

## From Anesthetic to Advocate through Accompaniment: Mission with an Olive Agenda in Response to Global Empire

*"When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land." – Desmond Tutu<sup>1</sup>*

An *anesthetic* is a drug used to relieve pain (analgesia), relax (sedate), induce sleepiness (hypnosis), spark forgetfulness (amnesia), or to make one unconscious for general anesthesia.<sup>2</sup> Among other things, anesthetics are generally administered by a specialist (anesthesiologist or anesthetist) upon a patient in order to induce or maintain a state of anesthesia and facilitate a procedure. With such thoughts in mind, *Mission as Anesthetic*<sup>3</sup> can be employed as a striking image for particular deficiencies in Christian missionary activity throughout the world, for the history of global mission – in addition to its current state of affairs – is filled with examples where the Gospel is used to induce various forms of unconsciousness, thus opening a significant social space for those in power to more effectively perform geographic, political, economic, intellectual, emotional, psychological, spiritual, cultural, and religious procedures.<sup>4</sup>

In order to offer an effective alternative to *Mission as Anesthetic* and other forms of incomplete and ineffective global missionary engagement, one is drawn toward the strong commitment of advocacy and "mutual conversion" expressed through *Mission as Accompaniment*.<sup>5</sup> Among other things, *Mission as Accompaniment* takes into account the nature of God's walking alongside humankind through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, thus the responsibility of participants in God's mission to accompany one another – strengthened and guided by the Holy Spirit (Advocate) – in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality. In contrast to missionary ventures that promote a distant God, general lack of earthly consciousness, and one-sided activity, *Mission as Accompaniment* embodies an incarnational approach to missionary companionship, which leads to heightened levels of awareness on all sides of the encounter, and thus moves beyond the labels of "your experience" and "my experience" and embraces the realities of "our experience".<sup>6</sup> As a result, *Mission as Accompaniment* goes beyond pain relief and seeks corrective operation (transformation), healing of core injuries (reconciliation), and rehabilitative strengthening for the future (empowerment). In other words, *Mission as Accompaniment* is concerned with life after death *and* life after birth, thus it requires

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Gish, *Desmond Tutu: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood: 2004), pg. 101. It must be noted that other variations of this quotation exist, which are not original to Desmond Tutu.

<sup>2</sup> WebMD, "Topic Overview: Intravenous Anesthetic" (January, 2010), <http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/intravenous-iv-anesthetics-topic-overview>

<sup>3</sup> As far as I am aware, *Mission as Anesthetic* as an image of missionary engagement is original to this paper. If I am mistaken, my apologies are extended to those who deserve credit for its usage.

<sup>4</sup> Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), pg. 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Global Mission in the 21st Century: A Vision of Evangelical Faithfulness in God's Mission*, (Chicago: ELCA, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Rafael Malpica Padilla, *Accompaniment: A Lens and Methodology for Mission Today*, (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Global-Mission/How-We-Work.aspx>.

mission practitioners from around the world to accompany one another for the purpose of engaging all systems and structures that seek to divide, conquer, and exploit.

With the above introductory thoughts in mind, the following sections will utilize a “See-Judge-Act”<sup>7</sup> methodology to move *From Anesthetic to Advocate through Accompaniment*.

### **See the Empire: Neoliberal Capitalism and the Impact upon Ecological Destruction, Inequality, and Poverty**

While a variety of views exist as how to define the nature of Empire, for use in this paper I will utilize the following thoughts from Joerg Rieger as a foundation for examination:

Empire, in sum, has to do with mass concentrations of power that permeate all aspects of life and cannot be controlled by any one actor alone...Empire seeks to extend its control as far as possible; not only geographically, politically, and economically – these factors are commonly recognized – but also intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, culturally, and religiously... The problem with empire has to do with forms of top-down control that are established on the backs of the empire’s subjects and that do not allow those within its reach to pursue alternative purposes.<sup>8</sup>

With these notions from Rieger in mind, one recognizes that evidence of Empire in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be found in numerous places, but perhaps most strikingly within the expansion of Neoliberal Capitalism. While a full description of Neoliberal Capitalism is not intended here, one recognizes that it seeks to transfer control of the global economy from public to private sector under the belief that such a transition will produce a more efficient government and improve the economic health of all nations.<sup>9</sup> However, Neoliberal Capitalism has led to massive consolidations of power, thus multinational enterprises – motivated by profit and mostly unaccountable to any electorate – use their strong financial influence to push governments into deregulation-orientated policies for the steady flow of products, currency, and factories.<sup>10</sup> While such strategies have created tremendous financial wealth, the distribution of positive and negative consequences has been increasingly disproportionate, and the current world population of seven billion is mostly controlled by an overlap of 600 billionaires. All in all, the definition of Empire by Rieger is an accurate fit for Neoliberal Capitalism, for the few who benefit seek to extend their control, sustain massive influence, and ensure that the global community is trapped within the structure and denied of any opportunity for alternatives.

