Dialogue: Responding in Faith in Christian-Muslim Interaction

It’s time to talk our way out of crisis

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Introduction

To be able to consider policies and actions that are appropriate to current circumstances in India it is necessary to first consider the overall context, the circumstances and origins of conflict between faith communities, and the international situation as well as current circumstances in India.

This paper will therefore focus on six matters.

1. Key aspects of the world situation and circumstances in India.

2. That three Abrahamic faith communities are partners, each subject to a community-specific divine covenant, but each having a common obligation.

3. That obligation is to enable all peoples to better understand and respond to their relationship with the sole and absolute Divine Creative Authority*, and to acknowledge the responsibilities that are consistent with that relationship and required to enable all humanity to live in peace, harmony and security for whatever may be the divinely determined term of its existence. (*The term “God” will be used in this paper for ease of reference.)

4. The circumstances that resulted in their development as three covenanted communities, separate and identifiable, each subject to a community-specific divine covenant but in conflict with each other and with all other faith communities.

5. That the circumstances of the inversion of the relationship between two great power blocs is consistent with the application of the penal clauses of each of the divine covenants.
6. The nature of dialogue, reassessment and cooperation that is necessary to offset the consequences of the misunderstandings, conflict and division that have inhibited each of the three covenanted partner-faith communities in pursuing their common obligation from the time the triangle was established until now.

What crisis?
Lots of fragments, or one whole?

There are a number of crises around the world and the supposition or myth that is promoted by currently dominant leaders is that each crisis has to be dealt with individually, one by one.

Those leaders represent a complex of national political sovereign states and vested interests that dominate world financial and resource activities, and the mass media, as a bloc. They see it as in their interests, both as individual states and as a group, to maintain that myth in order to maintain their positions of power and privilege. They act on the premise that in order to be able to exploit the resources (and thus the people) of the world, as if it was their right, they must keep it divided and design international and regional structures of governance and trade treaties in such a manner that competing nations or alternative power blocks cannot undermine their position. Their strategy is therefore to target any country that they see as a threat with subversive infiltration, isolation, misrepresentation, adverse propaganda and economic sabotage.

Although they have a heritage of many ethnic origins they are uncomfortably bonded by the ancient mortar of a common dominant but deeply divided religion: Christianity. This was imposed on many of them by force and coercion over a long period in an earlier phase of history so that it seems to most ordinary citizens a normal and logical state of affairs. They have developed a World View that they have a God-given right, the authority and the capacity of leadership to shape the world in their own pattern.

That bloc is the White Western Christian Bloc, (WWCB), which I describe as an “amorphous Christian gel” because its politics, expansionist policies, vigorous evangelism and greed-based economies have been glued together through trauma and political intrigue by the dogmatic teachings of the churches of Europe and North America. Its currently principal power broker, the United States of America, has developed a self-understanding that goes even further.
It sees itself as an exceptional community, endowed with perpetual world leadership and, in the view of many, the people chosen to be “the second Israel.” This view arose in the early days of the European settlement-invasion-expropriation when the Pilgrim Fathers and other religious minorities migrated to avoid oppression in Europe and to found a New World that would be exemplary in ethics, morality and conduct. They fear that if people are encouraged or enabled to see that amorphous Christian gel as either the cause of the crises that currently affect people around the world, or as vulnerable, or both, then they will lose their grip and implode.¹

In fact each of the current crises around the world are interwoven as fragments or threads of one central crisis. It is broadly called “the crisis in the Middle East” but its focal point is “the Israel-Palestine crisis.” Its effects include broken relationships, new alliances, and conflicts right around the globe that at first sight might not appear connected. They include the Iraq wars, the current Syrian “civil war”, the series of conflicts loosely labelled “The Arab Spring,” conflicts between Sunni and Shia Muslims, between Buddhists and Muslims, between Christians and Muslims, and between Hindus and Christians. It is a crisis in humanity’s inability to understand its relationship with God, the Divine Creator, and the conduct that that relationship requires. It is not only a matter of armed conflict between communities or countries. It involves resource exploitation, environmental degradation, social breakdown, and a threat to the future of humanity which is generally considered to be the ultimate piece in God’s creativity.

Now another fact. The WWCB has already lost its grip and is sliding down a slope that is becoming more slippery by the day. A change is taking place in the relationship between it and another bloc that is rarely mentioned as such. That bloc is everyone else: the World Majority Peoples, (WMP). The change is dynamic. It is not reversible. It is very long term. It has been quite predictable,² but leaders of the WWCB – locked in by their long-term self-understanding and their fear of the

¹ In an Op-Ed in the New York Times, September 13, 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin wrote that America should abandon a core concept of its civil religion: the notion of exceptionalism. He said it is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation.

“There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. “

Unpublished
domestic consequences of global decline – have refused to acknowledge it even as the evidence has become apparent all around them. 3

There are two aspects to the evidence.

One is the boldness being shown and the positive action being taken by the WMP and the shift in influence in their favour. To sustain its economic activity the WWCB is now economically dependent on countries it has long exploited and oppressed in Asia, Africa and Latin America – notably China and India. 4 5 6 7 8

The other is what the WWCB countries are doing to prop up their positions of privilege and power, to undermine the defence alliances and preparation of the WMP, to exploit its resources, and to prevent it from taking control of trading systems. 9 Notable among such steps are the information surveillance and interception systems that have been set up to monitor every move that countries of the WMP make or consider making, and bribery in high places to subvert legitimate decisions. Coupled with these things is the inability of the United States to exercise any influence over the State of Israel, which, as we will see, is at the centre of the crisis and exercises enormous influence on US foreign policy and the pursuit of Israel’s security and other interests. 10 These steps have been exposed by a series of

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‘whistle blowers’ including Americans Corporal Manning and Edward Snowden,\textsuperscript{11} and Australia’s Julian Assange of Wikileaks fame.\textsuperscript{12} 13 14 15

However the change can vary both in pace and intensity and its consequences for those that are caught in the turmoil of the process can be traumatic. The more the WWCB acts in an attempt to prevent or reverse the change – and its leaders are determined to do so – the more intense and traumatic the decline will become for the countries of that bloc, and for those who are caught up in it, as a consequence of coordinated resistance, counter measures, and increased sabotage and terrorism. So!

That’s enough of the world scene for a moment. Let’s acknowledge some of the problems in India which form a distraction from the world crisis, and which might be of more immediate concern to us today.

You, staff or officers of The National Council of Churches in India, the Diocese of Nagpur, CNI, IPC, TLLF and Nagpur Pastor’s Fellowship, are first and foremost members of the great family of vibrant ethnic communities that is India. As such you are working and praying for the welfare of that vast family while you also work to enable its people to reach a clearer understanding of their relationship with God through your commitment to the Holy Books of your particular covenanted community. That is an awesome opportunity and an equally awesome responsibility. Furthermore, and I do not say this lightly, it means you will inevitably face significant problems in relationships as the crises worsen. You will be blamed for many of the world’s ills by association with the either the decadent, declining but very belligerent WWCB, or the groups that are retaliating against the policies or actions of the WWCB. The attacks on both Christian and Muslim clergy,

communities, their places of worship and their organizations in many parts of the world as well as here in India are evidence of this.  

Theological disputation and communal conflict is bound to increase and there will be many challenges due to the diverse and contradictory interpretations within each faith community of Biblical and Qur’anic texts and subsequent doctrinal statements relating to divine covenants. If you are Christian you must be prepared to play a leadership role in the process of reinterpretation and dialogue within your own faith stream as well as with people of your partner faiths and colleagues of the non-Abrahamic faiths as authority within the Christian Church continuous to move steadily from the traditional centres of church authority in the WWCB – notably in Europe (Rome and Geneva) and the USA – to the Churches of the WMP in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The same applies if you are Muslim and you experience the long-dormant divisions within Islam deepening circumstantially, being exploited further by powers and vested interests within both the WWCB and the umma, or dār-al-Islām, and triggering debate among your ulama.

I shall return to this matter shortly, but first, a brief view of the circumstances in your home country.

There are real fears that the country could be facing a further round of partition struggles, and these have come to the fore in the past few days with the demonstrations against the Central Government’s decision to partition Andhra Pradesh to establish a state of Telangana. I am told that this decision is basically one of politics around who controls certain seats in Parliament, compounding latent social tensions that are coming to the surface, and certainly economic considerations and consequences for the continuing state that some media refer to.

