Chapter 162
Evangelical Geopolitics: Practices of Worship, Justice and Peacemaking

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162.1 Introduction

In his disturbing yet ultimately hopeful study of life under the Chilean military dictatorship of the 1970s, William Cavanaugh describes how the Catholic Church gradually developed a theology and practice of resistance to torture (Cavanaugh 1998). In the early days of the Pinochet regime, the church's emphasis on social action over poverty as the primary mode of public engagement left it ill-equipped to challenge the regime's practices of torture. However, argues Cavanaugh, in time the church cultivated practices of opposition that centered around the Eucharist. This 'Eucharistic counter-politics' contrasted the torture that Christ endured to the torture of the regime, and created alternative communities that resisted and exposed state violence.

Cavanaugh's research is a reminder that Christian political imaginations, geopolitical visions, and the practices of engagement that result from them, are created through and structured by practices of worship. As Bernd Wannenwetsch argues in his post-liberal critique of traditional theological ethical reflection, worship is central to the formation of Christian political ethics (Wannenwetsch 2004: 8). This chapter extends the growing interest in the geopolitics of evangelical Christianity by considering practices of worship that produce progressive political programs.

This emphasis on uncovering progressive evangelical geopolitics is an important counterbalance to popular impressions of evangelicals as being politically conservative or espousing an otherworldliness that is detached from reality. This conception is epitomised by Harold Camping, an 89-year old US Christian radio broadcaster who predicted that the world would end on May 21, 2011 (Tenety 2011). His claim was based on an idiosyncratic reading of Biblical prophecy, and led some of his

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S.D. Brunn (ed.), *The Changing World Religion Map*,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9376-6_162

relatively small band of followers to divest themselves of worldly goods in anticipation. Journalists followed their preparations with a mixture of fascination and scorn, and took obvious pleasure in their bewilderment when the predicted events failed to materialise (Harris 2011).

That media outlets in the U.S. and UK should so widely report a non-story like the world's continued existence, or the predictions of an obscure geriatric businessman that it was about to end, is remarkable. The story revisits a certain stereotype of U.S. evangelical Christians as wealthy, other-worldly, conservative, and irrational. Reporters barely mentioned that most Christian communities have other ways of thinking about end-times theology that inform very different political engagements.

In this chapter I argue that something analogous is in danger of occurring within the "geopolitics of religion" literature that has emerged over the past half-decade. Although I welcome study of the geopolitical significance of religion, I am concerned at its relatively narrow focus on right-wing militaristic readings of the end-times theology. Following Susan Harding's argument about the field of the anthropology of Christianity, I suggest that the emerging geopolitics of Christianity is constructing fundamentalist/evangelical Christians as our "repugnant cultural other." Although the critical geopolitical scrutiny of how evangelical theologies inform bellicose political practices is crucial, it is equally important to recover how people use the same traditions to inform more progressive social activism. This chapter considers practices by evangelical Christians that frame geopolitical interventions and imaginations in South Africa, the Middle East, and the UK that are marked by the pursuit of justice and peace through nonviolent means. Following a discussion of the recent geopolitics' literature on evangelicals, it does this by considering examples of three important evangelical practices of worship: preaching, prayer walking, and prayer meetings.

162.2 Evangelicals – Critical Geopolitics' "Repugnant Other?"

In 1961 Freeman lamented the "impatience" of many geographers with religion, even though it was clearly such an important geopolitical factor (Freeman 1961: 206). This same point about the neglect of the geopolitics of religion was echoed by a number of geographers almost half a century later (Dijkink 2006; Megoran 2006a). Scholars of geopolitics are at last taking religion seriously. Dittmer and Sturm's focused, coherent, theoretically-informed and empirically-diverse collection on the geopolitics of American Evangelical end-times prophecy belief (Dittmer and Sturm 2010) is ample demonstration of progress. A whole chapter is devoted to "Evangelicals" in the *Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics* (Dittmer 2013).

However, much of this work depicts religion in general, Christians in particular, and evangelicals specifically, as indelibly mendacious. This is the case from Dalby's 1990 asides about evangelicals reading prophecy to oppose arms reduction talks

(Dalby 1990), to Sturm and Dittmer's summary in their book that "Evangelicals often support highly violent foreign policies" (Sturm and Dittmer 2010: 4). Sturm (2006) and Dittmer (2008) consider interpretations of the Book of Revelation in U.S. popular culture and their significance within right-wing, pro-war constituencies and formal politics. In his own chapter of the edited book, Dittmer uses internet ethnographies to show how some evangelicals suspected that the 2008 U.S. Presidential winner Barack Obama was "the Antichrist" (Dittmer 2010). Across the Atlantic, Sidaway mentions how some anti-EU Britons read the union as the beast of Revelation (Sidaway 2006: 2–4). Catholicism has received less treatment but fares little better: Ó Tuathail explores the "Jesuit anti-Communism" of Fr. Edmund Walsh's Cold War "spiritual geopolitics" (Ó Tuathail 2000), and Agnew considers the geopolitics of the church under Pope Benedict XVI as based on a "Hobbesian-Stalinist model" of its place in global affairs (Agnew 2010: 56). Exceptions do exist (Gerhardt 2008; Gallaher 2010), but although each of the above studies represents by itself a valuable and important contribution to our understanding of geographies of religion, together they present Evangelical Christians as warlike, bigoted, racist, credulous, irrational, conspiratorially paranoid, and right-wing. No doubt some are, but Gallaher is at least partially correct in stating that "most commentators on the evangelical phenomenon (whether in the media or academia) are extrapolating the views of a few well known" figures to the entire movement (Gallaher 2010: 229). Critical geography should be wary about creating new Others.

