad-based economic equality, thus he instituted laws that provided for the poor as well as for restoring capital

assets and preventing exploitative acquisition (Deut. 15:1-14, 24:10-21). His blessing on a nation was interpreted as meaning that everyone would sit "under their own vine and under their own fig tree" (1 Kings 4:25, Mic. 4:4). This surprisingly modest economic goal



Dr Prabo Mihindukulasuriya wrote this article for the Langham-supported South Asia Bible Commentary.

focuses on security, independence, and sufficiency. Extremes of either wealth or poverty are rejected in the Old Testament (Prov. 30:8-9). In the New Testament, Paul takes a similar stance (2 Cor. 8:13-15). He does not define equality as meaning that everyone has exactly the same standard of living but that **everyone enjoys a standard of living that is compatible with human dignity.**

Proverbs presents values that should be taught at home regarding the right attitude to wealth and poverty (Prov.

3:9-10, 11:24-26, 12:9), how we should relate to rich and poor (Prov. 3:27, 14:21) and the management of family wealth (Prov. 13:11, 24:27, 27:18, 23-27). Hard work and enterprise are encouraged (Prov. 10:4-5, 21:5, 28:19-20).

These biblical teachings resonate with some South Asian values. But whereas these are applied within the extended family in South Asia, the New Testament pattern of economic sharing looks beyond the family and kinship group to the local and global needy. Christ's sympathy for the poor should be our model.

His incarnation is described as enriching the poor (2 Cor. 8:9). In the Church, the traditional Israelite kinship structure was enlarged to embrace economic sharing with fellow believers (Acts 2:44, Rom. 15:26, 1 Tim. 6:18). A new concept of hospitality arose, rooted in the understanding that our "household" was now the inclusive community of Christ (Rom. 12:13, Eph. 2:19). Believers today need to think deeply about the ethical challenges posed by wealth and poverty. How should we respond to the problem of debt to money-lenders and credit card companies? Is it good stewardship of our God-given resources to borrow money in order to maintain our social status? Are we striving for larger incomes so that we can fulfil our family duties, or are we defining our "respectability" by what we earn? Do we recognise the pressures of the never-ending consumerism that defines our worth by what and how much we buy? These are questions we need to ponder. The answers are not always easy.

We would be wise to heed Paul's counsel in 1 Timothy 6:5-18 as we traverse this ethical maze.

Dr Prabo Mihindukulasuriya is Assistant Professor in the History of Christianity at Regent College, Vancouver. This excerpt is taken from the Langham's South Asia Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary on the Whole Bible, edited by Brian Wintle (Open Door Publications, 2015; Zondervan, 2015). Used with permission.

‘I pray my Dad and the people of Fiji would be free from believing a lie.’



With a population of less than a million, Fiji has a strong family culture. People also respect Christianity, as it spread throughout the Fijian islands in the 19th century. But this respect is mainly traditional, not because of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Poor preaching is a prevailing problem across Fiji: pastors ostensibly use the Bible but push their own agenda and fail to apply God’s Word to people’s lives.

The so-called ‘prosperity Gospel’ is also affecting the fabric of Fijian culture, even in individual families.

Pio ‘Tukana’ Nakesu is the pastor of a small church in Suva, Fiji, called Namadi Heights Baptist Church. As the country’s Langham Preaching coordinator, he knows the enormous benefit of faithful biblical preaching – but it’s come at a personal cost.

‘We became poorer and poorer’

Tukana said: “I’m dealing with my own struggles of growing up as a pastor’s kid and my own relationship with my father. One of the biggest things was the idea that if you give then God will bless you with riches. I watched my dad give everything and we became poorer and poorer. He still subscribes to that line of teaching. He’s recently been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease.

“I can see physically he’s getting worse but somehow he still believes that things are only going to get better if you keep giving more money that you don’t

have. It’s all about what you do for God and God will be obligated to give you back.”

Tukana’s family pushed him to be a pastor in his father’s church and ultimately teach the ‘prosperity gospel’.

“When I decided I would become a pastor but not a pastor in his setup, the sort of teaching that he subscribed to, it made the relationship a lot more tricky. Some of his comments were really harsh and that is hard. It causes a lot of stress. I’m sad for my family, I’m sad for my dad. He really made a difference in our family in that he stood for what he believed for but when what you believe is not the right thing, you’ve given yourself over to misinterpreted teaching, twisted teachings of God’s written Word.