16 Pew Forum Research. ‘Arab Spring Adds to Global Restrictions on Religion’, June 20, 2013
18 Adama Samassekon and Maurice Aymard, Letter to organizational presidents and secretary-generals of CIPSH organizations, concerning the impact of The USA’s withholding of funds from UNESCO is having on humanitarian and social science programs. The International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences, 27 April 2012.
somewhat disparagingly as “the coastal strip.” However, unfortunately, according to reports in 'The Hindu', 5 October 2013, certain “left wing” political groups are sponsoring improved conditions for the Muslim community in order to gain their political support. This is inflaming tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities.

Very close to home you are well aware of the outcry among some Adivasi communities, notably the Hindu Sarna tribals, against continuing enculturation for proselytism by the unveiling of a statue representing Mary, the mother of Jesus, dark complexioned and clothed in traditional Adivasi attire. When talks broke down, Catholic leaders were reported as waiting for the outcry to subside.21 Such policies may compound the problem as tensions simmer underground, to rise in more violent form at the slightest provocation.

There are concerns that both Christian and Muslim Dalits are being coerced into reconverting to Hinduism either to escape victimization or to gain the benefits of Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe status. On September 19, Prof. Faizan Mustafa, vice chancellor of National Law University in Hyderabad, told a World Council of Churches consultation that despite constitutional guarantees of religious freedom in India, seven states have passed discriminatory laws owing to which Christians and Hindus face discrimination. 22 These concerns are reinforced in a private communication by Franklin Caesar concerning measures being considered by the Union of India, and statements by constituent bodies of the Sangh Partivar, including the Educators’ Society for the Heritage of India (ESHI) and the Hindu Students Council (HSC) on January 8, 2013. 23

Subsequently, in two private forum communications, Revd. Dr. Solomon Rongpi who kindly organized this function and is with us today, said he strongly supported the proposition that Dalit Christians have every right to appeal to any head of the church


world-wide for their support and intervention. “The movement for Dalit freedom must go on and one day we will dismantle caste-ism from the face of the earth just as the apartheid in South Africa is removed,” he said, and he was “really disappointed that Dalit Christians reconverst themselves to Hinduism at the same time have to fight for getting the SC status to existing Dalit Christians and that some were forced to follow Hinduism to avai the SC status.” He said that In this way, according to the record, five Million Dalit Christians had been reconversted to Hinduism to avai the SC, (and) it is sad and a disgrace for Christian community.”

In a series of statements, Dr. John Dayal, Secretary General of the All India Christian Council, has also emphasized the urgent need for action by both the churches and the Government. and I recently received from him a lengthy statement by Abdul Khaliq, former secretary-general of Lok Janshakti Party, who set out a case that the Scheduled Caste system is ‘State-Sponsored Apartheid.’ Khaliq said that:

> Although the Constitution has sanctified the freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion, the Constitutional order 1950, as amended from time to time, has penalised Dalit converts to Islam and Christianity for their religious beliefs. The true intent of the directive becomes self-evident when read in conjunction with the Circular issued by the Home Ministry in May, 1975 which states that “where a scheduled Caste person gets converted to a religion other than Hinduism or Sikhism and then reconvertst himself back to Hinduism or Sikhism, he will be declared to have reconversted to his original scheduled caste.” The hegemony of the dominant religion is sought to be protected by penalising SCs who convert to Christianity or Islam but restoring their privileges if they return to the fold. In effect, the State has legitimised discrimination against Dalits who convert to Christianity or Islam.

Khaliq went on to say that “the philosophy underlying the Constitutional Order of 1950 and its amendments bears an uncanny resemblance to the thinking of our right-wing fundamentalists … and … the intellectual elite and the media have steered clear of this issue because acknowledging injustice would morally bind them to do something about it. Their reluctance to engage with this subject possibly stems from the belief that this unprepossessing group - Dalit and minority - does not count for much in the larger canvas of minority politics or in the mart of economic strife and gain. They also clearly wish to avoid confronting the communalists for a marginal

24 John Dayal. UCAN India, 6 August 2013, and at National Integration Council, 23 September 2013.
group of Dalits.”

Crises such as that faced by Christians in Mindanao (Philippines), and the fate of the Muslim minority in Myanmar, with direct attacks, enforced refugee status and exclusion from national citizenship must also have an indirect impact on your communities in India. The lack of Western intervention in this particular and very genuine human rights crisis is a consequence of two factors. One is the fear that the extractive industries of countries that intervene will be excluded from resource negotiations. The other is the U.S. determination to out-maneouvre China.

So: this is where we must focus on the question of religious development in relation to your circumstances, what may be required of you as leaders in dialogue programs, and the fact that humanity’s crisis of conduct must be seen at two levels: both individual and communal. We must not look at the crisis from a short-term perspective. If we do we will be tempted to say that the crisis in the Middle East was triggered by the rise of Zionism in the late nineteenth century, or by Hitler and the Holocaust, or by the subsequent establishment of the State of Israel. Nor must we think that community patterns, conduct and culture as we know them are the norm, or that our particular values and beliefs are superior to those of people around us, or final and absolute. To begin to understand the crisis we must delve into history and we will find a pattern with many threads in the evolution of human understanding of the Divine.

Dr. Tveit, WCC Secretary General, told a joint forum of the WCC and the Global Christian Forum (GCF) of the need for “welcoming one another, appreciating one another and calling one another in Christian unity” despite differences in traditions and practices. The “unity of the Church, the unity of the human community and the unity of the whole creation belong together.” Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, member of the GCF committee and general secretary emeritus of the Reformed Church in America, then focussed in his presentation on the new developments in World Christianity: “We are living in the most significant times of change in Christian history, depicting a shift in the presence of the world’s Christians.” This shift is not only visible to the South, but also to the East. “We are observing a spiritual resurgence

25 Abdul Khaliq, ‘State-Sponsored Apartheid,’ forwarded by <catholicunion@gmail.com>, 26 September 2013
of non-Western Christianity throughout the world,” he said.  

It is unfortunate that, as Dr. George Oommen explains, the caste system found its way into the church in India. Dalit Christians within the church were discriminated against and were denied powers within the ecclesiastical structure. They were marginalized and ignored until recently. In 1991, separate places were marked out for them in the parish churches and burial grounds. Inter-caste marriages are frowned upon and caste tags are still appended to the Christian names of high caste people. Casteism is rampant among the clergy and the religious. Though Dalit Christians make 65 per cent of the 10 million Christians in the South, less than 4 per cent of the parishes are entrusted to Dalit priests. There are no Dalits among 13 Catholic Bishops of Tamilnadu nor among the Vicars-general and rectors of seminaries and directors of social assistance centres.

According to Dr. Oommen, the situation in the Protestant Church is no different except that some Dalits have been elevated to Bishopric and other positions of power recently. Many Dalit Christian leaders refer to the thrice-alienated situation of the Dalit Christians in India, namely, discrimination within the Church, discrimination by Hindu culture and discrimination by the State as they are denied Scheduled Caste status in the Constitution, and the related privileges which come with that status.

He states that the destruction of the Jajmani system, communal ownership of landed property, by the British and the introduction of legal land relationship changed the situation of Dalits for the worse. Jajmani had used traditional caste relationships for division of labour and had provided some material security for them, although it was an exploitative and unjust system, and the entry of colonialism enabled Dalits to search for new means of protest and liberation. Some Dalits integrated themselves into the colonial system by joining the army or by serving as indentured labourers in British colonies. Others chose Sanskritization as a means of upward mobility. However, mass conversions to non-Hindu religions were the most prominent means of Dalit protest which began during the second half of the 19th Century. Many historians, such as John Webster, say that the modern Dalit movement was begun in

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and through the Christian conversion movements.  

Several opinions are expressed regarding the reasons for Dalit conversion to Christianity. They range from the spiritual to socio-economic. But there is a general consensus among scholars that, "the underlying motivation was the search for improved social status, for a greater sense of personal dignity and self respect, for freedom from bondage to oppressive land owners."  

However I seem to be avoiding the question of where and when religious community relations became an issue. It began with the nature of Divine Authority and the intimately related matter of divine covenant, and that is the issue that is still at the heart of our crisis. The progressive revelation of the nature of Divine Authority, the relationship between humanity and God, and the nature of divine covenant can be demonstrated through a series of defined stages, and that was the purpose of the A3 chart that you each have.