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<sup>7</sup> Gerald West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publication, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), pg. 2-3.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Nathan Cohen, *The Impact of Neoliberalism, Political Institutions and Financial Autonomy on Economic Development*, (Unpublished Thesis, Princeton University: Princeton, NJ: 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Anderson, John Cavanagh, and The Institute for Policy Studies, *Field Guide to the Global Economy*, (New York: The New Press, 2005), pg. 1.

In regards to consequences of Empire, research has shown that Neoliberal Capitalism drives the Earth towards ecological damage,<sup>11</sup> to the point that mass production, over-consumption, and pursuits of unlimited growth have pushed the Earth past its natural resource capacity.<sup>12</sup> In addition to these alarming ecological realities, Neoliberal Capitalism also creates massive inequality and poverty, to the level that billions of citizens suffer harsh consequences while others reap the rewards.<sup>13</sup> As a result of these ongoing and steadily increasing challenges, one recognizes that Neoliberal Capitalism provides a worldwide Empire of “un-Economy”<sup>14</sup> that is un-fair, creates a world that is both un-stable and un-sustainable, and leaves the far majority of global citizens totally un-satisfied.

While much has been written surrounding the ecological and economic consequences of Neoliberal Capitalism, a more holistic examination reveals that *dehumanization* is both a product and source of its existence and sustained influence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> In specifics, *mechanistic dehumanization* – as described by Nick Haslam – reveals a mindset related to systemic processes – such as Neoliberal Capitalism – that strip others of life and dignity.<sup>16</sup> As Haslam explains, *mechanistic dehumanization* involves:

...the objectifying denial of essentially human attributes to people toward whom the person feels psychologically distant and socially unrelated. It is often accompanied by indifference, a lack of empathy, an abstract and deindividuated view of others that indicates an implicit horizontal separation from self, and a tendency to explain the other’s behavior in nonintentional, causal terms.<sup>17</sup>

With these thoughts from Haslam in mind, while one may correctly identify Neoliberal Capitalism as a systemic source of ecological destruction, inequality, and poverty, further investigation reveals that mechanistic dehumanization is a primary source and sustainer of Neoliberal Capitalism. In addition, one further recognizes the need to examine mechanistic dehumanization in relationship to *Mission as Anesthetic* and other deficiencies in global missionary engagement, for such can be a valuable starting point in order to move toward consciousness-building missiological trajectories that respond to Neoliberal Capitalism and other imperial mechanisms. In other words, what is worthy of attention is the reality that Neoliberal Capitalism – and other instruments of Empire – has similar roots and connections with *Mission as Anesthetic*, thus the vital need to develop global missionary ventures that resist the oppressive and seductive powers of Empire and more fully value the sacredness of life through participation in God’s mission.

<sup>11</sup> John T. Houghton, *Global Warming: 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> R.K. Pachauri and A. Reisinger (Editors) *Contribution of Working Groups I, II, and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, (Geneva, Switzerland: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Jim Wallis, The “Un-Economy”, *God’s Politics Blog*, October, 2011:

<http://blog.sojo.net/blogs/2011/10/20/un-economy>

<sup>15</sup> Lutheran World Federation, “Communion, Responsibility, Accountability: Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization”(Geneva: December, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Nick Haslam, “Dehumanization: An Integrative View”, *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, (2006, Vol. 10, No. 3.).

<sup>17</sup> Haslam, pg. 262.

