

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Why Global Solidarities are a Matter of Life and Death: The Difference Religion Can Make

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Abstract

Even though the globe is moving closer together, solidarity among people appears to become more difficult. Nationalisms, racisms, ethnocentrisms, and sexism are on the rise, dividing and conquering and thereby producing false solidarities. While religion is often part of the problem, it can also become part of potential solutions. As the apostle Paul observes, “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor 12:26). This insight may hold true not only for personal relationships and communities but also for our global situation. The solidarity that emerges here goes deep, as it reconnects us with people, planet, and the divine.

Keywords: abrahamic traditions, capitalocene, christian nationalism, class analysis, colonialism, imperialism, privilege and power, racism, unite-and-conquer

What are We up Against?

Over the past centuries, global communities have been brought closer together by various factors. But while advances in technology have made travel and communication easier, the drivers of these developments were often rooted in colonising schemes of domination and exploitation. Such schemes can take on different forms, though the hard ones such as military conquest, enslavement, and extraction are easier to identify than the soft ones such as efforts focused on what was classified as education and civilisation. In Pasifika and elsewhere, soft and hard forms of colonialism often went hand in hand. Life and death are at stake, with native populations being decimated by the millions, including the sacrifice of those who were supposed to benefit from global expansion, like settlers and working people. In the process, any form of solidarity has become increasingly difficult if not impossible.²

¹ This article is an expanded version of a public lecture delivered by its author at Pasifika Communities University in Suva on 19 September, 2025.

² The quest for solidarity in the midst of our current troubles is the theme of my book *Theology in the Capitalocene*, particularly chapter 4 (Rieger 2022). The present article grows out of presentations given in Australia, Fiji, and New Zealand in the fall of 2025 and picks up the themes of the book in order to further the conversation.

In our search for new global solidarities, we need to begin by taking a closer look at the problems. What exactly are we up against in the early decades of the twenty-first century? While terms like globalisation, imperialism, and colonialism are still in use, talk about the Anthropocene seems to have taken center stage. Picking up on all these terms, I would like to suggest another term to describe what we are up against, the Capitalocene, as it combines some of the insights of each notion and moves us forward (Moore 2016; Rieger 2022).

The notion of the Capitalocene seeks to capture various global developments that have consequences for the future, not only of humanity but also the planet. Unlike the notion of the Anthropocene, it acknowledges that a closer look at the drivers of our geological age is needed (following the Holocene, the age in which human civilisations began to flourish after the last Ice Age eleven thousand years ago). While the notion of the Anthropocene suggests that the problem has to do with the sheer numbers of humanity, the notion of the Capitalocene talks about flows of power, with attention to the enormous flows of profit and influence at a time when the rich get richer and most people, and even the planet, are left behind.

One caveat when talking about the Capitalocene is that conversations about capitalism, especially in theological circles, have often turned into moral complaints. Typical critiques involve accusations of greed, consumerism, and selfishness, and sometimes end with demonising capitalists who should become more moral persons. Such critiques overlook the structures and relationships in place that constitute the foundations of the Capitalocene, which do not depend on individual moralities. In fact, if a corporate CEO were to turn away from the principles of capitalism, that person would be quickly replaced by another one. The same applies to the corporate leaders of the church.

Talking about the Capitalocene, therefore, is talking about the global relationships and flows of power that shape our age. It is not hard to see how relationships of power shape the current state of the global economy, and how these relationships of power also affect how politics is done, how cultures shape up, and so on. Most important for the study of theology and religion is the observation that the Capitalocene also has the power to shape faith and theological images at their very core.

Conversations about globalisation, imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, and even postcolonialism can also benefit from a clearer understanding of how power flows in the Capitalocene. Imperialism, for instance, is not merely a political project pursued by specific nations or politicians; it must be understood as a broader phenomenon where power flows underground. The same is true for critiques of colonialism and neocolonialism, as colonial relations have by-and-large shifted away from traditional political schemes (embodied in governors and viceroys) to economic relationships, and talk about postcolonialism makes little sense without awareness of the kinds of economic colonial relations that continue long after the end of political colonial arrangements.