Here is how it works. The horizontal axis is a time line to be read from left to right. It begins at 4,000 years BCE and ends with projections to about 2,500 CE. The data in the body of the chart places major developments and events in relation to that time line. There is no data basis for a vertical axis. It simply provides space to fit the main streams of the Abrahamic faiths in understandable time relationships. The foundational points of other world faiths and philosophies are placed to relate them to the progressive developments in the Abrahamic group and to clearly identify five epochs in the revelation of the nature and consequences of divine covenants. The vertical coloured lines mark the era of a change from one epoch to the next that I have identified as Exemplary Revelation, Shared Responsibility, An Extended Network, Brutal Demonstration, and Application.

I have added some data to take account of India’s particular circumstances in preparation for discussions during my current visit which started with last week’s Holy Books conference in Kerala concerning life after life. A second layer of epochs, in pale pink, shows Professor Flood’s interpretation of five epochs in the evolution of Vedic Hinduism. It helps to note those developments and to recognize some of the influences in the hardening of attitudes among the formally very tolerant Eastern

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religions, especially the European colonial Era and twentieth century conflicts and globalization.

The first Hominids walked the earth about 2.3 million years ago, then, after a series of evolutionary stages, our current Homo species appeared about 200,000 years ago. The Hominids’ progress was probably inhibited by the series of glacial periods, the last of which began about 110,000 years ago, but it is believed that our Homo ancestors began migrating out of Africa between 50,000 and 100,000 years ago. It is estimated that at the end of that glacial period, about 10,000 years ago, the human population was about four million persons.

The cosmic time scale, the evolutionary processes on earth, and the human population pattern with projections to a peak in about two generations from now, followed by leveling to a plateau that is expected to take about ten generations, are illustrated in the first, second and fourth of the charts following on consecutive pages. Chart three, illustrating the pattern of growth of major world religions, is critical to our understanding of the current complex of crises.
Chart 1

Humanity in Universal Existence

The Big Bang
Formation of Humanity
The Sun & Earth

-13 billion yrs

- 4.6 billion yrs

Today/

No human population
6.9 billion

Best est. of peak c. 2075
9.22 billion

Subsequent Plateau after a trough, probably 9 billion, (see suggested range of 8-11 billion)

Anticipated end of Humanity
of Solar System
5 + 2.6 billion yrs

A peak is generally anticipated between 2075 and the early years of the 22nd century (assuming no extraordinary wars, plagues or natural occurrences), followed by a slow decline to about 8.3 billion c. 2175, followed by a rise to a plateau of, or just below, 9 billion to be reached by about 2300. [Main sources: (1) UNFPA, State of World Population 2004, revisions published 2004, www.unfpa.org/swp/2004/english/ch1/page7.htm#1 (8.9 billion plateau), and 2008. The range for the plateau of 8 billion to 11 billion shown in this chart takes account of a series of factors). (2) US Census Bureau projection updates have been April - 2005 projection 9.224 billion by 2050; August 2006, 9.404 billion by 2050; December 2008, 9 billion will be reached in 2040. (USCB International Data Base: http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/worldpop.html)
## Chart 2

### Hominid Evolution

The backdrop to the evolution of systematic religion and the concept of divine covenant.

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**Population estimates**
1. Rising from an est. 4 million about 10,000 BCE to an est. 170 million at the dawn of the Common Era.
2. Still less than 500 million as European Colonization began.

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### Time Line of the Hominid Species - Millions of Years Ago (mya)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>7.0</th>
<th>6.0</th>
<th>5.0</th>
<th>4.0</th>
<th>3.0</th>
<th>2.0</th>
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<td>Ard. ramidus</td>
<td>K. platyops</td>
<td>Aus. garhi</td>
<td>Aus. apanensis</td>
<td>P. boisei</td>
<td>Homo erectus</td>
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<tr>
<td>P. boisei</td>
<td>H. rudolfensis</td>
<td>H. antecessor</td>
<td>P. robustus</td>
<td>H. ergaster</td>
<td>H. habilis</td>
<td>P. aethiopicus</td>
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<tr>
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<td>H. floresiensis</td>
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Drawings included in module website, from "Human Origins The Fossil Record", Larsen, Matter, and Gebo, 2nd ed 1991 Waveland Press

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**Composite Chart compiled by Ian Fry, MCD, December 2010**
The Population Explosion: Development & Interaction, the Abrahamic Faiths

Overview:
- World Population in Millions
- Horizontal Axis: Hundreds of Years from 2000 BCE to 2300 CE
- Data to 1900 CE, McEvedy 1978; Projections, UNDESA ST/ESA/SER.A/236 2004

Key Events:
- Population when Israel established, 2.5 b
- Population c. 1450, 390 m
- Overlapping Reformations in Christianity, Islam, Judaism
- European Colonialism Population c. 1450, 390 m
- Muslim capture of Constantinople
- Population when Israel established, 2.5 b
- Population 2010, 6.9 b
- Anticipated peak 9.22 billion c. 2075; plateau 8.97b c. 2300

What's Next?
- Revolutions recast an Arab Spring
- Global Financial Crisis
- 'War on Terror'
- Retaliation attacks 9/11
- 2nd Gulf War
- Yom Kippur War
- Establishment of the State of Israel
- Anti-Semitism & Hitler
- WWI / Balfour Declaration
- Colonialism, Dreyfus, Herzl, WZO

Major Events:
- Zoroaster, Confucius, Gautama the Buddha, and development of Asian and Greek Philosophies in parallel with Hebrew prophecy and messianic expectation
- By tradition Yahwism
- Moses, Law Covenant
- Jesus of Nazareth, Population 170 m
- Muhammad, Islam, Population 200 m
- Pentecost, Development of Christology
- Nicaea
- Maimonides
- Crusades
- Pentaecost.

Ian Fry MCD May 2011
At the time of Abraham the human population is thought to have reached about 27 million, and there were a number of streams of religious activity. Of those streams only one has remained and become the basis of a major world system of faith: Hinduism, based on oral Vedic traditions. One other, the belief system of the Indigenous people of Australia, is also extant, but in the circumstances of geographic isolation and subsequent colonial oppression it has no presence beyond its shores. Gavin Flood identifies a series of five millennial stages in the history of Vedic evolution. Therefore, because Hinduism, based on the Vedic traditions, is the oldest extant faith system, those stages provide a framework to consider concurrent developments in religious beliefs, doctrine and the consequent conduct of people living under the influence of all major religions, and to place them in direct relationship to the Abrahamic faiths and the revelation of divine covenants. This enables us to avoid an undue emphasis on developments in the Western world.

There have been five communities of faith that have been subject to divine covenants. One, the Abrahamic, is no longer extant; one is the Universal or Noahide Covenant, and three are the perpetual, cyclical Hebrew or Mosaic, Christian or New, and Qur’anic covenants. Each has three key components: a divine undertaking or promise to the community concerned, an obligation to which the community must respond, and a penal clause that may be activated upon neglect or deliberate contravention of the obligation. They also have two key aspects which work in parallel, personal and communal; and three conditions that were understood progressively by the Hebrew prophets but have since been overlooked or deliberately ignored in successive bids to consolidate institutional and clerical power and authority.

The conditions are that divine covenants are imposed and non-negotiable, perpetual and irrevocable, and cyclical in nature. This means that on the basis of its acceptance or rejection of its obligations a community might enjoy the fruits of obedience for time, then, because of misconduct, might suffer retribution under the penalty clause, but be restored to favour if it recognizes its errors, repents and takes steps to offset the effects of its wrongdoing. If, as history shows, a covenanted community again falls into serious error, it might again be subject to penalty as the cycle continues, but the imposition of the penal clause may not be apparent or understood until long after the events which triggered them.


The Abrahamic Covenant was imposed on a tribal basis on Abraham’s family in order to set it up as a community of exemplary conduct that would enable all humanity to understand and respond to its relationship with God. In Western thought, Abraham’s experience is usually considered to be the starting point of systematic religion, but the command to Abraham was not made in a religious vacuum.