The narrow focus of the geopolitics of religion is of interest not simply because of what it says about a certain group of Christians, but because of what it says about "us." Here we can learn from the vibrant field of the anthropology of Christianity. A foundational text was Susan Harding's 1991 article in *Social Research*, "Representing fundamentalism." Harding argues that fundamentalist/evangelical Christians have become anthropology's "repugnant cultural other." Seen as antithetical to modernity, "which emerges as the positive term in an escalating string of oppositions between supernatural belief and unbelief, literal and critical, backward and progressive, bigoted and tolerant," they constitute us as the modern subject (Harding 1991: 374). Our study of the geopolitics of religion may be doing likewise. Here the anthropology of religion can point a way forwards. A recent review article in *Anthropological Forum* shows how this literature may point us forwards, enjoining scholars to attend to diverse local forms of Christianity (McDougall 2009: 188). I suggest that one way to advance the study of the geographical study of evangelicals is to do just that.

In this chapter, I will outline three ways in which Evangelical Christians have engaged in practices with more pacific geopolitical implications. The first is the preaching of South African anti-Apartheid activist and church leader Allan Boesak; the second is a "prayer walk" by U.S. missionaries in the Middle East to deliver an apology for the First Crusade; and the third is UK evangelical prayer meetings that acted as a way to reflect on and repent over nationalism and racism. These divergent evangelical activities inform geopolitical visions and sustain political practices quite different from those considered in the literature thus far.

162.3 Preaching: Allan Boesak and the Re-reading of Revelation

More so than for Christian traditions that emphasise sacramental or liturgical worship, the performance of the sermon is a crucial element in evangelical practices of worship. To cite a well-known example, many of the addresses of Rev Martin Luther King Jr in the civil rights campaign were sermons delivered in his or another church at the height of a particular element of the civil rights (King 1981).. This section considers the sermons of a black leader of the South African anti-apartheid movement who drew on King's legacy, Rev Allan Boesak. In particular, it explores his exposition of apocalyptic scripture to critique apartheid and to succour its opponents.

Much of the work on evangelical geopolitics outlined above has looked at geopolitical interpretations of the biblical book of Revelation. Arranged as the final book of the New Testament canon, it is ascribed to "John," exiled to the island of Patmos "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."[1] Revelation is an example of the genre of contemporary apocalyptic Jewish writing. This genre uses extraordinarily vivid imagery and language to depict cataclysmic events, moments that may present substantial ruptures in human history. All texts are open to multiple interpretations; but history has shown that Revelation is more so than others.[2]

The geopolitical analyses cited above have largely considered how Revelation is mapped onto present geopolitics by evangelical Christians using the theological paradigm of "Dispensationalism premillennialism" (or simply "premillennalism"). Although its antecedents are in the earliest Christian times, dispensational premillennialism was developed in the nineteenth century by John Nelson Darby. It is a highly literalistic interpretation of texts like Revelation and holds that at the end of the present "dispensation" the church would be "secretly raptured," or safely removed to heaven in an instant. Following this, earth's remaining inhabitants would be subject to the great "tribulation" (including disease, war, and famine), before the salvation of the Jewish people and Christ's return to rule the earth from Jerusalem for 1,000 years of peace. The end of this "millennium" would witness a final decisive battle with evil in the form of "Babylon" and its minions (Boyer 1992: chapter 3; Weber 1987: 1–27). Premillennialism understands many passages of the book of Revelation as literal predictions rather than symbols. It thus lends itself to the identification of specific events in our time with what are understood to be biblical predictions. It is premillennialist circles – and often extreme and marginal elements of them, such as Harold Camping – that have been the focus of most of the scholarship on geopolitics and religion cited above.

In contrast to premillennialism, Kovacs and Rowland's illuminating compendium of readings of Revelation over Christian history shows that this approach of

[1] Revelation 1: 9, Bible. All Bible references are to the New International Version, London Hodder and Stoughton 1973.

[2] This argument is developed more fully in Megoran 2013.

seeing Revelation as coded references to specific future events and people is only one of a broad range of approaches (Kovacs and Rowland 2004). Richard Bauckham, an influential scholar of Revelation, dismisses this approach of seeing Revelation as coded future predictions, insisting instead on the need to understand the social, political, cultural and religious resonances of its symbols (Bauckham 1993: 19). These, he posits, are primarily Roman and particularly the Roman empire of Nero and Domitian that was brutally persecuting Christians. In Bauckham's interpretation, the strategy of Revelation, he suggests, is to create a symbolic world for its readers to enter in order to "redirect their imaginative response to the world," and thereby break the bounds which Roman power and ideology set on the world (Bauckham 1993: 129).

Ben Witherington's respected commentary on Revelation fleshes this out. For example, Revelation chapter 17 depicts "Babylon," mother of harlots, as a woman on a city built on seven hills, deceiving the world, draining it of wealth, and drunk on the blood of the saints. Rome was, famously, a city built on seven hills. Witherington observes that a coin minted under Vespasian, and still in circulation under Domitian (when Revelation may have been written) depicted the female divinity Roma sitting on seven hills. Witherington writes that "John's depiction may owe something to this coin, but one must bear in mind that he is doing a deliberate parody of such images that involves comic exaggeration of features, such as we see today in political cartoons" (Witherington 2003: 218–219). Numerous such references can be drawn from Revelation, by particular attention to the textual and visual discourses of Roman imperial propaganda and emperor worship. The cult of the worship of Ceasar as emperor, as "the son of god" who had brought "peace" and "salvation" to the earth, was increasingly seen as integral to Roman life and welfare. Witherington thus asserts that Revelation's proclamation of Jesus (rather than Caesar Domitian) as Lord is a profoundly political act (Witherington 2003: 162). This is an articulation of a politics of resistance that is non-violent because "conquering takes place through dying not killing" (Witherington 2003: 174).