Once relationships of power in the Capitalocene are clarified, it becomes clearer that those affected are not merely minorities but the majority of humanity, as well as the planet. We must look at the big picture, since as many as 99 percent of humanity who have to work for a living in order to make ends meet and to survive are on the receiving end of how power flows in the Capitalocene. Even the middle class in various locations around the world is increasingly in trouble, finding it ever more difficult to secure jobs once taken for granted. This crisis is not just for themselves but for the next generation, whose entry-level jobs are being replaced by Artificial Intelligence and whose utter replaceability becomes clearer every day.

In the United States, for example, the so-called American Dream that promises reward for hard work feels hollower than ever. Minorities who are led to believe that it is their turn to enjoy the American Dream

are competing with white supremacists who have not yet realised that the promises made to them by politician-billionaires like Donald Trump have been empty for a long time. In Pasifika, to give another example, it is clearer than elsewhere that deep-sea mining does not benefit the many but the few, because every aspect of life depends on the delicate balance of the oceans.

What about Theology and Religion?

At first sight, theology and religion might offer spaces less affected by the Capitalocene. How much money is at stake in the study of theology and religion? While the flow of corporate power and money may be less obvious in theology and religion, in the United States big money has directly influenced Christianity since the 1920s and 1930s, and this has spread to other parts of the globe. Moneyed interests, worried that Christianity would increasingly support progressive causes in the wake of the Great Depression, began funding conservative religion.

This flow of money is what made the rise of the evangelist Billy Graham's ministries and other conservative efforts possible, and this continues into the present (Kruse 2015; Philipps 2006; Kobes Du Mez 2020; Keddie 2020). In 1959, Billy Graham spent 16 weeks in Oceania, including a brief stop in Fiji. In the wake of this marriage of money and religion, conservative Christianity picked up heat, becoming more conservative than ever before and continuing that trajectory even today. Of course, Christianity is not the only battleground for big money and religion; other so-called world religions like Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism offer similar examples.

Well-funded efforts to shape religion trickle down into places where big money cannot reach otherwise. During my travels in Oceania and Pasifika in the fall of 2025, where the topics of this article were presented, I was surprised at how much attention the American Christian nationalist Charlie Kirk commanded, a person I had not paid much attention to before he was tragically shot in September 2025. Even theology students in Fiji, who can hardly expect to get rich off their ministries, were directly influenced by Kirk via social media. But few of Kirk's followers anywhere knew that he was not a self-made religious hero but put on the map by moneyed interests in the United States (Coates 2025).

Influences of big money and power on theological ideas are as disconcerting as influences into the life and practice of religion, embodied in faith communities. What holds the various communities of conservative Christianity together at the moment are the theological currents of *dominionism*. This is most clearly visible in Christian nationalisms, which believe that Christianity is called to determine all of life. The dominionist interpretation of the divine injunction to have "dominion" over the earth (Gen 1:28) has produced the so-called "Seven Mountains Mandate," according to which Christianity needs to subdue the mountains of family, religion, education, media, entertainment, business, and government.

Christian nationalism in the United States promotes a particular form of theocracy, whose forms are matched by other Christian nationalisms around the globe, although they may not be as pronounced elsewhere. In this way, the Capitalocene shapes top-down images of God that, at first sight, may appear to be in continuity with traditional images of God, but which further the interests of the dominant power in new ways. In Christianity, traditional images of divine top-down power go back to the early days. In the context of the Roman Empire, Christianity soon envisioned God in the image of the Roman emperors, with royal robes and insignia. As time went on, even Christ was envisioned in this way, sitting on a throne next to the Father. The Nicene Creed's emphasis on the *homoousia*, the sameness of substance between the two, added

its own emphasis to what I have described as the domestication of Christ by the empire (Rieger 2007, Chapter 2).