## Judge the Empire: Mission as Accompaniment

In light of the above mentioned connections between mechanistic dehumanization, Neoliberal Capitalism, ecological destruction, inequality, poverty, and deficient forms of global missionary engagement, *Mission as Accompaniment* is a valuable framework as international church companions seek innovative and respectful methods to accompany one another in God's mission. As stated in "Global Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Vision of Evangelical Faithfulness in God's Mission", *Mission as Accompaniment* is:

...walking together in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality. The basis for this *accompaniment*, or what the New Testament calls *koinonia*, is found in the God-human relationship in which God accompanies us in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

As a critique of past and present missionary practices, such as the aforementioned *Mission as Anesthetic*, and in response to God's "walking-alongside" of humankind through Jesus Christ, *Mission as Accompaniment* builds upon previously held understandings and thrusts mission into a "relational mode",<sup>19</sup> for it implies "proximity to the walking companion" and "accepting the invitation to accompany the other".<sup>20</sup> In many ways, *Mission as Accompaniment* embodies various threads of Liberation Theology,<sup>21</sup> and also falls under the more general theme of Postcolonial Mission due to its renegotiation of power between world church companions.<sup>22</sup> All together, *Mission as Accompaniment* provides a significant contribution to contemporary missiological conceptions, and it also has the ability to address urgent social issues surrounding dehumanization, Neoliberal Capitalism, and the impact upon ecological destruction, inequality, and poverty.

In regards to theological underpinnings, "accompaniment" derives from the Latin "*ad cum panis*" which translates as "to go with bread." With such thoughts in mind, one engaged in *Mission as Accompaniment* walks alongside others "with bread", or in other words, shares and receives the sustenance of life in relationship with God, humankind, and all that God has created. As *Mission as Accompaniment* finds its biblical foundations in the Luke 24 "Road to Emmaus" account, one recognizes that Jesus was more fully recognized *through* the exchange of life-giving bread, and as a result the disciples received a greater sense of self-recognition, changed their pre-determined course, and returned to Jerusalem in order

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<sup>18</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Global Mission in the 21st Century: A Vision of Evangelical Faithfulness in God's Mission*, (Chicago: ELCA, 1999), pg. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993); Jerry Aaker, *Partners with the Poor: An Emerging Approach to Relief and Development*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1993)

<sup>20</sup> Rafael Malpica Padilla, "Accompaniment as an Alternative Model for the Practice of Mission". *Trinity Seminary Review*: Summer/Fall 2008. Volume 29, No: 2. Trinity Lutheran Seminary: Columbus, Ohio. Pg. 88

<sup>21</sup> Brian E. Konkol, *Mission Possible? Power, Truth-Telling, and the Pursuit of Mission as Accompaniment*, (Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, 2011), pg. 30.

<sup>22</sup> Desmond van der Water (Editor), *Postcolonial Mission: Power and Partnership in World Christianity*, (California: Sopher Press, 2011).

to participate in God's mission.<sup>23</sup> As a result, it can be argued that within and through the sharing and receiving of sustenance Jesus Christ is made known, divisions caused by greed are broken, the interconnectedness of humanity is realized, and communities – both local and global – are more fully restored to exist faithfully and fruitfully as God first intended.

With the above thoughts in mind, one of the primary ways that *Mission as Accompaniment* is a significant framework for addressing dehumanization is the recognition that power disparity increases the likelihood of dehumanization,<sup>24</sup> and *Mission as Accompaniment* has been shown as a valuable corrective.<sup>25</sup> As highlighted earlier, *Mission as Accompaniment* involves mutual exchange and a revelation of common humanity through the appreciation of relationships and sharing of life-giving sustenance. Therefore, *Mission as Accompaniment* contributes towards a significant decrease of power disparity, thus a logical consequence is a decline in mechanistic dehumanization. While one recognizes the risk of oversimplification within such a sequence, the potential outcomes of *Mission as Accompaniment* are massive, for if the likelihood of dehumanization diminishes as a result of reduced power disparity, then opposition to Neoliberal Capitalism can increase, and thus a reduction of ecological destruction, inequality, and poverty. As has been shown throughout human history, the power of interpersonal solidarity is astonishing, thus the sociological potential of *Mission as Accompaniment* as a response to Empire is extraordinary.