“But what he doesn’t see is that faithful Bible teaching, people long for it as well.”

‘Now people are growing personally by their own study’

“With Langham training, churches are getting serious about understanding what God’s Word actually says. We’ve got preachers that are now growing themselves, growing personally by their own study of God’s Word. So we have more people now that are trusting God’s

Word, preaching God’s Word faithfully and helping others to grow.”

Langham Preaching seminars have been running in Fiji since January 2018, with pastors and leaders from a variety of churches and ethnic backgrounds attending. During the COVID pandemic, online training was hugely appreciated.

Members of Tukana’s church have noticed the great difference that Langham training has made to the preaching they hear, including seeing how God’s Word applies to their lives.

Veresa Colata, an elder at a Brethren Church, said: “Preaching takes courage – preaching God’s Word is very important. Langham training helped me a lot. It taught me to dig deeply into the Bible.”

Langham has also impacted student ministry organisation ‘Pacific Students for Christ.’ Its President, Taniela Vuli Levuka Qeleni, said it’s a “gift from God for us. It actually helped us to see how to write a Bible talk, how to see things from within the passage and for us as staff there was a big turnaround. I thank God that we were introduced to Langham.”

Holding out hope

Tukana says he loves helping others to discover things for themselves in the text: “My prayer is that not just my dad, for the many people in Fiji that have been tricked into this false idea, or this misinterpreted Scriptures that they’ve subscribed to that they would see the truth. That they would believe in the actual teaching of the Bible so they can be free from believing in a lie.”

Under Tukana’s leadership, Langham is training church leaders to faithfully preach God’s Word. Tukana holds out hope that his dad will embrace the Gospel.

Thank you for training pastors like Tukana so that God’s Word can reach and transform God’s people in Fiji and beyond.



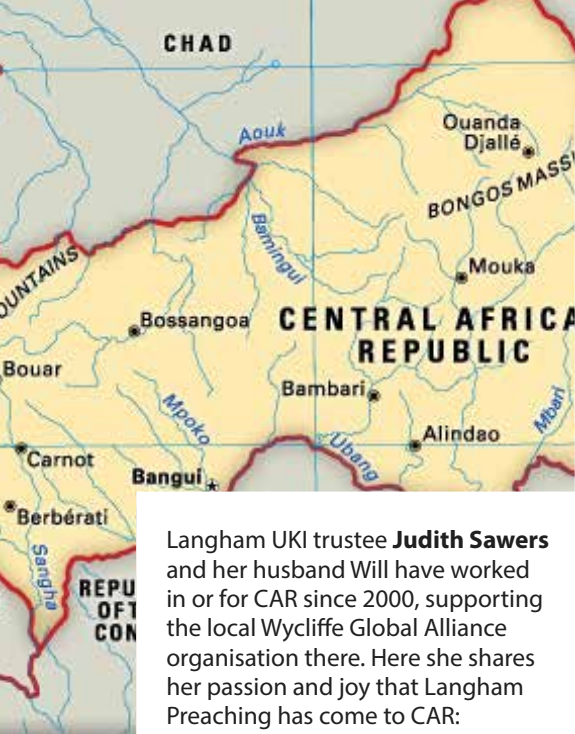
Pastor Tukana says there is a strong culture of family and community in Fiji.

SEE MORE



Watch a video about Pastor Tukana and the life-changing impact of Langham Preaching:

uk.langham.org/get-involved/videos/



‘We have to be able to **share this teaching** with everyone!’

Langham UKI trustee **Judith Sawers** and her husband Will have worked in or for CAR since 2000, supporting the local Wycliffe Global Alliance organisation there. Here she shares her passion and joy that Langham Preaching has come to CAR:

There are about 100 languages in CAR, for a population of nearly six million. Bible translation has been slow: after almost 25 years’ work on each, last year saw the launch of three New Testaments, with the release of 15,000 print copies, audio copies and the *JESUS* Film. These could reach a large chunk of the population, as these are three of CAR’s largest language communities.

Wycliffe’s experience over the last 80 years is that in some ways it’s easier to work towards reducing the number of Bible-less languages than to impact the number of people-less Bibles... Bibles that sit on shelves or in boxes or in other ways fail to fully reach into people’s hearts and lives. And this is where Langham comes in.