In the Capitalocene, images of the divine resembling the ruling powers go one important step further. While ancient emperors and monarchs were principally committed to the welfare of all, including the poorest of the poor, modern-day CEOs are exclusively committed to the welfare of the stockholders. This is part of their job description, and CEOs insisting on the welfare of their workers can be challenged and stopped in their tracks. This is what happened to Henry Ford, the founder of the Ford Motor Company, when he wanted to invest some of the company's profits into better working conditions (Roe 2021).

The God of the Capitalocene, therefore, musters a specific kind of power, which transcends even the powers of monarchs and reappears in Christian nationalist visions of dominionism. This is not only an economic problem, as even politicians and church leaders are increasingly expected to act like corporate bosses. During my travels in Pasifika, I began to wonder how much this flow is shaping even traditional communities and how it is transforming traditional leadership roles in families, villages, and other institutions.

At a time when both the survival of humanity and of much of life on the planet is at stake due to the increasing unsustainability of the flow of power in the Capitalocene, such top-down power has become a matter of life and death. This has repercussions for most of humanity, with the possible exception of those who are building their own survival bunkers, with the option to retreat and live when the going gets tough for the rest of life as we know it.

Alternative Images of God and Religion

In the Capitalocene, the problems of dominionism and the concomitant images of God as wielding CEO-like power cannot be resolved by merely proclaiming somewhat more benevolent images of God as ruler. Even the friendlier bosses of the Capitalocene must stay committed to its most basic rule: the increase of the wealth of the stockholders at all costs, including the cost of the welfare of the working majority, both human and other-than-human.

In this context, it may come as a surprise that in many of the Abrahamic traditions God is often envisioned as the opposite of a typical king and ruler. The stories of creation in the beginning of the book of Genesis talk about God as doing pottery work, when God forms Adam from clay or dust. A similar story can be found in the Qur'an. In the same parts of Genesis, there is mention of God planning a garden. In all of these cases, God is envisioned as a working person, getting the divine hands dirty, as it were. Images of God as performing menial labor can be found throughout the Hebrew Bible, including metal work, agricultural work, pottery making, and work often relegated to women such as cleaning, sewing, cooking, baking, etc. (Banks 2008).

Other images of God shared by all three Abrahamic traditions include the Exodus of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt. The miracle of the burning bush, for instance, can be interpreted as the miracle of God speaking to Moses (Ex 3:1–12). While Jewish and Christian interpretations sometimes get stuck with the miraculous phenomenon of a bush in the desert that is burning but not consumed, Islamic interpretations assume that the miracle is God speaking to Moses. To take this one step further, we might argue that the real miracle is what God is saying from the burning bush, namely that God has seen the misery of the slaves, heard their cry, and knows their suffering. At times when the divine is envisioned in terms of dominant powers and empires, whether ancient or modern, envisioning the divine as taking the side of the enslaved is indeed a miracle.

Images of the divine taking the side of enslaved people not only challenge images of the divine as siding with the dominant powers sitting on thrones or situated in the corner offices of the Capitalocene. Such images of the divine also challenge somewhat more enlightened images of the divine as residing above the struggle, embodying fairness and neutrality. The God who liberates the slaves and wanders with them through the desert differs fundamentally from classical images of impartial Lady Justice, blindfolded and holding a scale in addition to her sword.

These ancient images, while having their own limits, offer powerful examples of divine solidarity with the working majority, with God joining their struggles rather than remaining unaffected and situated in higher spheres. And once God has taken sides, there is no turning back in the history of the Abrahamic religions. The only question a theologian might ask is, *what took so long?*

A final image of divine solidarity with the multitude is the miracle of Christmas in Christianity. Assuming that God had choices, Jesus being born into a working-class family is a substantial commitment, especially since Jesus being born into a family at the top of the Galilean or Roman food chains would have major advantages for the spread of Christianity. Adding to that is the odd miracle of the heavenly angels serenading day labourers in the fields who were taking care of other people's animals (Luke 2:8–14), when a display of the heavenly hosts in Jerusalem or Rome would have created an entirely different level of publicity and would have gone down in the official history of the world.