While the aforementioned logic may produce criticism surrounding naïvety and overconfidence, one should not underestimate spiritual momentum and sociological domino-effect, thus *Mission as Accompaniment* does possess a strong potential to address Neoliberal Capitalism and other tools of international systematic oppression. However, it is also recognized that *Mission as Accompaniment in its current form* requires additional theoretical resources for a more focused approach in response to 21<sup>st</sup> century Empire. As a critique of *Mission as Accompaniment* is its lack of detailed focus surrounding specific global issues, a potential consequence is walking together for the sole objective of walking together, which can lead to partnership without purpose and no clear walking direction. Therefore, as global mission companionship is – at its core – intended to build righteous relationships, exchange hospitality, restore community, and generate outcomes that cannot be produced in isolation, while *Mission as Accompaniment* addresses power imbalance through a relational approach that impacts dehumanization, it requires a more specific focus that can be applied directly to the Neoliberal Capitalism.

### **Act in Response to the Empire: Mission as Accompaniment with an Olive Agenda**

In order to provide a more firm and attentive walking direction for *Mission as Accompaniment* in response to Neoliberal Capitalism, the work of Steve de Gruchy in "An Olive Agenda: First Thoughts on a Metaphorical Theology of Development" is of great

<sup>23</sup> See: Carlos A. Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus*. Translated by Paulo Ueti Barasioli. (Con-Texto Grafica e Editor, Centro de Estudos Biblicos, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Joris Lammers and Diederik A. Stapel, "Power increases Dehumanization", *Group Processes Intergroup Relations* (January, 2010, Vol 14, No. 1), pg. 113-126.

<sup>25</sup> Brian E. Konkol, *Mission Possible? Power, Truth-Telling, and the Pursuit of Mission as Accompaniment*, (Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, 2011).

importance, for he provides a significant contribution toward the pursuit of resistance and alternatives to various expressions of 21<sup>st</sup> century Empire.<sup>26</sup> For example, de Gruchy offers a theological metaphor – the olive – that transcends the duality between the “green” environmental agenda and “brown” poverty agenda “that has disabled development discourse for the past twenty years”.<sup>27</sup> As a result, an Olive Agenda provides a “remarkably rich metaphor” that “holds together that which religious and political discourse rends apart: earth, land, climate, labor, time, family, food, nutrition, health, hunger, poverty, power and violence”.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, while an Olive Agenda in its present form already adds to the wealth of theological research on ecology and poverty, it has yet to be developed and applied fully as a missiological trajectory, thus a tremendous opportunity emerges for one to connect an Olive Agenda with *Mission as Accompaniment* in order to more fully respond to that which stands in direct opposition to God’s mission: Neoliberal Capitalism and its direct impact upon ecological destruction, inequality, and poverty.

An Olive Agenda is rooted in the understanding that although Neoliberal Capitalism – called the “Big Economy” by Larry Rasmussen<sup>29</sup> – has provided a number of contributions to modern life, its flawed logic of mass production, over-consumption, and unlimited growth works against “the Great Economy”, a term from Wendell Berry.<sup>30</sup> In other words:

Economic production and consumption, as well as human reproduction, are unsustainable when they no longer fall within the borders of nature’s regeneration. So the Bottom Line below the Bottom Line is that if we don’t recognize that the laws of economics and the laws of ecology are finally the same laws, we are in deep doo-doo. Eco/nomics is the only way possible.<sup>31</sup>

With these thoughts in mind, it is evident from contemporary political, religious, and developmental discourse that many place issues of economics and ecology in separate (and competitive) categories, to the point that an emphasis upon one is widely regarded as a betrayal of the other. While past civilizations have long recognized the need to build economic lives in faithful relationship to ecological boundaries, the recent phenomenon of Neoliberal Capitalism has proven to be unfaithful within this important economical/ecological union,<sup>32</sup> and the result is growing levels of gross inequality, increases in poverty, and an Earth that can no longer endure its industrial punishment. However, regardless of the countless negative consequences of Neoliberal Capitalism, its well-funded proponents continue to spread myths of universal benefits, thus leaving a trail of misplaced faith in trickle-down economics and false choices between poverty reduction and ecological

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<sup>26</sup> Steve de Gruchy, “An Olive Agenda: First Thoughts on a Metaphorical Theology of Development”, *The Ecumenical Review*: Volume 59, Issue 2-3 (April-July, 2007), pg. 333-345.

<sup>27</sup> de Gruchy, pg. 336.

<sup>28</sup> de Gruchy, pg. 336.

<sup>29</sup> Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Wendell Berry & Norman Wirzba, *The Art of Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* (Washington, DC: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2002), pg. 219-235.

<sup>31</sup> Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), pg. 112. The use of the term “Bottom Line” is borrowed from Thomas Berry, and “eco/nomics” from William Ashworth.