This idea that Revelation is not merely an anti-imperial text, but one that posits *non-violent* resistance to empire is gaining increasing currency. Patricia McDonald reads Revelation's the battle scenes between angelic and demonic forces as examples of "nonviolent conquering" (McDonald 2004: 265). Likewise Mark Bredin argues, "The Jesus of Revelation is a Revolutionary of peace," who defeats his enemies by dying at their hands, who fights violence with nonviolence, and who stands for all humankind rather than projecting violence against the evildoer who must be eradicated (Bredin 2003: 223). In his attempt to "aid the recovery of a spiritual reading of geopolitics in our time," Michael Northcott argues that contemporary premillennialist right-wing U.S. readings of the apocalypse are a product of the Constantinian shift in the fourth century when "Christianity was turned from its non-violent and anti-imperial origins into an imperial cult" (Northcott 2004). The task, then, is "saving Christianity from empire" (Nelson-Pallmeyer 2005).

A practical outworking of this theology can be seen in the life and work of Allan Boesak, was a Black theologian, church minister and influential anti-apartheid activist in South Africa (Ackerman and Duval 2000: 348). He argued for the importance

of social context for the doing of theology by Black Christians in Africa and North America (Boesak 1977). His African liberation theology incorporated a rigorous theorization of violence, with a clear vision of a just and peaceful future obtainable by peaceful means, and practical application in the messy context of a localized struggle. For example, in 1983 he discovered that he was the target of a foiled assassination plot by the *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (Akrikaner Resistance Movement). In response, he declared that their actions were explicable when "racist laws, racist structures, racist attitudes emphasize in a thousand ways the sub-human status of black people in South Africa" (Boesak 1983a: 46). He rejected the option of "cheap reconciliation" which "denies justice, and which compromises the God-given dignity of black people" (46–47), and instead averred his commitment to "true peace" that would only occur with the dismantling of apartheid, and was to be pursued through nonviolent civil disobedience.

His sermons repeatedly turn to Revelation. For Boesak, prophecy is "much less predicting the future that contradicting the present" (Boesak 1983b: 29) and Revelation contradicts Apartheid as much as it contradicted Rome. For example, in 1978 the so-called 'Information Scandal' plunged the South African government into turmoil when it was revealed that it had been using illegal means to sell the government's Apartheid policy to the outside world. Boesak reads this through Revelation as God unveiling and judging the immoral workings of empire (Boesak 1987).

Boesak's 1987 book C*omfort and Protest,* is a commentary on Revelation, or, perhaps more accurately, a commentary on the Apartheid regime performed through a reading of the book of Revelation. He identifies specific Apartheid policies and official proclamations, comparing them to the Rome/Babylon of Revelation. In closing his book with a discussion of the final chapter of Revelation, Boesak quotes a poem written by Martial praying for the safe homecoming of the Emperor Domitian:

> Thou, morning star,
> Bring on the day!
> Come and expel our fears,
> Rome begs that Caesar
> May soon appear

"The church smiles at this last desperate attempt at power and glory," writes Boesak, observing that the final chapter of Revelation hails not Domitian, but the Lord Jesus Christ as "the bright morning star" (Revelation 22:16). As John surveys the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of justice and peace, descending to earth to reunite symbolically God and humanity, he implores, "Come, Lord Jesus." Boesak (1987: 137–138) creates a liturgical prayer from this:

> For the pain and tears and anguish must end… Come, Lord Jesus
> For there must be an end to the struggle when the unnecessary dying is over… Come, Lord Jesus
> For the patterns of this world must change… Come, Lord Jesus
> For hate must turn to love, fear must turn to joy…Come, Lord Jesus
> For war must cease and peace must reign… Come, Lord Jesus.

Apocalyptic scripture presents the empire is a force whose wickedness must be taken seriously, yet insists that, for all its might and resources, its claims to represent civilisation or God's agency in history are nothing but lies. It does not have the final word in the human story, indeed, it will be overthrown spectacularly. Kovel argues that the apocalyptic mindset's ability to conceive of the wholesale overthrow of an unjust order has made Revelation a key text in revolutionary history, from anti-slavery struggles to Communism (Kovel 2007). The emerging geopolitics of religion needs to uncover radical and revolutionary readings of apocalyptic scripture, not just reactionary ones. It is crucial to place these readings not only as part of academic theological discourse, but as sermons embedded in specific struggles for peace and justice.

162.4 Prayer Walking: Crusade Apologies

The second evangelical practice of worship that we will consider is 'prayer walking,' an activity that came to assume importance in certain strands of evangelical church life in the 1980s. Although evangelicalism commonly eschews the idea of "sacred places," prayer walking emerged from a theology that emphasised 'spiritual warfare' against 'territorial spirits.' This theology posited that the work of the church could be enhanced by specifically praying in certain places. One product of this was the "March for Jesus" movement, that saw sometimes thousands of Christians at a time processing through British streets with songs and prayer (Kendrick 1992). An unusual example of this movement, that grew out of it and took it in new directions, was the Reconciliation Walk, a prayer walk in apology for the first Crusade that took its participants overland from France and Germany to Jerusalem.[3] This phenomenon will be considered in this section as a particular form of engagement with the geopolitics of the Israel-Palestine question.