There had been many attempts by political leaders in West Asia to set up lasting codes of conduct, either in parallel with, or in spite of Sharman or priests, and out of sight to the east the early Vedic traditions were being adopted as the basis for the Indus Civilization. Also out of sight in the Great South Land the First Peoples of Australia had already developed an understanding of a covenantal relationship with God. The difference was that the Abrahamic Covenant carried a promise of a perpetual secure homeland, subject to certain ritual requirements and patterns of conduct being adhered to. The penal clause was soon imposed when Abraham’s successors failed to honour their obligations. It was famine-induced enslavement in Egypt. Unknown to them, but coinciding with their enslavement, the Hindu Rg Veda was being composed.

In due course a divine reprieve was experienced for the first time when Moses was called and the Hebrews were led out to establish their homeland in Canaan. Again, they lost their way and suffered a second exile, to Babylon and there, under the influence of a host of new experiences and contacts, they developed an understanding of the Universal Noahide Covenant and the fact that Yahweh was not exclusively their God, and was God for all.

They experienced a second reprieve with a return to Jerusalem and the Second Temple period. But the pace of development in systems of ethics and religious understanding was quickening. Coincidental with the Hebrew traumas and the Babylonian Exile, Greek philosophers were hard at work, and the ministries of Confucius, The Buddha, Zoroaster and the Jains were taking shape.

At that point the prophetic Hebrew understanding of divine covenant was quite clearly and comprehensively defined. However as a consequence of human failings it was to remain little more than theological hypothesis pending Israel’s involvement in interaction between communities that interpreted religious matters, and in particular covenantal relationships, differently. In fact the communities with which that interaction would soon take place did not yet exist. Their leaders had yet to receive their divine circumstantially-invoked commissions. The Hebrew prophets
had not left a neat concise statement of covenantal understanding but it was readily available, scattered through the Tanakh. It just had to be pieced together. If they had done so, it could have looked like this.

**The Mature Hebrew Understanding of Divine Covenant**

- A covenant is invoked or initiated by God, the first party.
- A covenant is non-exclusive and the invocation or initiation of a covenant is entirely a matter for God.
- It is a means by which God reveals the Divine will, intentions for humanity and all of creation, and a means of enabling humanity to gain a meaningful understanding of its relationship with God.
- Interaction between parties which are subject to identifiable community-specific covenants may be a means of exemplifying either an aspect of covenant or as aspect of divine intention.
- A covenant involves a relationship which is imposed on the second party. It is not an agreement.
- It is non-negotiable and inescapable.
- It is perpetual in application and operation, and thus will never be revoked or annulled.
- It is cyclical, not static.
- The relationship between the parties and the phase of the cycle that is dominant at any time are dependent entirely on the response and the conduct of the second party.
- The conduct of a second party to a covenant is subject to guidance, and misconduct may be proscribed, but the party’s conduct is entirely determined by unrestricted free will, and it cannot avoid any adverse circumstances that result.
- The principal component aspects of a covenant are four, viz:-
  - A divine call or command by which the covenant is identifiable
  - A divine undertaking or promise that is conditional upon adherence to linked obligations.
  - Obligations associated with a role or roles that may be identified together with the call or command, or may be latent and recognizable circumstantially.
  - A penal clause under which rejection of a covenantal obligation or failure to adhere to it may involve divine judgment and the application of a penalty.
- A penalty is not necessarily invoked immediately upon the relevant inaction or misconduct of the second party. By the nature of Divine Will it may be applied
and become apparent progressively, after a substantial circumstantial delay, or it might not become apparent until subsequent generations.

- It is very likely to involve a retaliatory reaction by a third party which has been adversely affected by the relevant inaction or misconduct.
- It might involve temporary negation or withholding of a Divine undertaking which has been recognized as basic to the covenant, and which will be reinstated, subject to the second party returning to God’s favour through repentance and recompense for the third party.
- It might also involve a new role or a variation in emphasis within the existing role, not anticipated or announced in a previously understood manner, and invoked by God in relation to a Divine undertaking that is already understood and recognized as an aspect of a different community-specific or universally applicable covenantal relationship.
- In that case the cyclical pattern of repentance, recompense, adherence to the obligations of the new role and a return to God’s favour will be entirely consistent with all aspects of the covenant to which the covenanted party has been subject since its initiation.

In the specific case of Israel’s current circumstances, that sequence may be vital in enabling humanity-at-large to recognize the validity of divine covenants, its relationship with God, and the reality of the statement relating to Abraham and attributed to HaShem that “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.” (Gen. 18:17-18 JVL)

As we now know, the Hebrew memories failed. The reprieve could not last. The absolute abuse of covenant under the Hasmonean kingdom led to a divine call to another person, Jesus of Nazareth, and a second covenanted community came into existence. However Jesus didn’t leave a concise comprehensive statement of covenant any more than the Hebrew prophets had.

**So what defines “The New Covenant”?**

N. T. Wright considered this question at some length, but preceded that discussion by proposing that when Jesus spoke of the forgiving of sins he was “offering the return from exile, the renewed covenant, the eschatological *forgiveness of sins* – in other words, the kingdom of god.” 32 Concerning the challenge to live as a New

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Covenant People, he wrote that Gerhard Lohfink was ‘near the mark’ in saying that Jesus did not intend to found a church because there already was one, the people of Israel itself, and his intention was to reform Israel, not to found a different community altogether.  

Wright then suggests that Jesus intended to establish cells of followers, mostly continuing to live in their towns and villages, who by giving their allegiance to him and adopting his praxis, his way of being Israel, would be distinctive within their local communities, and that he succeeded in doing so. He wrote that Jesus’ “construal of the symbolic world of Judaism involved, as with the Essenes, a sharp critique of the Temple and the clear understanding that his movement was *in some sense a replacement* for it.” He said Jesus challenged his followers to a distinctive lifestyle, living “as the people of the new covenant, those who were truly returned from exile, those for whom and in whom the prophesies were coming true at last.” He then suggested that for a Jew the context of behaviour was the covenant, but for Jesus, the context was the *renewal* of the covenant.  

Referring to the kingdom story, Wright says that:  

> From Jesus’ point of view, the narrative of YHWH’s dealings with Israel was designed to contribute to the larger story, of the creator’s dealings with the cosmos, (and) this shows ... that Jesus’ promise, implicit and explicit, to the nations beyond Israel’s borders came as part of an affirmation, not a denial, of the unique elected role of Israel within the purposes of YHWH.  

It is significant that Wright used the term ‘renewal’ when referring to the covenant. He used the term ‘replacement’ only in referring to a possible role for Jesus’ community in relation to the Temple, and none of the Gospel writers suggest that Jesus used it in referring to the covenant. 

If it were a replacement, then all aspects of the one which was being superseded would have been annulled immediately. They include the divine undertaking and any prospect of it ever becoming identifiable; the obligation, and any need to 

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33 Ibid. p.275.  
34 p.276-7.Ibid.  
36 Ibid. p.310; ibid.
attempt to fulfil it; the prospect of judgement and a consequential penalty; and any prospect of redemption. The people-Israel would have become free agents with absolutely no role in the Divine Plan and no need to reflect on their relationships with other people. It would have been for them as if two thousand years of religious evolution had not taken place.

Jesus was saying two things. First, that his life had been, and his sacrifice would be, on behalf of the people-Israel who were, and are, bound under the continuing corporate or communal Mosaic Covenant. Second, that his life and sacrifice also instituted a New personal Covenant that stood, and stands, together with, and in parallel with, the Mosaic Covenant.

Jesus commanded his disciples to accept a New Covenant with the obligation which Israel, at that point, had failed in miserably. The fundamentals of the New Covenant were the same as those of the Mosaic Covenant, with four changes.

- **First:** the people of the New Covenant were not to inherit the territory of Canaan in the sense of it being a base from which to demonstrate humanity's relationship with God through exemplary relationships with neighbouring nations. Being the principal city of the region in which the covenantal relationships between God and humanity were revealed, the City of Jerusalem would become the geographic focal point for people of faith. This is not to discount the role of Zoroaster and the revelation that he received. The distinction is that one was revelation of relationships between God and humanity, and the other was revelation of the fact that God is God alone.

- **Second:** as would be made very clear at Pentecost, the world was to be their area of positive activity and the obligation to fulfil that role was couched in positive terms. This contrasted with the terminology of the Mosaic Covenant which required essentially passive responses from the Jews who were, in effect, anchored to their base in Canaan.