<sup>32</sup> Diakonia Council of Churches, *Oikos Journey*, (Durban, South Africa), pg. 16. Available at: <http://www.diakonia.org.za/dmdocuments/OikosA5e.pdf>

health. As a result, an Olive Agenda is a much-needed response to the influential proponents of Neoliberal Capitalism, for an Olive Agenda exposes the propaganda of the financially powerful, it moves beyond competition between the brown and green agendas, and as a result produces global companionships that seek to create ecological sustainability while also reducing poverty and inequality throughout the world.

In response to these aforementioned contemporary realities, there are ten ways that an Olive Agenda can function as a missiological trajectory:<sup>33</sup> 1) As a color, Olive integrates both brown (poverty) and green (ecology) agendas, 2) As a texture, the Olive draws us to our earthly context, 3) The Olive points us toward issues of food security, 4) The Olive branch is a symbol of peace, 5) The Olive draws us into a plurality of cultures and religions, 6) As a tree, the Olive points to life itself, 7) The Olive tree symbolizes inter-generational sustainability, 8) The Olive is rooted in popular struggles, 9) Olive oil contributes to health, and 10) The Olive is a Biblical symbol. All together, as a result of these ten points, in addition to previous mentioned insights, one can immediately recognize the massive prospects of developing an Olive Agenda further, especially in relationship to *Mission as Accompaniment*, as the combination of these concepts provides unity, diversity, and a firm walking direction for global missionary companions to participate in God's mission. In other words, while *Mission as Accompaniment* encourages companions to walk together in a solidarity that practices mutuality, an Olive Agenda provides visible signposts and a more clear walking direction.

### **From Anesthetic to Advocate through Accompaniment**

With all the above sections in mind, what this paper has shown is that Neoliberal Capitalism is a valuable tool of 21<sup>st</sup> century Empire, for the international economic system seeks to "consolidate mass concentrations of power that permeate all aspects of life", form "top-down control" on "the backs of empire's subjects" and deny the pursuit of "alternative purposes."<sup>34</sup> In addition, one recognizes that mechanistic dehumanization is a core source of Neoliberal Capitalism and *Mission as Anesthetic*, for the denial of humanity within others leads to a rationalization of apathy and disparity. As a result, because dehumanization increases in relationship to power imbalance, *Mission as Accompaniment* provides a significant response, for it directly counters the indifference and horizontal separation<sup>35</sup> of mechanistic dehumanization through a commitment to walking together in mutuality and solidarity that distributes power on a more balanced scale. However, as highlighted previously, in order to provide a more focused walking direction and address the primary contextual concerns of 21<sup>st</sup> century globalization, an Olive Agenda is needed within *Mission as Accompaniment*, for such a trajectory allows for the green agenda of ecology and brown agenda of poverty to join for a more faithful and fruitful participation in God's mission.

As highlighted in various sections of this paper, the consequences of Neoliberal Global Economics are massive, thus an increased level of urgency for more faithful interactions

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<sup>33</sup> Steve de Gruchy, "An Olive Agenda", pg. 340-343.

<sup>34</sup> Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), pg. 2-3.

<sup>35</sup> Nick Haslam, "Dehumanization: An Integrative View", *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, (2006, Vol. 10, No. 3.), pg. 262.

between creation and humankind. In addition, one recognizes a similar swell of need to move far beyond *Mission as Anesthetic* and other deficient forms of missionary engagement that depletes worldly consciousness. As the Christian tradition “includes safeguards designed to prevent and correct the accumulation of unjust power and the misuse and abuse of creation”,<sup>36</sup> the time has come to challenge the tight grip and idolatrous myths of Empire, and thus support resistance and alternatives that seek global economies of life. As a commitment to participate in God’s mission recognizes and values the interconnectedness of all God has created, the relationship between humanity and the Earth must be evaluated, the responsibility of being God’s stewards of the Earth is to be examined, and the accountability that humankind has to God, the Earth, and one another is to be fully valued and restored. The result of this process, a movement *From Anesthetic to Advocate through Accompaniment* in God’s Mission, will embody an Olive Agenda and more faithfully represent who God is, what God does, and who God’s people are called to be.

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<sup>36</sup> Diakonia Council of Churches, *Oikos Journey*, (Durban, South Africa), pg. 28. Available at: <http://www.diakonia.org.za/dmdocuments/OikosA5e.pdf>