A recurrent criticism of the geopolitics of U.S. and UK evangelicalism is its often uncritical support of Israel in recent Arab-Israeli disputes. For geopolitical analysis, the key place of premillennalism is important in explaining this, as it predicted the 'ingathering' of the Jews to Palestine and a 'great tribulation' before Christ's return (Boyer 1992). By the 1970s premillennialism was firmly entrenched in the U.S. as the prevalent evangelical end-times doctrine. What began as an apparently obscure theological debate gained important geopolitical significance with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.

The belief that the emergence of the modern state of Israel is a fulfilment of Biblical prophecy (Sizer 2004; Clark 2007) has led to the condition whereby 'the vast majority of [American] evangelicals instinctively believe that vigorous support

[3] It might be more correct to say that the Reconciliation Walk grew along with the March for Jesus. As Graham Kendrick records in his history of March for Jesus, Lynn Green – the originator of the Reconciliation Walk – was involved with prayer walking and March for Jesus in Britain from their earliest stages (Kendrick 1992, chapter 4).

for Israel is the only appropriate response to the conflicts in the Middle East' (Burge 2003: 236). Ruether and Ruether argue that "Christian fundamentalist support for Israel is not simply a matter of apocalyptic theories; it is a matter of garnering major economic and political support behind an expansionist vision of the State of Israel" (Ruether and Reuther 2002: 182). Likewise, evangelicals in this camp view "the native Arab population in generally negative terms," rarely calling for their equal treatment (Weber 1987: 206–207). The attitude of this "Christian Zionism" towards Muslims is part of a wider geopolitical vision that is antagonistic towards Muslims. Thus, for popular U.S. theologian Don Carson, the "war on terror" is "a civilisational struggle between the world of Islam and West" (Carson 2002: chapter 4).

The geopolitical impact of U.S. premillennialism is an example of the central assumption of geopolitical study: the views we hold about the world have real impacts upon the way we act in it. Having identified the most common geopolitical implications of U.S. evangelicalism in regard to the Arab-Israeli conflicts, this chapter will now consider the ways in which the Reconciliation Walk, contested this geopolitical vision and moved towards an alternative one.

On November 27, 1095, Pope Urban II preached a sermon to crowds of clergy and laity attending a church council in the French town of Clermont-Ferrand. Calling on Europe to unite and defend itself against Muslim attacks on Christian territory and pilgrims, his speech initiated what became known to history as "the First Crusade." The First Crusade culminated on July 15, 1099, when Jerusalem fell and Jewish and Muslim defenders and residents were massacred. On November 27, 1995, evangelical Christians gathered in Clermont-Ferrand to launch "The Reconciliation Walk" (henceforth 'RW'). This involved thousands of largely American and European Christians retracing the routes of the First Crusade and apologising to Jews, Eastern Christians, and Muslims for the Crusades.[4] Although based in England, the RW was largely a project of the influential U.S.-based global evangelical Christian mission agency, Youth With A Mission (henceforth "YWAM"). The RW culminated in Jerusalem on July 15, 1999, when a formal apology was issued to, and received by, Muslim, Orthodox and Jewish leaders in the city.

This juxtaposition of parallel journeys between Clermont-Ferrand and Jerusalem undoubtedly appears bizarre. But it reveals how a geopolitical vision can be transformed through engagement. I conducted research on the RW by interviewing its key organisers and originators, and through accessing its archives at a UK regional YWAM centre in Harpenden, England.[5]

According to its original promotional literature, the RW was designed to "… make a major contribution to peace between the peoples of Christianity, Islam and Judaism" (Reconciliation Walk no date). By apologising to Jews, Muslims and Eastern Christians, it would assist in "defusing the legacy of the Crusades" (Reconciliation Walk 1996). An important cognate idea was that "defusing" this

[4] The text of the apology is available at the RW's website: www.crusades-apology.org/Crusades%20Project/turkpres.htm (accessed December 2009).

[5] For a fuller investigation of the Reconciliation Walk, see Megoran, N. (2010) 'Towards a geography of peace: pacific geopolitics and evangelical Christian Crusade apologies'. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 35(3), 382–398.

legacy would remove an obstacle to the conversion of Muslims to Christianity, as one RW leader put it, removing barriers "between the Islamic world and evangelism" (Cathy Nobles, interview, Harpenden, 4/08/2006).

The RW was officially launched with a day of prayer in Clermont-Ferrand on November 27 1995. Although it might appear to be a form of traditional pilgrimage, in fact its more immediate context was the practice of "prayer walks" developed by charismatic Christians in the 1970s and 1980s. Lynn Green (see below, one of the RW leaders) was involved in the "March for Jesus," a series of prayer walks in UK cities in the 1980s, and in an interview with me indicated that this practice was in his mind as he planned the RW.

In the spring of 1996, a few small groups of walkers retraced Crusader routes along the Rhine and Danube and via Italy and the Balkans, praying for peace and reconciliation and focussing on presenting an apology to Jewish communities, the first targets of the Crusaders. In the summer of 1996, the first teams began to arrive in Istanbul. From then on, greater numbers of larger teams joined the RW for often short periods of time (2 weeks). Following an induction, teams then fanned out across different parts of Turkey, meeting people en route in public spaces such as cafes, shops, and parks, and being invited to homes. At the same time, leaders and teams held official meetings with religious and civic leaders, when framed copies of the apology were presented and discussions held in well-publicised meetings that attracted sometimes significant media coverage. The walk then continued down the Levant through Syria, Lebanon, and to Israel/Palestine. A similar format was followed in these countries. Around 3000 people from over 30 countries and a variety of Protestant denominations took part.

The RW was a project with great sensitivity to geography. Following the exact routes that Crusaders took, and reaching places on the anniversary of their arrival, was considered a vital aspect of the historical authenticity and contemporary spiritual effectiveness of the project.