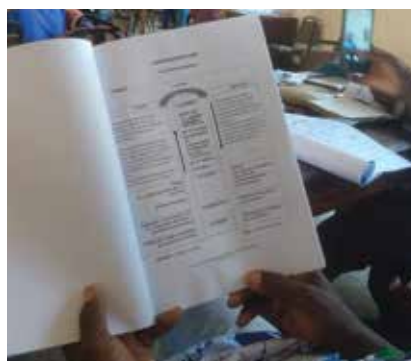
Getting God’s Word into hearts and lives

I’ve wanted to see Langham Preaching training in CAR for years. I believe this is one of the best ways to get God’s Word from those 15,000 books

The landlocked country *Central African Republic* (CAR) is one of the poorest and most fragile countries in the world despite its abundant natural resources. Its institutions are weak, infrastructure is woefully inadequate, gender-based violence is widespread and the social fabric has been eroded.

into people’s hearts and lives, as well as from the many more new New Testaments we hope to see arriving in the next few years.

I’ve heard many... shall we say ‘inadequate’... sermons in CAR, and one stands out in my memory as particularly bad – just wrong! **The church in CAR needs Langham**



There is a need for the Langham Preaching manuals to be translated into Sango, CAR’s national language.

Preaching! By God’s grace, it has now happened, with the first workshop taking place in June. I can’t get over God’s generosity to me in that I just happened to be in CAR the week when the seminar was on.

A couple who Will and I have supported since their marriage in 2001 were part of that first cohort. I was so excited to hear that Cécile as well as Daniel was in the training, as one of the relatively few women to have gained a theology degree from FATEB in Bangui.

Maximising impact by training women

Teaching women to rightly handle the Word of God is so important for reaching and training the next generation, as many young people are growing up without a father-figure. Women have such an enormous reach, whether standing in a pulpit, in women’s Bible study groups or in the home.

So thank you, Langham, for opening doors for women’s potential.

It was a huge privilege to be there on that morning. I was able to encourage the participants on the basis of the passage about Zacchaeus that they were working on, which had also been referenced in one of the New Testament dedications last year: you don’t have to climb a tree to see Jesus; today he has come to your home!

There were 40+ participants, including a good number of women. It was fantastic to discover that they were not just using French (a high-status language) but also working in the national language, Sango, which is spoken right across the country and



Will and Judith Sawers have worked in or for Central African Republic since 2000.

has the complete Bible available in several versions.

Most people will say they understand French because of its status but might miss things because they don't really know it well enough, so it was good to see people confident enough to admit their preference for Sango, clearly motivated by their desire to learn. Sadly in CAR, status often trumps functionality.

'We have to be able to share this teaching'

One of the ladies attending, who was not sitting at the Sango-speakers' table, urgently said to me: 'We need the manual in Sango! As soon as possible! We have to be able to share this teaching with everyone!'

The CAR Wycliffe organisation is building new community relationships now in many parts of the country. It would be wonderful if we could help with translating Langham's course materials in future, tying in with our Scripture Engagement strategies for communities in those areas receiving their first Scriptures.

Langham Preaching training is potentially **counter-cultural** in CAR, where the culture tends to be hierarchical, and where "knowledge is power". If you know or learn something, it's yours, and it's not the



Judith believes Langham Preaching training could bring about lasting change in CAR.

norm to share it. My expat colleagues and I sometimes feel we've made little progress in trying to build capacity in the local Wycliffe organisation in the last 20 years. Despite training and mentoring, we're not seeing enough people taking on roles that we still do. So, training like Langham's that can be passed on in a culturally appropriate way, in what's basically an oral society, is **fantastic**.

Hampered by poverty and instability

In a country that's been hampered by instability, poverty is absolutely a reality in CAR, along with poor educational levels, and low life expectancy. Even people who are in

work are only eating once a day in order to provide for extended family members in their households, so Langham's preaching training not only **helps to meet a spiritual need** but does it in a way that recognises that people can't afford fancy books and resources!

Christian agencies in CAR are also now coming out of their silos to work together much more, so it's a great moment for Langham, as another partner in kingdom work, to step through those open doors.

Please pray for Langham Preaching training in CAR, both for the growth of the church, and also because of its potential to be a huge service to other missions and NGOs also seeking to bring about lasting change at the local level.

By Judith Sawers, Prayer and Communications Officer for CAR working with Wycliffe Bible Translators, and LPUKI trustee.