- **Third:** the people of the New Covenant were not subject to the rigid religious practices and the means of identification as a community that were still required of the People Israel.

- **Fourth:** the New Covenant was not restricted to people of one ethnic identity. It went beyond both the Mosaic Covenant with its restriction to descendants of Jacob/Israel, and the Abrahamic Covenant which was restricted to the wider community of descendants of Abraham. It was open to people without restriction: essentially the people of the Noahide Covenant which encompasses
people of both prior specific covenants as sub-communities within the total human family.

However the New Covenant and the Noahide Covenant are not intrinsically the same. The Noahide Covenant is, by Freedman’s definition unconditional: instituted by God with a divine commitment and universal obligations which no one is free to opt in or out of. The New Covenant is conditional: an open invitation requires recognition of the person extending the invitation, acceptance of a personal commitment, and acknowledgement that divine authority (judgement) is paramount. It means recognition of a personal covenant with God in a manner that shines a spotlight directly on humanity’s relationship with God.

It was not a completely new light. Ezekiel had lit a torch, but it had been allowed to go out. Nicholas Gier shows that while a shift in emphasis actually began within Judaism with the prophet Ezekiel’s writing during the Babylonian Exile, his inspiration might have been triggered by Zoroaster’s teaching on ethical individualism. However the level of decadence in Jewish religious leadership and communal conduct was such that in spite of the efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah, the mid-Second Temple recovery was short-lived and little notice was taken of the shift in emphasis until it became a focus of the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus.

Jesus’ disciples were certainly well instructed in the new emphasis but, at the time of their last supper with him, they were still uncertain of their future role. They had to wait for clarification until just prior to Jesus’ ascension for his final message.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. (Mt. 28:19-20)


40 Ibid. p. 4. Gier (Gier 1994 p. 4) says: In Zoroastrianism the supreme God, Ahura Mazda, gives all humans free-will so that they may choose between good and evil. Zoroaster may have been the first to discover ethical individualism. The first Hebrew prophet to speak unequivocally in terms of individual moral responsibility was Ezekiel, a prophet of the Babylonian exile. Up until that time Hebrew ethics had been guided by the idea of the corporate personality – that, e.g., the sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons (Ex. 20:1-2).
From that moment the world had two communities specifically covenanted to be exemplars of God’s will, each committed to enabling all people to understand their relationship with God, and the reality of God’s absolute authority and love for humanity within the totality of creation. The leaders of the older one were determined to adhere to the plan they had devised to gain freedom from their overlords as a precursor for their communal salvation that they had come to see as the focal point of their covenant. The leaders of the younger one had received a command under a covenant in highly traumatic circumstances, and after Pentecost they floundered, with no idea how to put the command into effect.

Unfortunately the understanding of the early church leaders was inadequate. They could not recognize that they were to form a partnership with their religious forebears and they were so eager to establish their authority as the successors to the Jews and Judaism, and their abuse of covenant was mind-boggling. There was then another divine call, to the Prophet Muhammad. Dār-al-Islām was very quickly established as the third covenanted community in a triangle that would demonstrate, through interaction, the reality of cyclical perpetual covenants.

It is clear from the Qur’an that Muhammad’s task was to initiate reform: to warn the covenanted religious authorities of that time that they had failed to honour their obligations under covenant; to remind them of those obligations, and of the fact that they were especially subject to judgement and punishment for disobedience because they had already received “The Book”. It is also clear that he understood and accepted his limitations.

Do they not reflect? Their companion is not seized with madness: he is but a perspicuous warner. (Qur’an Sura 7:184)

They ask thee about the (final) Hour - when will be its appointed time? Say: "The knowledge thereof is with my Lord (alone): None but He can reveal as to when it will occur. ... If I had knowledge of the unseen, I should have multiplied all good, and no evil should have touched me: I am but a warner, and a bringer of glad tidings to those who have faith." (Qur’an Sura 7:187-188)

He had to clarify and spell out very directly the essential components of covenant and the essential requirements of the Law and the Gospel which had completed the Law. His task was essentially to call the church and the Jewish community to rethink their circumstances, their failures and the obligations they had, as yet, to fulfil.
Muhammad's task was not to write a history of the evolution of faith or to revise the teachings that had already been delivered. His starting point was the melting pot of imperial political and religious intrigue and corruption in which Rome, Byzantium, Persia and the Avars were battling for control of the Eastern Mediterranean, Western Europe and North Africa into which he had been born. It was a critical point in human affairs and the evolution of religious understanding. Just how critical that point was could not have been apparent to Muhammad or his colleagues, but it has become apparent with the passage of time.

The thrust of Qur’anic teaching is firmly about the relationship between God and the people of the Book, that Muslims must honour a sense of Amanah and Kalifa, or trusteeship, being responsible for the care of the community and every aspect of the created world. A critical passage of the Qur’an to place its overall teaching in perspective is the Night Journey.

The Qur’an recognizes that the scriptures of all three Abrahamic faiths validly comprise ‘The Book,’ but maintains that access to Paradise and salvation is not limited to their adherents. It is for all who live according to God’s will, even if they are of a community outside the ‘People of the Book’ and an apostle has not yet reached them to give warning. The following passage shows remarkable coincidence with the teaching of the much-maligned Pelagius.

Every man’s fate We have fastened on his own neck: On the Day of Judgment We shall bring out for him a scroll, which he will see spread open. (It will be said to him:) "Read thine (own) record: Sufficient is thy soul this day to make out an account against thee." Who receiveth guidance, receiveth it for his own benefit: who goeth astray doth so to his own loss: No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another: nor would We visit with Our Wrath until We had sent an apostle (to give warning). (Qur’an Sura 17:13-15)

If any do deeds of righteousness - be they male or female - and have faith, they will enter Heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them. Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to Allah, does good, and follows the way of Abraham the true in
Faith? For Allah did take Abraham for a friend. (Qur’an Sura 4:124-125)\textsuperscript{41}

According to the Qur’an, Sinai did not abrogate either the Abrahamic Covenant which continues to bind all descendants through Ishmael to Muhammad as the ‘Seal of the Prophets’, or the universal covenant that relates to all living creatures, not only humanity. It is of special significance that the Jews are declared to be still part of the Divine plan, subject to covenant. This totally contradicts the notion of Supersession, and therein is an important aspect of the prophecy of the Night Journey.

Yes. You know what is coming. Islam’s leaders were no better than those of the church and it suffered a devastating split, the consequences of which are now more apparent than ever.

While human population expansion and interaction picked up speed there were a series of concurrent developments. Too many to detail now. It is sufficient to note that they included the composition of the manusmrti which would prove to be devastating in its impact in later ages, the development of the Vaisnava World View which, frankly, was more realistic than the world time view that the church was enforcing to very painful effect. There was enculturation and proselytizing at a confusing rate, developments in Judaism and the brilliance of Maimonides’ interpretations, and then all three Abrahamic faiths went through the trauma of reformations that clarified little and added more conflicts that would be compounded over following centuries.

All of these developments occurred under increasing population pressure with the dynamics of relationships changing with conflict becoming a matter of course, and a desperate need for teachings and guidelines that would enable humanity to live in harmony and to understand both its personal and communal obligations to God as humanity unknowingly faced the cliff face of exponential population growth towards the plateau of about nine billion that will be reached in about two generations from now. This is illustrated in Chart Four.

So we come to the crux of our discussion.

\textsuperscript{41} For additional references to the teaching that judgement and salvation are dependent upon one’s conduct and not upon whether one has been exposed to one of the three religions of The Book, see: the Qur’an Sura 5:119-120; 21:35,47; 36:51,53-57.
The current situation:

The communal penal code is now being put into effect against the WWCB through the inversion of relationships between the WWCB and the WMP in such a manner that humanity is enabled to – and might – recognize, both the reality of divine covenant and its relationship with God. Furthermore, in doing so, humanity might also recognize the following matters.

- The establishment of the State of Israel has become the central fact of the Common Era and the People Israel are unwittingly involved in the process of inversion as a catalyst-under-covenant.
- The penalty for the WWCB’s breach of covenant is being implemented through the retaliatory response of Muslim communities to long-running exploitation in their interaction with both Israel and the WWCB in Islam’s role as an agent of reform and renewal under covenant.
- Humanity might, if it responds to those matters, enjoy stability, justice and harmony as a result of the continuing cyclical application of each of the community-specific covenants together with the Universal Noahide Covenant.