The genesis of the RW is traceable to a small number of US citizens working for evangelical Christian mission agencies in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These were principally Lynn Green, currently the International Chairman of YWAM, Cathy Nobles, a YWAM leader based in Harpenden, England, and Matthew Hand of the U.S. Lutheran Orient Mission Society. In interviews, all three identified themselves as having been influenced to some degree by the Christian Zionism of the US Christian Right at some point in their lives. I identified above two geopolitical implications of the theological position of the U.S. Christian Right: support of the state of Israel, and antipathy to Muslims. The remaining sections will examine how the RW came to question these positions and articulate alternatives.

162.4.1 The Reconciliation Walk and Israel

Those interviewed all spoke about having more-or-less developed Christian Zionist backgrounds, which they had come to re-evaluate and reject through participation in the RW. Key to this was the impact of actually meeting people in the Middle East.

Cathy Nobles cited the example or a 2006 "RW follow-up trip composed of 'mostly Zionist-type Christians from the US, UK and elsewhere' she had taken to Israel/Palestine. They began the trip on the city wall in East Jerusalem, and suddenly came across a group of angry Palestinian teenagers chanting and shouting. It transpired that an Israeli air-raid had hit the wrong target, massacring families in Gaza. The Israeli authorities arrived and, without even attempting to calm down or disperse the crowd peacefully, began beating and arresting them. Cathy Nobles relayed that the visitors were shocked to see the actions of the state they supported" (Cathy Nobles, conversation, Harpenden, 11/11/2006).

The importance of face-to-face meetings with local people in transforming views was also stressed by Lynn Green. I asked him whether, bearing in mind how critically he spoke of Christian Zionism, there was a political goal to the RW (that is, of changing these views). He replied that he didn't think they "set out with any kind of political goal," but that they became aware from their own experiences that meeting people face-to-face and "humbling ourselves and taking a message of apology over something that is such an open wound amongst these peoples" changes people in a way that "will always have political implications." These implications were that those who went on the walk "would be much more reticent about supporting militaristic action, for the expansion of the borders of Israel, for example" whereas previous to their participation he thought that many would have had "no qualms" about that:

> Once you know the people, and they are people instead of images on the television screen, it does change your politics. That's the tragedy, isn't it, you know that oftentimes the people making the decisions, the people who wield the power, don't actually know the people that they are deciding about as people, they know them as images on the television screen, strategic objectives in some sort of geopolitical scenario. (interview, 5/08/2006)

By bringing British and American Christians into contact with those suffering as a result of Christian Zionism, the RW sought to transform the theological and thus geopolitical visions of those taking part. As the next section shows, this was the case not only with regard to Israel, but also Islam and Muslims.

162.4.2 The Reconciliation Walk and Muslims

Just as participation in the RW transformed its leaders' theological understandings and thus geopolitical visions towards Israel, so it shifted their attitudes towards Muslims. Crucial to this shift was the impact of meeting Muslims in the context of apologizing to them. In many cases, this was the simple overcoming of prejudices and stereotypes by folk whom participants would instinctively have been afraid of. For example, Cathy Nobles spoke about her fears of meeting and giving the apology to a "rough guy, head of a fundamentalist, reactionary group" in Beruit. She was surprised that he not only did "not look fundamentalist" but was "sweet, welcoming, loving." On a different occasion she was hosted to a sumptuous breakfast by

Istanbul's deputy mayor. She was struck by his suggestion that Christians and Muslims were on the same side facing overlapping moral concerns, such as pornography and secularisation (interview, 4/08/2006).

More striking than simply the realization that Muslims who appear frightening may in fact be pleasant and personable, or the identification of common perspectives on social morality, was an appreciation of the spirituality of Muslims. This was more disconcerting for those involved. Cathy Nobles (interview, 4/08/2006) spoke about "meeting very godly Muslims," people who:

> as far as works of godliness are far exceeding us, in their understanding of God, in the way that they treated their neighbour, you just had to envy and marvel at what they knew.

This raised some uncomfortable questions for her, challenging her preconception that "they know nothing and I bring everything to the table." It led her to a theological position which she identifies as "the openness of God," that if the Holy Spirit is working in all the world then "you should be finding truth in other cultures." Lynn Green recounted a similar transformation. He described his pre-RW perspective as one of "Western superiority," the:

> unconscious thinking was that God was at work amongst us, and outside of us it was kind of like a vacuum, a spiritual vacuum, and people were out there sitting in total darkness, and they had no understanding of God, or what understanding they had was heretical. (Interview, 5/08/2006)

He said that meeting Muslim groups in Turkey such as the Alevi and Mevlana, and learning of many more where "the fundamental message of Jesus has been proclaimed, that God is love, and we're called to love our neighbour." he saw so much evidence that the Holy Spirit was already at work. He professed to have read many books on this theology, "but the penny never dropped," and what he found was "totally unexpected" – "a sort of spiritual communion with some Muslims." He underlined how unexpected and disconcerting this was for him, by adding to his previous quote that "even saying those words I realise that I'm going to be branded a heretic by a number of Western Christians, but there it is."

Cathy Nobles did not understand this merely as human interaction, but as God speaking to her through it. Through these experiences, she concluded that:

> God confronted me that in falling in love with the Jews, that I had hatred for the Muslims… I heard God speak to me that "I am in love with these people, I am passionate about these people."

The implication of this for Cathy Nobles was that if God loved Muslims, she ought to too – but had not done so.