Over 40 people attended the Langham Preaching training event in CAR, including a good number of women.

SEE MORE



Watch an interview with Judith Sawers on her experience in Central African Republic:

uk.langham.org/get-involved/videos/

Supporter's Page

Hundreds hear of Langham this summer

Some of you may have appreciated and enjoyed attending a conference or convention during the summer months. Hopefully you saw our brand-new Langham stand and spoke to a staff member! We were at:

- **Keswick Portstewart** (Northern Ireland)
- **Keswick Convention** (Cumbria, England)
- **New Horizon** (Northern Ireland)
- **Moray Coast Convention** (Scotland)
- **Bangor Worldwide Missionary Convention** (Northern Ireland – Chris Wright was the main speaker)

Hundreds of conversations were had, boxes of promotional materials and books were handed out, and new for this year was our unique Virtual Reality Experience. Delegates enjoyed learning about Langham through the interactive



Jose Laussu at the Moray Coast Convention, Scotland



Chris Wright at the Bangor Worldwide Missionary Convention.

VR headset, including watching videos.

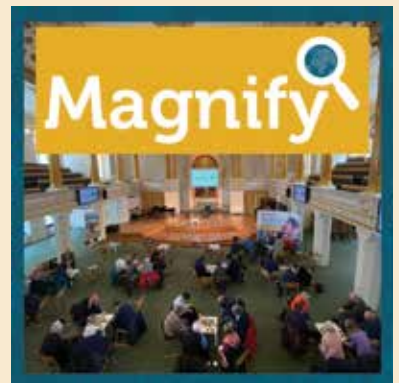
Mark Armstrong, our Supporter Development Officer in Ireland, said it was a privilege and joy to introduce attendees to Langham, especially as many had never heard of Langham or its founder John Stott. He shared:

"After four weeks of conferences and many conversations, I did succumb to a throat infection! But there's nothing quite like seeing the penny drop as people came across our stand, heard about Langham's amazing impact around the world and wanted to hear more. I'm looking forward to further engagements in the coming year and continuing some of those conversations. Roll on summer 2024!"

We are hoping to be present at various conferences and conventions next year – please look out for us and say Hi!

Magnify Campaign Launched

The Magnify campaign was launched at All Souls, Langham Place back in April. During the event – attended by over 50 people from various denominations – we heard about the recent release of the Central and Eastern European Bible commentary from its General Editor Peter Penner. Peter took over from Corneliu Constantineanu, who died of Covid in 2021.



We have been on the road since then meeting supporters in Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield, Cambridge, Tonbridge and Dumfries. We are planning events in Birmingham, Bristol, Inverness, Dundee, Lisburn and Aberdeen over the next six months. If you are close by, we will email you with details when finalised.

If we haven't been close to you and there is a Sunday service or a mid-week meeting we can come along to share Langham's vision, thank supporters and pray together, please do contact Jose Laussu or Simon Foulds: magnify@langham.org

We would love to be invited!

Celebration Leaflet

■ Inside this copy of Transform you'll find our brand new 'Celebration' leaflet giving a snapshot of Langham from the last financial year.

If you'd like copies to give to friends please email: uk@langham.org



Combating 'white saviourism' for the good of the Global Church

Rev. Jose Laussu writes: After the 1960s and 70s, when many countries gained independence from colonial powers, young churches received more autonomy from their parent mission organisations. All faced new tensions in their mission/church relationships, leading to a moratorium being called on missions, largely by Majority World churches.

At first, western missionary involvement was deferred for a limited time of five years, but others argued that missionaries should be withdrawn completely.

Missions and churches have since wrestled with moving from "parent" to "partner". The idea of partnership between mission organisations and their daughter churches has gained much traction, but lacked success – especially when such divergent ideas exist regarding what partnership entails.

As a black clergyman, I have observed in countries such as Angola, Zambia, South Africa, Madagascar, Seychelles and Guinea that local churches are not independent of foreign missions. Foreign mission bodies are still directing their work.

'White saviourism' resembling colonialisation

While growing up, it was common to see foreign mission organisations controlling institutions and schools. This included an imposed work budget and vision by expatriates. Whether deliberate or not, this form of 'white saviourism'*** resembles colonialisation as much as it did 200 years ago.

Recent church-mission conferences have deliberated on how to improve the mother-daughter relationship that many mission organisations have with their partners overseas. However, the new resolutions are complicating the transfer of authority from foreign agencies.