Covenant in brief

- The invocation or initiation of a divine covenant is entirely a matter for God, the first party. It is not activated by request or negotiated; it is non-negotiable, critical conditional, perpetual, cyclical and inescapable. It will not be abrogated or annulled, and is neither superior or inferior to another which preceded it or which was initiated subsequently.
- Covenant is a means by which God reveals the Divine will and intentions for humanity and all of creation, and a means of enabling humanity to gain a meaningful understanding of its relationship with God.
- Interaction between parties that are subject to identifiable community-specific covenants may be a means of exemplifying either an aspect of covenant or as aspect of divine intention.
- A divine covenant involves a relationship that is imposed on the second party. It is not an agreement in any sense.
- It is not static, and the status of the relationship between the parties and the phase of the covenant cycle that is dominant at any time are dependent entirely on the conduct of the second party.
- The conduct of a second party to a covenant is subject to guidance, and misconduct may be proscribed, but the party’s conduct is entirely determined by
unrestricted free will, and it cannot avoid any adverse circumstances which result.

- The principal attributes or aspects of a communal covenant are four, viz:-
  - It has been initiated by a divine call or command to a person who, in responding to the call, has become the founding leader of an identifiable community that is subject to a community-specific covenant thereafter.
  - It involves a divine undertaking or promise that is conditional upon adherence to linked obligations.
  - It involves an obligation or obligations associated with a role or roles that may be identified together with the call or command, or may be latent and recognizable circumstantially.
  - It involves a penal clause under which rejection of a covenantal obligation or failure to adhere to it may involve divine judgment and the application of a penalty.

- A penalty is not necessarily invoked immediately upon the relevant inaction or misconduct of the second party. By the nature of Divine Will it may be applied and become apparent progressively, or after a substantial circumstantial delay, or it might not become apparent until subsequent generations.

- It is very likely to involve a retaliatory reaction by a third party that has been adversely affected by the relevant inaction or misconduct.

- It might involve the temporary negation or withholding of a Divine undertaking which has been recognized as basic to the covenant, and which will be reinstated, subject to the second party returning to God's favour through repentance and recompense for the third party.

- It might also involve a new role or a variation in emphasis within the existing role, not anticipated or announced in a previously understood manner, and invoked by God in relation to a Divine undertaking that is already understood and recognized as an aspect of a different community-specific or universally applicable covenantal relationship.

- In that case the cyclical pattern of repentance, recompense, adherence to the obligations of the new role and a return to God's favour will be entirely consistent with all aspects of the covenant to which the second party has been subject since its invocation.

- The common primary role and obligation of each Abrahamic faith is to exemplify and teach the fundamental universal covenantal relationship between humanity and God.

- The penalty/retribution may involve the withholding of the divine undertaking.
The divine undertaking may be reinstated subsequently and circumstantially on the basis of cyclical continuity in perpetuity.

The Mosaic, Christian and Qur’anic Covenants were invoked circumstantially; they do not stand alone; they are linked in partnership; none have been abrogated, and the restoration of an undertaking under one covenant does not annul any other.

The exemplary demonstration of that partnership was the convergence of prophecy from the Qur’an, Maimonides, and the Book of Mormon in the Shoah and the establishment of the State of Israel. Thus the establishment of the State of Israel is the central fact of the Common Era.

The key understanding that the components of the Mature Hebrew Understanding of Divine Covenant (MHUDC) also applied to the Christian community as well as to the Jews was undermined or lost when the church adopted Supersessionism, rejected the key aspects of communal obligation and judgement, and developed a Christology-based self-understanding which became the basis of its unhealthy interdependent relationship with the dominant imperial power.

The application of the penal clause for non-compliance with covenantal obligations is now apparent in the inversion of the relationship between the WWCB and the WMP in which the People Israel are an unwitting catalyst in a process involving interaction between each of the covenanted faiths.

The fact of that inversion, that the State of Israel came into existence due to competitive interaction between the three faiths, and their continued separate existence, will provide perpetual evidence of the manner of God’s participation in the affairs of the world and, humanity in particular.

Although no one covenant takes precedence over another in contemporary application, Israel remains the focus of the Abrahamic traditions.

The Context for Enhanced Dialogue

The world is in a state of crisis, but that is nothing new. For the whole of the 20th century the Great Powers blundered from one crisis to another. At the end of WW II, when peace was supposed to prevail, the confrontation between the socio-economic

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42 The Qur’an S. 17 A. 2-10, 13-17.
44 “The Book of Mormon,” (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1974). 3 Nephi 15:21-22; 3 Nephi 16, from 5-20; 3 Nephi 16, from 5-20.
and political philosophies of Western Capitalist countries and Soviet-led Socialist-Communist countries of Eastern Europe and Asia, threatened far greater disaster than humanity experienced during WW II.

Points to Ponder

1. Neither Jews or Muslims carry the primary responsibility for the crisis in the Middle East.

2. Jewish leadership will not give up its determination to maintain the US military umbrella until and unless they have a rock-solid commitment that the church is ending its supersessionist teachings.

3. The term of humanities existence could be several billion years. (Chart One)

4. The evolution of a successor tribe to Homo sapiens sapiens – in the event that it self-destructed – could be as little as 120,000 years or as long as two million years. (Chart Two)

5. While the dialogue process can be said to date from the 1950s, it was denigrated and in a state of near-animated suspension until the Yom Kippur War in 1973; it received a boost with the Gulf Wars and the Iraq Wars, but it really got up a head of steam after 9/11 – prompted by the WWCB’s fears of the consequences of no action.

Whose task, then, is it to resolve the crisis? Three Partners.

If Israel cares to take the lead, and to reach a settlement to the satisfaction of the Palestinians, it can anticipate gaining the support of the worldwide communities of faith, and, in so doing, facilitate the diversion of funds and technology on a massive scale to the developing countries that have suffered such oppression and exploitation over a long period. It will thus focus attention directly on the basis of its divine covenant, and bring humanity closer to the realization of the second strand of Maimonides’ expectation: a world focused on an understanding of its relationship with God. But that is not a task for Israel by itself.

Primary responsibility for the crisis lies with the churches and the governments of the WWCB. So also does the responsibility to seek and to implement a solution, and to accept a reduction in status, privilege and influence in recompense for a history of broken covenants.

However, the three Abrahamic faiths are each legitimate, established by divine inspiration, and circumstantially, and they are obligated to fulfil a common role.
That role is to enable humanity to enjoy harmony and stability for the full term of its existence, and to move towards an understanding of its relationship with creation and the Creator. To do this they must first acknowledge that they are partners. Then they must work in intimate collaboration, picking up the threads of reform for which Islam was called into existence but which its older partners denied, and which now requires a coordinated effort.

The specific obligations under covenant for the people of each of the Abrahamic faiths can be expressed quite simply, and when they are set, together, in common publications for communal use, they can provide a clear statement of basic Abrahamic self-understanding.

**For Judaism:** to be exemplary in personal and communal dealings with neighbours of other faiths, to be conspicuous so that others will know that they are in favour or out of favour in relation to their covenantal obligations, as they certainly are conspicuous at present, following the convergence of prophecy from all three faiths, the demonstration of divine judgement and the requirements of a covenantal relationship with God. Its people may marvel at the operation of the covenant and be better able to follow the flow of history, to practice the Law scrupulously, and to perform the practices of mitzvot, required by the Torah, and maintain kosher and Sabbath prayers.

**For Christianity:** to put into practice the teachings of the Gospels which clarify, expand and illustrate the teachings of the basic Law, and which can be easily applied in a developed community, and to teach others to follow them also. They are to spread the Good News that Love comes before judgement but does not exclude it; that all is not lost after a transgression, if recompense and repentance are genuine and not superficial, knowing that to be basic to the operation of Divine Grace, and not to look for a quick ticket to heaven. And at the level of personal practices, to share bread and wine together in remembrance of Jesus, to use the Lord’s Prayer and to look for Baptism in the name of the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost.