There were geopolitical as well as theological implications of this shift. RW leaders spoke about their desire to challenge visions of global space that pitted the West/Christianity against an Islam that they perceived to be dangerous. Lynn Green said that he had been increasingly

> dismayed at the tendency in the American Christian press for some of the best known spokespeople to go right along with the secular media perspective of casting Islam as the

> enemy, and not coming to grips with love of enemies, forgiveness, and getting the idol of nationalism in its proper place. (interview, 5/08/2006)

Based on her experiences in Turkey, and listening to Turkish recipients of the apology, Cathy Nobles said she became aware that "we have carried prejudice towards Turks," and "this whole image of a Christian Europe up against Turkey, two empires colliding, it really doesn't have a whole lot to do with Jesus" (interview, 3/08/2006).

Thus, the act of meeting Muslims and giving them an apology challenged assumptions and prejudices on numerous levels. The RW leaders came to people their imaginative landscapes of the Middle East with real Muslims rather than frightening stereotypes, spiritual illiterates, or dangerous enemies of the state of Israel. These personal engagements challenged the antagonistic views on Islam common within American evangelicalism. They questioned those geopolitical visions that posited clashing civilizations or re-enacted crusades. They created spaces for more peaceful and transformative interactions with Muslims. This is remarkable enough, but as we shall see in the next section, the RW did not only contribute to changes in views on Islam. It also led to changed understandings of evangelicalism's nature and its role in the Middle East.

162.4.3 The Reconciliation Walk and U. S. Evangelicalism

The RW challenged deeply-held US evangelical views about Israel and Muslims. At the same time, it transformed understandings of Christianity and Christian mission. It began by seeing the Crusades as a discreet historical episode whose spiritual legacy could be "defused" in order to facilitate conversion. However, according to interviewees, recipients often expressed thanks for the apology, but at the same time pointed to ongoing perceived Western and Christian injustices. Thus the RW leaders came to see the Crusades as emblematic of a "Crusader spirit" of arrogant superiority that infects subsequent Christianity (and Westernism) down to and including contemporary evangelicalism. Cathy Nobles told me that she frequently observed participants going through RW training and then presenting the message, who came to realise (as Cathy Nobles herself had) that "I had a lot of Crusader in me and the way I live my faith." This "Crusader spirit"

> comes into any place that we've got Manifest Destiny going, with the Northern Irish and the Scots feeling its their promised land, South Africans felt like that with their promised land, America is the promised land, so there's that same ethos. I still think that's the over-riding spirit we need to get out of the church. (interview, 3/08/2006)

The reference to "Manifest Destiny" in the U.S. context is clearly geopolitical, indexing the idea that the US has a unique, divinely-given destiny that justifies – or rather demands – power projection outside its own borders. Lynn Green observes that:

> there is still a great big chunk of, especially US American evangelicalism, that is just so firmly and closely identified with conservative politics there, including a deep belief in the

> efficacy of redemptive violence, and the idea that a lot of problems in the world can be solved militarily. (interview, 5/08/2006)

He describes this as being generally seen as part of the "whole package" of being an evangelical Christian, that if someone "holds steadfastly to the basics of the evangelical faith" they ought naturally to hold to this right-wing conservative political position, and cannot understand why "you don't cheer when the U.S. military goes to war." He reported that "I'm just no longer convinced" by the idea that this conservative theological position should be wedded to the right-wing position on foreign policy, concluding that "it's not a whole package." He explained that through involvement in the RW he had come to realise that about U.S. evangelicalism and reject it (interview 5/08/2006). As he put it to my question about how involvement in the RW changed him and his understanding of God, "it changed me in that I began to see the gospel completely differently" (interview, 5/08/2006).

This would appear to be the chief impact of the RW on the understanding of Christianity itself by Lynn Green and Cathy Nobles – that reconciliation "is the core of the gospel" (interview, 4/08/2006). This understanding leads her as an American Christian to see an important Christian task as being "to challenge power and weaponry in the age we're living in." In relation to the "war on terror," it means "to get people, instead of being reactionary against Islam" to ask

> 'why is this happening?', are we asking the right question of why these people [the 9/11 attackers] feel so passionately about why they kill themselves, and attack us in this way, and is there something that we can change, especially as Christians.

This is a significant movement away from the geopolitical perspective that sees the U.S. as a righteous innocent violated by a pathologically evil world of Islam. Concomitantly, it involves a withdrawal from the position that Christians should back the U.S. government as it responds with military force to its enemies, and as it offers uncritical support of the state of Israel.

This research concludes that participation in the Reconciliation Walk occasioned significant shifts in the geopolitical visions of its leaders. What began as a tactic to facilitate conversion led to a wholesale rejection of a theology of Christian Zionism and its associated foreign geopolitical vision and foreign policy agenda. It also precipitated movement towards a very different theology and practice of engagement with Muslims. Due to the influence of these people within U.S. evangelicalism, this potentially has significant broader implications – particularly as they have identified spreading the lessons of the RW within the movement as a key ongoing goal.[6] The Reconciliation Walk demonstrates how evangelical Christian practices such as prayer walks can produce politically-progressive geopolitical practices and visions and prove transformative for those engaged in them. The final section will consider the long-term effects of walk on participants.

[6] For more on these implications, see Megoran, Towards a geography of peace.

162.5 Prayer and Repentance: Reconciliation Walk Follow-Up Meetings

Prayer and repentance is an important element of everyday evangelical Christian worship. Following the completion of the Reconciliation Walk (RW) in 1999, Lynn Green and Cathy Nobles renamed it, "Reconciliation Walk… the Journey Continues" and the project has continued to undertake a number of activities. Building on relationships formed up to 1999, it takes groups of largely British and American Christians to Lebanon and Israel/Palestine, where they meet Christians, Jews and Muslims, and receive teaching about reconciliation. It also conducts work on Christian-Muslim dialogue in the UK. These activities are supported through bi-monthly prayer meetings at the YWAM "base" in Harpenden, and it is these prayer meetings that are considered in this final section of the chapter.

