

Not Too Late: Christian Mission amid Catastrophes

Introduction to This Issue

The keynote speaker for the spring 2024 World Mission Institute, an annual event co-sponsored by the Catholic Theological Union, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and McCormick Theological Seminary, focused on the task of Christian Mission during an era of catastrophic events brought about by climate change. “It is late, but not too late,” contended Barbara Rossing, who described both the dangers and losses we currently face and shared narratives (biblical and contemporary) of hopeful resistance to the exploitation of our “common home.” Naming this historical moment as a “*kairos* moment,” she presented a biblical and theological vision for that holy work, encouraging her listeners to take heart. “**Kairos for Creation, Kairos for Mission: Hope for Our Common Home**” is the opening article in the July 2025 issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission*.

Three thoughtful and engaging responses to Rossing’s presentation at the 2024 World Mission Institute follow:

In “Feeling the *Kairos* Moment: A Response to Barbara Rossing’s 2024 World Mission Institute Lecture,” **Marvin E. Wickware Jr.**, offers three conceptual shifts that could help Christians to accept the hopeful stance Rossing urged: a shift from a human-centered narrative to a planet-centered narrative, a shift from guilt to grace, and a shift from human dominance to human dependence.

Theodore Hiebert (“A Biblical Basis for Facing Environmental Catastrophe”) notes how Rossing has given us one of the strongest biblical images that the world matters and that it’s part of God’s

“It is late, but not too late.”

plan for the future: the vision of the new Jerusalem in the book of Revelation at the end of times descending to earth as God’s residence among us. He then invites us to abandon the classical theism which separates God from creation and asks us to recover the Old Testament God who creates the world and animates it by indwelling it and inspiring it.

In “Dark Spaces Birth New Stars,” **Joanne Doi** agrees with Rossing that the *kairos* moment of climate change is a critical moment when God is leading us into decisive action and demanding that we recognize the suffering and hope of Indigenous peoples throughout the earth. Her response attempts to bear witness to Indigenous peoples’ contributions, practices, and wisdom toward restoring the health of our common home, the Beloved Mother Earth.

That same spring, **Phyllis Anderson** addressed the 2024 graduating class of United Theological Seminary (“Heroic Leadership in Challenging Times”). This seminary commencement address lifts up radical changes in the church and its seminaries that were navigated in the speaker’s experience and points to even greater challenges ahead for the graduating class entering ministry. To serve through these deeply troubled times in a church with diminished power and resources will require leadership marked by heroic courage and generosity. The graduates are gifted and prepared for this work. A grateful church thanks them in advance

for all they are about to do.

By the spring of 2025, so much had changed. “Diversity, equity, and inclusion” endeavors were decried and punished. Immigrants and refugees increasingly find the United States a fearful and threatening place, unsure of whether even a legal immigration status is sufficient protection. When **Javier Alanis** addressed the 2025 World Mission Institute (“Immigration, the Story of the Church in Contested Spaces”), drawing on his experience as an immigrant, a lawyer, a pastor, and theological educator, he delved into the complexities of navigating the “Judaic law and gospel of the Christian tradition in tension with the civil and critical law of the state.” This tension is what many experience today—what are the “marks” of Christian mission for such a time as this?

The final essay in the July 2025 issue of *Currents*, “Spring Revolution in Myanmar (Burma): A Buddhist-Christian Perspective on the Revolutionary War,” is by **K.M.Y. Khawsiamma**. The author describes how the Myanmar military, known as the *Tatmadaw*, or *Sit-tat* in Burmese, seized power on February 1, 2021, sparking the “Spring Revolution” and widespread national resistance that has since evolved into a revolutionary war. Fearing the return of oppressive military rule, citizens (or *Ludu*) protested fiercely despite brutal crackdowns. Repression led to the radicalization of youth and the formation of People’s Defense Forces (PDF) to fight for democracy. This article explores the concepts of *Dhamma* (righteousness) and *Adhamma* (injustice) from Buddhist and Christian perspectives within the context of revolutionary warfare.

It is fitting to conclude this section with a reflection from another country that is struggling to uphold democracy in difficult and disheartening circumstances, amid the many temptations that afflict people in times that seem overwhelming and even hopeless.

We have two *Currents* Focus articles in this issue. **Jim Harries** observes how Christianity once was seen as irrelevant to anthropology and missionaries were removed from its research circles. Now anthropology is challenging its own foundations, insofar as it has Christian origins itself. The article exposes some deep problems in anthropology, as well as its deep roots in faith. New insights from Christianity can help anthropologists be more honest about their own foundations.

Kristin Johnston Largen provides a sermon and order of worship for a Blessing of Animals service that was held on the Commemoration of St. Francis of Assisi at Wartburg Theological Seminary. The sermon conveys why it is appropriate and meaningful to have a service of blessing the animals and provides encouragement for others to consider implementing the practice. The order of worship provides a guideline for elements that might be included in this service.

The introduction to **Preaching Helps** for this issue echoes the overall theme of climate change and holy resistance to the destruction of our beloved world. Several of the writers refer to the writings of Walter Brueggeman. None of them knew when they wrote that Walter Brueggeman would die on June 5. It is fitting to dedicate this issue of *Preaching Helps* to Brueggeman who wrote over 100 books and whose writings have inspired and

challenged preachers over his long career. Peace be to you, Walter, and thanks be to God for your brilliant, faithful life.

I have recently been reading *Life After Doom: Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart*, by Brian D. McLaren.¹ Faced with the possibility that there might not be a good outcome for the Earth despite all efforts toward that end, he embraces “a motivation that goes deeper than hope as commonly understood. This ‘hope against hope’ inspires the ‘energy to act when all hope for a good outcome is gone... We find courage and confidence, not in the likelihood of a good outcome, but in our commitment to love.’”²

It is not too late to be faithful to the One whose greatest commandment was to love. Such faithfulness is manifested in acts of care for our common home and for its most vulnerable inhabitants, for the acts of stubborn resistance to forces of violence and destruction. Not because we believe we will be successful, but because love demands no less, whatever the outcome.

Kathleen D. (Kadi) Billman

Co-Editor, *Currents in Theology and Mission*

1. Brian D. McLaren, *Life after Doom: Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart* (New York: St. Martin’s Publishing House, 2024).

2. McLaren, *Life after Doom*, 83-84.

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