**For Islam:** to be faithful in conduct consistent with amanah and kalifa; to practice the five pillars of the faith to their best ability: maintaining faith or belief in the Oneness of God and the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad; establishing daily prayer practice; showing concern for the needs of others, and almsgiving to the needy; self-purification through fasting; and making the pilgrimage to Makkah if able to do so, and being happy in engaged surrender to the demands and judgement of Allah.
When the three faith communities live and work together, not competing nor trying to suppress another, and leading others to an understanding of God by example, then the way may be open to a sixth epoch – after Maimonides.

The special challenge for the Roman Catholic Church

If the Crisis in the Middle East is settled in this manner, with attention drawn more firmly than ever to Jerusalem, it will pose a major challenge for the Roman Catholic Church, whether or not Israel chooses to establish a theocratic Jewish state or to remain a parliamentary democracy with Judaism as its state religion, for the following reason.

The idea to seek to establish a Jewish state was initiated and pursued relentlessly because of the abuse of obligations under Divine Covenant began when the Church of Rome was the only substantial branch of Christianity. The people and powers who carried out the abuse did so on the basis of their self-understanding which was the consequence of the church’s teachings based on Dictatus Papae and Romanus Pontifex. Their successors are locked in by the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church together with the churches of the Reformation that maintain similar theologies of Supersessionism. They remain locked in until they repudiate that theology and enable the Jewish community to review its claims over the territory of Palestine that are based solely on its interpretation of the Covenant that was invoked when it was the only covenanted stream. It might then be able to free itself of the deeply-held denial that it has been in breech of its obligations ever since the adoption of plans to gain control of Palestine and its agreement with Britain under the Balfour Declaration.

The Catholic Church opposed the establishment of the State on the basis that the Jews had forfeited any rights to it because of their breach of covenant, that the covenant had therefore been abrogated and the Church had been appointed as the divinely designated New Israel with legitimate responsibility for Palestine. Subsequently it strengthened its theology of Supersession and provoked greater determination for the re-establishment of Israel as a Jewish Homeland. It then further reinforced the theology of Supersession as the basis for the current Dogmatic Constitution on the Church subsequent to the establishment of the State of Israel and in order to deny the state any legitimacy and to maintain its claims for administrative rights over certain sacred places within the state.45

That Dogmatic Constitution was drafted on the basis of a hypothetical scenario of a Divine Covenant conceived by God prior to Creation with a defined direct line of responsibility for the Church in all matters salvific to be administered by the Pope as God’s nominated infallible delegate or surrogate. It says the line passes through the previously delegated people, the errant Israel, whose authority was abrogated through a process of Supersession, to Christ whom the Father "foreknew and predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that he should be the firstborn among many brethren" and who existed with God before the people into whom he was to be born.46

The church has maintained a proselytizing ministry to Jews on the basis of the abrogation of the Covenant of Sinai and Supersession until well into the Fifth Epoch, and it declined to enter into dialogue on the same premise until 1965, immediately after promulgating the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Statements issued by senior members of the church hierarchy show continued deep division over these matters, and in spite of statements by Pope John Paul acknowledging that the Covenant has never been revoked, no moves have been made to rescind the relevant sections of the Dogmatic Constitution.

If the church is prepared to enter into face-to-face dialogue conversations with Jewish leaders in order to provide the assurance on the absolute repudiation of Supersessionism which is necessary, then it cannot avoid rewriting that Dogmatic Constitution in such a way that it confirms that the Mosaic Covenant is still extant, in parallel with the New Covenant, and it must provide a line of covenantal contact which does not, in some miraculous way, either pass through or bypass the ‘superseded’ Israel. As noted above, the rescinding of that section would require substantial review of many related aspects of the churches doctrine, teaching, authority systems, and its claims to surrogacy of delegation of Divine Authority. If it constitutionally accepts that Judaism is valid and that its people live under a divine covenant imposed by the same God it is, ipso facto, acknowledging a partnership with shared responsibility. If it does not, then it will be saying that the Church and Judaism are still in competition, and that will be a negation of the former Pope’s statement that there will be no more evangelizing to the Jews.

Clearly, the fact that such a far-reaching theological reassessment would logically follow is not a reason to refuse a process of direct theological dialogue with Jews.

46 First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Pastor Aeternus, Chapter 4, n. 9, promulgated by the First Vatican Council, Session IV, July 18, 1870: confirmed by the Second Vatican Council in Lumen Gentium, n. 25: November 21, 1964.
and Muslims over the future of Palestine on the basis of obligations under covenant. No effective dialogue can be conducted without immediately confronting the wider issues. We must not forget that Muslims who are adopting methods that are contrary to Islamic principles in an effort to undermine the Jewish State justify their actions on the basis that Jews are contravening their obligations under covenant. However, in doing so they are in breach of their own obligations under the Qur’anic Covenant and teachings so that they are equally subject to divine judgement as indicated in the Night Journey. That matter also has to be addressed on the basis that if the notions of divine judgement and personal salvation are intimately linked for people of one faith, they are linked in the same manner for each of the covenanted faiths. The question of whether salvation for martyrdom in the defence of faith applies to death in an action that is essentially offensive, even when it may be seen as part of the process of retribution under covenant, requires careful consideration.

However the critical issue is that of Supersession consequent upon denial of a continuing Covenant, because Jews cannot be persuaded that there will not be a return to genocidal anti-Semitism in the event of world trauma while the church’s self-understanding is based on constitutional Supersessionism. The human future is too important to be placed at risk by a refusal to enter dialogue based on covenantal understanding and obligations in relation to Palestine when all three faiths that are subject to specific covenantal relations with God and all humanity are directly involved in the crisis.

**Parallel Programs: Enhanced Dialogue of Life, Action and Prayer**

In addition to the major program of conversation dialogue at peak level, it is highly desirable that the peak faith bodies, on acknowledging that they are all obligated under Divine Covenant, encourage the development of ongoing programs of dialogue between their adherents at a range of levels and as matter of urgency. If they are not comfortable with the notion of a partnership at this stage it is of little consequence. The partnership will become self-evident in due course.

The levels envisaged are the peak faith bodies themselves; regional bodies crossing national boundaries, especially where their conciliar bodies approximate each other; national or semi-national; and local or district bodies based on the work of presbyteries or their corresponding bodies, and clusters of congregations. The series of dialogue programs should be seen not merely as mechanisms for intervention in situations of tension or conflict, “to put out spot fires,” but as a foundation for the development of effective community cohesion based on respect, understanding and cooperation, and incorporating
● education in communal religious and life issues;
● community development, welfare, and service programs;
● conflict resolution and counselling

All programs should focus on one aspect or another of a covenantal relationship, using the MHUDC as the basis, and appropriate to the needs and the circumstances of the people involved. The Qur’anic understanding, involving a number of aspects, parallels the MHUDC very closely. The process will get nowhere if a program is limited to modes or processes in endeavouring to attain personal justification or salvation based on Calvin’s teaching. 47

**Dialogue, Level 1**

At the local and district levels most programs would be planned around the people’s understanding of responsibilities under covenant such as care and support for those in need, provision of local health services, enhancement of the local environment, and supplementary schooling programs – all with the aim of everything that can be done together being done together and not on a stand alone basis. Certainly they should take account of, and be focused on how people perceive their responsibilities under covenant in their daily lives as they live out their faith within their community.

As I have travelled in India and Sri Lanka it has been apparent that there are many programs of this nature already being put into practice. However there are many regions in which there are no such programs, and the need to encourage and support them is urgent.

To enhance the sense of community cohesion and reinforce the commitment to cooperation, the congregations or units of each faith taking part in a joint program could be encouraged to enter into a declaration of covenant similar to that adopted in Beaumaris and Black Rock, Victoria, Australia. 48 That example involved only churches, but it can be adapted to suit any group of mosques, synagogues and churches, on the basis of whatever they undertake to do together. These programs equate to what the Divine Word Missionaries term dialogues of life and of action, 49 but it is not desirable to label program aims. They should come out of preliminary discussions among the people about how they wish to work, and it is important that

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47 Fry, “Covenant and Dialogue.” Chapter six.
48 Ibid. Appendix N.
they relate to the current levels of religious experience and participation. As argued in chapter nine, there is no need to reinvent the dialogue wheel. There are ample models available for leadership guidance at all levels.

There are two residential camp models that can be considered at both Level 1 and Level 2, dependent upon the severity of conflict that is occurring, the extent of resources available, and the level of experience of the respective leaders.