These meetings serve as a means for Lynn Green and Cathy Nobles to report back on and discuss ongoing activities, to have them prayed for and to bring together veterans of the walk. Most of the people who regularly attend the meetings had been inspired by the original RW to continue peacemaking/reconciliation activities in their own communities in southern England: for example, in local Christian-Muslim dialogue groups, or promoting alternative perspectives in their own congregations. Meetings tend to have 20–30 people present, most of them late middle aged white Britons. From 2006 until the time of writing, I have attended one or two of these a year to conduct an ongoing ethnographic study through participation (Megoran 2006b) in the continuing work of the RW. In this section I describe two of these meetings and show how prayer for the work of the RW abroad served to inform and rework geopolitical understandings of participants (Megoran 2010).

The RW prayer meeting in June 2006 coincided with the football world cup. The chapel on the YWAM base had been taken over to screen England's first game, against Paraguay, and the RW meeting took place in the sunshine outside the chapel.[7] Perhaps appropriately, prayer and discussion that day revolved around the topic of nationalism. Lynn Green began by reading from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, chapter 28. This passage depicts the confrontation between the prophet Jeremiah and the royal court prophet, Hananiah, over the subjugation of the Kingdom of Judah to the Babylonian empire of King Nebuchadnezzar (reigned c. 605–562 BC). Hananiah prophesied that God would "break the yoke of the king of Babylon," whereas Jeremiah contended that Babylon was God's instrument of punishing Judah for its idolatry and oppression of the vulnerable. In Lynn Green's reading of this encounter, Hananiah

> identified the interests of the elite with God's interests, and said that God was on their side…. Many evangelicals make that mistake today as well. But God's plan is to bring a nation out of nations, a people out of peoples, a race out of races – and we make that harder the more that we identify with a certain nation, as we drag our principalities and powers into the mixture.

[7] Reconciliation Walk prayer day, Highfield Oval, Harpenden, 10/06/2006.

Lynn Green identified nation states, in Jeremiah's day or ours, as 'principalities and powers.' Although he did not expand, this reprises an obscure Biblical idea that states and empires are entities that have spiritual identities that influence those who inhabit them and that are ultimately answerable to God for their conduct. It has been developed by radical theologians such as Walter Wink (1998) and William Stringfellow in their critiques of violent state power as demonic. A particularly influential reading of "the powers" is offered by Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, whom Green explicitly identified in this meeting as an influence on his thought. After mentioning Yoder, Green continued (Yoder 1994 (1972)) "These principalities and powers hate this new nation, because they have to bend their knees to it, because their power is challenged when old enemies of different nations reconcile."

This led into a discussion about how Jeremiah contested the nationalist assumptions of his own day, and what it would similarly mean for Christian peacemakers to challenge the spirit of nationalism today. This discussion was forced to a halt, with much mirth, when the British national anthem blared out from the nearby chapel before the match began! "Should we stand up?" joked Cathy Nobles. Lynn Green made the obvious point about nationalism and the church, and led the group into a time of prayer. He began by praying, "Jesus Christ is Lord, and one day every tongue will confess this and every knee will bow, you reign over every principality and power… not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit."

Further discussion and prayer that afternoon majored on nationalism: the choice between identifying with a warring nation state, or with the people of God as a new nation. Prayers were framed in a way that sought to stand outside identification with the foreign policy interests and objectives of the participants' nation states. Thus there was a discussion of the killing that week of Al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi by a U.S. air strike. People voiced feeling uncomfortable at the celebration of his death by U.S. leaders, with Cathy Nobles beginning a prayer on the topic with the words, "We know that you sorrow at a life that brought such destruction." Other matters discussed and prayed for included the RW/YWAM's work in helping Italian Catholics to rethink the legacy of the Italian church's support of Mussolini's African wars, promoting U.S.-Libyan relations, developing existing relationships with Palestinian Islamists, and supporting programmes to engage young British Christians with the topic of reconciliation.

A recurrent motif was the idea of nationalism as a demonic power that can warp the ways that unsuspecting Christians think and act in the world, and that it must therefore be combated through prayer. Thus, for example, the leaders updated the group on the efforts of Messianic Jewish congregations (that is, Jews who accept Jesus Christ as the messiah and maintain a strong Jewish identity) and Palestinian churches to work together. In praying for them, Lynn Green prayed for good "Arab-Messianic relations" and prayed against "the divisions that the powers and authorities want to introduce" – on the last count specifically praying 'against the gods of nationalism.' Humorously, and with heavy ironic reference to the football tournament, Cathy Nobles concluded the meeting with a final prayer and the words, "God bless England!" to laughter all round.

If nationalism emerged as the theme of the June 2006 meeting, then a RW prayer day held in August that year was dominated by that of racial prejudice.[8] This was prefigured in discussion even before the leaders of the meeting began speaking. The meeting began with me being introduced. In order to avoid covert research and that I might approximate some level of informed consent, I explained my work, and how studying the RW had been transformative for me, and that I would be taking notes unless anyone objected (as the leader, Lynn Green, joked, "be careful what you pray – it may end up in a textbook!") My introduction prompted one of the participations, Georgina,[9] a late middle-aged white British woman, offered her experiences of how participating in the RW had led to a "seismic shift" in her thinking, going from being "very pro-Israel" to a radically different view of the Middle East conflicts and of theology.