While relinquishing control is the right step, it should not be about control in the first place.

For true mutuality, there must be a genuine give-and-take from both



Rev. Jose Laussu, Langham's Supporter Development Officer (Scotland).

sides. The Church needs to be taken seriously by the Mission; the Mission needs to see that it happens. Both sides (particularly the Mission) must consider the two most common models used in approaching partnership, moving from the 'sponsorship' model to the 'family' model.

From 'sponsorship' to 'family'

Langham aims to equip indigenous leaders from Majority World nations to multiply disciples. Climaxing 50 years of some of the most fruitful work in the history of modern missions, Langham uses the 'family' model to come alongside the global church and equip God's people with God's Word – through our Scholars, Preaching and Literature programmes. White saviourism can be combated by moving from the 'sponsorship' model to the 'family' model. However, both those who send missionaries and those who receive

them have scars of distrust, pondering: 'Are we really partners?' This keeps both sides from seeing how God has gifted each.

Therefore, even where funds are involved, two governing principles are vital. Firstly, "the principle of the giving of life," is about the sharing of resources in an equitable way. Secondly, "the principle of stewardship," emphasises self-support. This underlines the continuing importance of enabling the Majority World Church to become mature.

Therefore, Langham does not send missionaries abroad. Though our Majority World family lives in places of poverty, pressure, and persecution, they are also places of great potential.

Moving beyond the 'problems'

Rather than dwelling on the past, national and expatriate church workers should work together for the good of the Church, as they are here to positively benefit the growth of the body of Christ.

Ministry strategies are needed to propel the Mission and the Church in new directions. Instead of laying the blame at each other's door, each side should take responsibility now to move forward. Dwelling on the difficulties or misunderstandings of the past will only give bitterness an opportunity to spring up and cause trouble (Heb. 12:15).

*** 'White saviourism' is an ideology whereby a person of white ethnicity – often from a place of superiority, whether consciously or unconsciously attempts to rescue or 'save' people of colour.

By Rev. Jose Laussu, Supporter Development Officer (Scotland).

This article is an extract from a longer article first published by Christian Today: <https://shorturl.at/kIFR4>

SEE MORE



Listen to Jose speak to UCB Christian Radio about this issue of white saviourism:

uk.langham.org/get-involved/videos/

Word on the World

Chris Wright

Looking for water on the moon - **destroying it on the earth**

On 23rd August 2023, India successfully landed a spacecraft close to the south pole of the moon, to great national acclamation - having won the race with Russia who (to unacknowledged national shame) failed to do the same when their spacecraft crashed on 19th August. The point of landing at the *south* pole of the moon, we are told, is that it seems certain that there is water there, preserved by the icy darkness of that lunar region. And water would be essential if humans were inclined to spend any length of time resident up there. Fresh water for moon-dwellers! Hooray!

Meanwhile back on earth, just two months earlier, on 6th June, Russia (by all plausible accounts it is assumed to have been Russia) destroyed the Kakhovka Dam in Ukraine, with the total wastage of an unimaginable quantity of fresh water for earth-dwellers. That dam, holding some 35% of Ukraine's fresh water, supplied close to one million people with water for drinking and sanitation, and for vital irrigation over a vast and massively productive area. Its destruction has not only devastated the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of humans, it has caused massive loss of habitat and biodiversity, and serious pollution of the Dnipro River, killing untold quantities of fish and aquatic creatures and other animals. It has caused virtually irreparable degradation of a whole ecosystem. It was a crime against the earth itself: ecocide.

I find it hard to think of a clearer example of the sheer lunacy of human folly than for the same people at almost the same time to be searching for fresh water on the moon (where we



might never live), while intentionally destroying vast quantities of the diminishing store of the precious stuff on the earth (where we actually do live).

And that is just one spectacular act among the myriad ways in which humans are destroying the earth and its precious resources, and paying the cost in the worsening impacts of global heating and climate chaos.

And God is not pleased. In fact, the Bible makes it very clear that God is profoundly angered when humans ruin and ravage the beautiful earth he entrusted to us with its three great creational spaces in Genesis 1 and their respective fillings: the air, the waters, and the dry land - all now threatened by our abuse. (And isn't it interesting how the word "biblical" is used to describe anything awesomely vast - like floods and fires). We are not the first destructive generation of humanity,

though we are certainly the worst.