One is the model developed in Europe and adopted by the Jewish Christian Muslim Association of Australia (JCMA) in which approximately equal numbers of participants from each faith go into residence for three or four days to discuss specific issues that are of concern, using the Holy Books of each faith for textual comparison of the theological and cultural components of misunderstanding and conflict, and problem solving.

The other is a more ambitious program to bring people together in the same proportions, but by selection or invitation involving consultation with community counsellors, police and clergy in order to include some people who have actually been involved in, or affected by, violence in a region that has record of violence and is severely affected by conflict such as attacks on persons or assets. Sessions are designed to draw out and confront the basis of antagonism towards “the other”, fear and abuse, and to get people talking freely about their understanding of their own responsibilities under covenant, and working through them to find how they coincide with, or differ from, the understandings of “the other.” Emmanuel Igborba’s programs in crisis districts of Nigeria, illustrated in a readily available video, provide a basis for planning. 50

The JCMA also has a very successful schools program running with government assistance in Victoria. Teams of three spokespersons, one from each faith, enter into dialogue with each other, and explanations of their beliefs, aided by a facilitator. The students are drawn from years nine and ten from two or three schools in a region of mixed ethnic communities.

**Dialogue Level 2**

50 From either (1) Dr. Emmanuel Ande Ivorgba, Msc.D., Ph.D., Executive Director, New Era Educational and Charitable Support Foundation, RABO HOUSE, #1 Mazaram Road, Rayfield P.O.Box 6451, Jos, Plateau State, NIGERIA. <eivorgba (at) needcsi.org>, or (2) Libby and Len Traubman, Foundation for Global Community, 1448 Cedarwood Drive, San Mateo, CA 94403 USA. < LTRAUBMAN (at) igc.org>
At the mid to more senior or experienced levels, the focus would shift towards dialogue of prayer with regular meetings of clergy adopting such approaches as the IIID terms Deep-Discussion, or intensive small group programs based on the work of the Scriptural Reasoning Society; discussion of each other’s forms of worship; the rationale behind the liturgy and festivals; and cooperation in social action to offset existing or unintentional bias or disadvantage in service provision. In addition they can relate to support for people who choose to marry across traditional barriers; and cooperation in education, and especially how to handle concerns about different constructed beliefs. These are beliefs that have been developed during early periods of a religion’s evolution on the basis of cultural syncretism and tradition rather than logical extension. They are the ideas around which much local communal religious conflict erupts.

At this level there are also opportunities for very significant practical cooperation dialogue projects in both environment enhancement and community service development based in the Caux Round Table Model which involves lay business and professional people undertaking to apply the beliefs of their faith to more responsibly manage their businesses, either commercial or non-commercial, to ensure that they have minimum environmental impact. The organizers do not refer to their program as based on covenantal responsibilities, but the expression they use means exactly the same. They refer to the Stewardship of Creation based on Abrahamic Social Thought. And while they do not refer specifically to establishing joint ventures, they offer strong encouragement to consider it.51

This is also the level at which to consider the preparation of booklets with explanations of the main beliefs and practices of each faith, in the languages of communities in the trouble spots, for use by schools and community centres. A small book of this nature, prepared and published in Sinhala for use in mainly rural areas of Sri Lanka by Professor Antony Fernando could be adapted to use in many areas. It is being used by local government agencies, government schools and private schools, and its acceptance has encouraged Professor Fernando to plan an edition in Tamil as well.

**Dialogue, Level 3**

Clearly the peak bodies would be concerned with jointly considering the developed interpretations of a wide range of fundamental theological concepts. These would encompass, progressively, Theism, God, Divine Presence, Creation, Divine Covenant,

51 The statement issued following the Caux Round Table meeting in September 2010 can be accessed via the internet at www.cauxroundtable.org/view_file.cfm?fileid=165.
Responsibility, Obligation, Divine Law, Canon, Rabbinic or Shariah Law, Divine Judgment, Salvation, Redemption, Justification, Prophecy, Messianism, Incarnation, Resurrection, Predestination, Election, Freewill, Sin, Repentance, Atonement, Worship, Prayer, Clergy (role of), Authority, Tradition, Discipline, Eucharist, Transubstantiation, Intersession, Devotion to Saints, Beatification, Sacrifice, Penance, Indulgence, and for the planning of whatever changes may be involved to guidelines, regulations, canon law, education programs and teaching materials when it is decided to vary the teaching on any matters. At this level the need for contextual consideration of each concept, and intertextual study based on the SRS model is self-evident.

**Principal propositions**

The mature and comprehensive Hebrew understanding of the concept of a covenant that was developed during the first epoch encompasses a number of aspects or subordinate concepts.

The pronouncement of a covenant was preceded by a call or a command to the person around whose ministry the community or the faith developed, and it involved the imposition of an obligation on the people of that community; a divine promise or undertaking conditional on the people complying with the obligation; a penal clause under which the community shall be judged on the basis of its response, and under which punishment may be administered in the event of non-compliance with the obligation; and an indication that the covenant applies in perpetuity.

During the period of a century before and after the destruction of the Hasmonean kingdom, which marks the end of the first epoch and the start of the second, different interpretations of critical events developed due to Hebrew interaction with communities with different heritage and belief systems. This led to the progressive construction of variant statements of belief, and the concept of covenant became subject to diverse interpretations and usage. The circumstances in which those divergent interpretations continued to evolve have determined the perception of covenant by individual adherents of each faith, and within each community of faith, and how these perceptions impact on their self-understanding, attitude to the others, conduct, and interaction between them.

Within Christianity, these circumstances influenced the development of a number of specialist fields of study, including Christology, soteriology, eschatology and hamartiology; systematic, doctrinal and sacramental theology; missiology, ecclesiology, hermeneutics and religious philosophy. Reliance on particular
interpretations of the composite concept of covenant by communities of each faith
to support critical claims, political positions and religious activities has contributed
to injustices, provoked conflict and resulted in the crises that now compel us to seek
reconciliation and to strive for peace with justice.

Within the churches there is currently general agreement that three types of
dialogue should all proceed. These are: ecumenical, about the shape of Christian
belief; intra-Christian about claims to goodness and truth; and with other religious
traditions about understanding reality. I assert that because of considerations listed
above, the systematic re-examination of the concept of covenant by religious
leaders, scholars and community leaders within the Christian, Jewish and Muslim
traditions, working in collaboration and through conversation dialogue, is a vital
step which circumstances now require. That conversation dialogue must be
conducted in the presence of scholars of all world faiths and with their full
participation invited and welcomed. Conducted in that manner it can be expected to
progressively:

1. stimulate recognition that each of the three faiths exists as a consequence
   of divine invocation and adheres to, and is under an obligation to act
   upon, a valid concept of covenant;
2. demonstrate that they therefore have a relationship as partners in
   pursuing divine intent;
3. lead to continuing conversation-dialogue on other concepts and matters
   that are considered to be important but are also divisive;
4. facilitate reconciliation and alleviate international conflict,
5. open passages to peace with justice.

Concurrent with conversation dialogue, other forms of dialogue conducted on a
community or regional basis, focused on programs of practical cooperation, and
based on obligations that each faith accepts under covenant, can lead to rapid
improvement in relationships at community and regional level.

Unfortunately it is apparent from press reports, and my own research, that in spite
of the general agreement about the need for interfaith dialogue, not all communities
or practitioners of theology in any of the Abrahamic faiths are prepared to
participate in conversation-dialogue, will be attuned to it, or will be acceptable to
practitioners in the other faiths as conversation-dialogue partners. However the
circumstances and personal qualities or characteristics that will draw people into
the process and facilitate it have been identified by a number of scholars and should be taken into account to avoid disruption and encourage success.

**The final word**

Dialogue must be approached with an understanding of the partnership of three community-specific covenanted faiths.

Dialogue must not be approached as an arm of Evangelism as if there is a numbers game component in the mutual obligation of the three covenanted partners to enable people to understand their relationship with God and with each other.

To enter dialogue with an attitude of superiority, and that one's faith is absolute and not to be challenged, is counter-productive.

Not to enter dialogue with an open mind that appreciates that one's beliefs will be challenged, and that the process is faith-enhancing, is also counter-productive.

A strong faith in the absolute authority of God, and in an understanding that this authority is being demonstrated in the inversion of relationships between the White Western Christian World and the World Majority Peoples, is the best basis for dialogue.

References