Lynn Green began by saying:

> Today, we are going to pray for unity in the body of Christ. Our prayers are blunted when we don't pray with a sense of empathy towards people on both sides of this. It is important for us to reclaim the "two-eyed" perspective on the Middle East.

He explained that YWAM had had a 'word of knowledge' (understood as a direct revelation of God to the organisation) in the early 1990s that the organisation was looking at the Middle East with only "one eye," that is, through the lens of the state of Israel as the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy and thus deserving of partisan political support. He then proceeded to provide an account of the Arab-Israeli conflicts seen from an Israeli perspective, and asked if anyone identifies with that perspective.

Again, Georgina spoke up, saying that she did: 'we were taught to pray and rejoice in the return of Jesus to the land, even though we thought that this would involve a big battle. It was uncaring.' Lynn Green commented that although he now see[s] this end-times theology as "misguided," he exhorted humility and cautioned against judgementalism towards those who hold it. He went on to present an Arab/Palestinian perspective that foregrounded Palestinian grievances and historical narratives.[10] He concluded that, 'Our task is therefore to pray for both, empathise with them, remember that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Palestinian.' Following more open discussion, this led into an extended time of prayer for Palestinians and Israelis.

This was followed by a tea break, but the resumption showed that praying for others to understand the narratives of their enemies was productive of an introspective search for the same prejudice in oneself. Thus Lynn Green began by saying:

> I was speaking to Rudolph at the tea break, and as he reminded me, when we pray it is important to address the causes of sin and see if we have any remnants of that same sin in us. We have less provocation, but the same source may be there.

[8] Reconciliation Walk prayer day, Highfield Oval, Harpenden, 6/08/2006.

[9] Apart from Reconciliation Walk leaders, the names of other people cited have been replaced by pseudonyms.

[10] This approach of presenting parallel narratives of the same events was one that epitomized what the Peace Research Institute of the Middle East would later call the 'dual narrative approach' (Adwan and Bar-On 2012: x).

Rudolph, a late middle-aged white British man, then confessed:

> I was walking along a street with my wife the other day, and started grumbling about all the non-whites and the takeover of the street by people of different nationalities. I had also been in a hospital waiting room, and there were lots of translators waiting for people who had not turned up. I suddenly noticed that my wife was not by my side, and looked back, and she had stopped a few yards behind me. She said that she was suddenly convicted by the Holy Spirit who said to her, 'Whose street is this anyway?' Answer: it is God's street. We were very convicted of our prejudice.

Lynn Green invited the group to "wait on the Lord" to impress upon us awareness of similar sin: "purify us, and give us the gift of repentance," he prayed. There followed a time of silent prayer and meditation, which was productive of a number of similar prayers of confession. Angela, again a former participant of the RW from a similar demographic as the other participants mentioned, spoke up that she "really hate[s] the smell of curry," it makes her feel "physically sick." She continued that she was walking down the street past a curry house recently when she smelt the cooking, and felt ill, and said to herself that she hoped she "never had a neighbour move in who cooked that stuff." This story was presented as a prayer of repentance to God, complete with asking for forgiveness. Another participant told of a recent golfing outing with his friends, when he saw a couple of golfers on a parallel course who appeared to be of Pakistani background – an unusual sight on his golf course. He recounted that here was some confusion over whose ball was whose, and one of the other golfers kicked the speaker's ball into the longer grass to examine it. The speaker recounted that he was angry because that simply wasn't golfing etiquette, and he found himself saying to himself that it was because these people were foreign, they didn't understand. Again, this confession was accompanied by prayers of repentance.

The Reconciliation Walk prayer meetings would be understood in their own terms to exist to seek divine assistance and guidance for the organisation's activities. But they also have an obvious geopolitical significance. They act as a forum for a group of committed individuals to critically reflect on international relations in the light of their experiences on past prayer walks, and to support each other in pursuing activities that many in evangelical circles would be wary of. The combination of discussion and prayer challenges geopolitical designations of Christian-Muslim and US/UK-Middle Eastern relations as indelibly hostile. These alternative framings, and the supporting community in which they are generated and articulated, sustain both leaders and participants in what they would understand as their ongoing activities for Christian peacemaking.

162.6 Conclusion: Worship, Geopolitics and Peace

"The recent emergence of critical geopolitical study of evangelicalism is important and welcome. However by focusing largely on right-wing and militaristic evangelical geopolitics, it risks stereotyping this community as indelibly reactionary. It is thus also important to mine evangelicalism for its pacific geopolitics" (Megoran 2010).

One way to approach this is to explore not simply texts, but practices of worship. As Wannenwetsch contends, "For Christians, the experience of worship is seminal. It is here that they experience the presence of the acting and judging God in a formative way; and here, at the same time, a reflective ethics will emerge among them" (Wannenwetsch 2004:5). By considering preaching on apocalyptic scripture in Apartheid South Africa, prayer walking in the Middle East, and prayer meetings in the UK, this chapter has shown how more pacific practices of thinking about and doing geopolitics emerge from evangelical Christian worship.

Acknowledgements I am very grateful to Lynn Green and Cathy Nobles of the Reconciliation Walk for assistance with research for this chapter. Material for Sect. 162.3 has been drawn from "Radical politics and the Apocalypse: Activist readings of Revelation," forthcoming in *Area*. Material for Sect. 162.4 has been reworked from my article originally published as 2010 "Towards a geography of peace: pacific geopolitics and evangelical Christian Crusade apologies," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 35*(3), 382–398. I would like to thank Wiley for permission to reuse material in both cases: especially as not all journal publishers grant this without charging a fee nowadays.

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