In biblical times, as now, war was terribly destructive of the natural environment. Trees were felled in vast quantities for engines of siege. Crops, orchards, olive groves and vineyards were systematically destroyed. Sometimes land would be salted to make it infertile. Wells were poisoned, flocks and herds slaughtered. God's anger against such behaviour was particularly targeted at **Babylon**, so much so that the very word became not only the historical name of the actual enemy of Judah who destroyed their land, city and temple in the 6th century BC, but also a symbol of universal humanity united in enmity against God and his people - and destroying God's earth in the process.

Destroyers of the earth

"Babylon," above all, is the target of God's judgment, historically and in the

eschatological future. And Babylon's destruction of nature - the earth itself - is spelt out several times among the many dimensions of their arrogance and evil.

Habakkuk lambasts the devastating impact of Nebuchadnezzar's wars in the region, on forests, animals, people, land, and cities,

The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,
as will the *destruction of the beasts* that terrified them,
for the blood of man and *violence to the earth*,
to cities and all who dwell in them.
(Hab. 2:17 (ESV; "Lebanon" stands for the felling of its great cedar trees).

Isaiah pictures the trees themselves rejoicing when the king of Babylon sinks down dead to the underworld. His fall means they will no longer be felled.

All the lands are at rest and at peace;
they break into singing.
Even *the junipers and the cedars of Lebanon*
gloat over you and say,
"Now that you have been laid low,
no one comes to cut us down." (Isa. 14:7-8).

Jeremiah, in his enormous oracle of condemnation of Babylon, simply calls that evil empire a destroyer of the earth,

"I am against you, you destroying mountain,
you who destroy the whole earth,"
declares the LORD (Jer. 51:25).

John quotes that verse of Jeremiah in his portrayal of God's ultimate judgment on evil powers that have wreaked not

only death on human beings but are indeed "destroyers of the earth". With the seventh trumpet, the twenty-four elders cry out,

"The time has come for judging the dead,
...and for *destroying those who destroy the earth*" (Rev. 11:18).

God is not mocked. We reap what we sow, and what a terrifying harvest we are now indeed reaping on the earth we have so vilely abused. For what will it profit the human race to gain all the water on the moon while losing the earth's own soul - this miraculously watered blue planet? Or on a smaller but still scandalous scale, who profits when those who deliver fresh water to our taps are at the same time poisoning with sewage the very sources of fresh water in our rivers, lakes and aquifers?

The water of life

Coming back to water itself - H₂O has been described as "The Universe's Most Miraculous Molecule." It covers 70% of the earth's surface and constitutes 75% of our bodies. It is almost the only substance known to us that expands (rather than contracts) as it cools from liquid to solid state, so that water freezes from the top downwards, ice floats, and life can go on in the depths beneath. 97% of the earth's water is in the salty oceans, but the amazing dynamic cycle of evaporation, condensation in clouds, precipitation in rain and snow, gives us the remaining 3% as fresh water that keeps us all alive, though about 70% of that fresh water is locked up in the polar

ice-caps that we are slowly melting back into the oceans...

No wonder water is a constant image in the Bible for life itself, for salvation, for fruitfulness, for the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is how God describes himself through Jeremiah,

"My people have committed two sins:
They have forsaken me,
the spring of living water,
and have dug their own cisterns,
broken cisterns that cannot hold water (Jer. 2:13).

I think Jeremiah would have nodded at the similar ironic and futile stupidity of squandering our existing supplies of earth's fresh water while digging for water on the moon, and crashing spaceships in the process... It's the kind of thing humans do when they collectively abandon the living God and his gifts of grace - in creation and redemption.

No wonder either, then (to conclude with biblical hope), that water features prominently in John's climactic vision of the new creation. Don't be put off by the words "there was no longer any sea" (Rev. 21:1). Earlier in Revelation - as also in the Old Testament - the sea has been the symbol of chaotic evil, the place where the dragon stands and from where one of the "beasts" emerges (Rev. 13:1). So those words about the new heaven and new earth imply the ending of all such sources of evil, rebellion and deception, rather than a literal description of new creation geography.

Then comes the beautiful vision of the glory of God in the new creation that draws the whole drama of scripture to a close. We won't need the light of the sun. And we certainly won't need water from the moon either.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:1-2).

...for the healing not just of the enmities and hostilities of the nations, but also for the healing of their destructive madness and folly.

Amen. Come Lord Jesus!



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