The question may, of course, be raised whether by turning images of God from their heads to their feet we are simply replacing one anthropomorphic image of God with another one. Is envisioning God in the image of working people the same mistake as envisioning God in the image of the rulers? The difference, it might be argued, is that one of these mistakes is easier to commit than the other. Those looking for a “higher power” and “that than which nothing greater can be conceived” (Anselm of Canterbury) have always found it easier to look up rather than down. A Jesus accepting the offer of the devil to wield power over all the kingdoms of the earth rather than refusing it (Matt 4:8–10) would have had an easier life, probably not ending up on one of the imperial crosses reserved for revolutionaries, accomplishing what present-day Christian nationalist dominionists want.

In addition, the ancient traditions portraying God in the image of the working majority cannot be as easily explained as traditions portraying God in the corresponding dominant images of the day, which seem to be moving history and the world. This is also part of what the story of Jesus is usually about: Jesus consistently refusing to conform to the dominant images of the day. Many of his contemporaries were disappointed in him not because he claimed to be the Messiah, whose coming they longed for, but because he turned out to be different from the Messiah they expected who would come in the form of dominant power.

In sum, Christianity has a real edge here that is often ignored both by conservatives, who opt for authoritarian dominionism, and by liberals who opt for unoffensive pluralism. How might this religious edge help shape global solidarities, and what are the roadblocks we still have to engage?

False Solidarities as a Global Problem

The unacknowledged problem of the Capitalocene is that there are always more people than rulers. Talking about the Anthropocene, when humanity as a whole is supposedly taking over the planet, helps cover this up, which may help to explain why the term has become so popular.

While in classical empires, monarchies, and colonialisms top-down power is generally accepted, modern democracies can present a problem for the few because they promote the rule of the majority. How

can the few keep in power over the many in the Capitalocene and still maintain the semblance of democracy? When classical empires needed to shore up the power of the few, they typically resorted to divide-and-conquer methods—for instance, when some were declared to be more human than others, or when the different roles were clearly marked and accepted: some as workers, some as slaves, and others as born to a life of higher things. While some divide-and-conquer continues, this has become more difficult with the end of classical empires, monarchies, and colonialisms.

Compared to the empires of old, domination in the Capitalocene is more difficult to identify, even as power differentials have grown more severe than ever. As modern democracies assume their compatibility with capitalism and even create space for the inclusion of minorities (even in the United States some corporations still tend to follow the guidelines of “diversity, equity, and inclusion” [DEI], against Donald Trump’s wishes), the few seem to have more power over the many than at any other time in history.

In the Capitalocene, the few are managing to stay in power by producing false solidarities, what I have called “unite-and-conquer” methods (Rieger 2022, Chapter 4). Racism may serve as an example. White supremacy in the United States, for instance, in full force beginning with the enslavement of African Americans, suggests to white people that they are superior to all non-white people. In this way, white supremacy employs the help of white people in conquering non-white people.

This is also true for the Eurocentrism that is often observed in Pasifika and many other formerly colonised places. Under the conditions of the Capitalocene, however, white supremacy also works in the other direction by helping to conquer most white people, because it makes white people ignore the differences between bosses and workers that are at the heart of the exploitative and extractive relationships that define the structures of our age. A similar insight applies to how Eurocentrism leads to ignoring the differences between the European colonisers who accrued the lion’s share of colonialism and most of their helpers, including many missionaries.

Another example of unite-and-conquer are dominant nationalisms. In Nazi Germany, for instance, German nationalism led Germans to believe that their nationality rendered them superior to all other nations. The result was Adolf Hitler’s total war that accrued profits for the elites, including some non-German corporations like IBM, but hardly benefited most Germans, many of whom were left behind, wounded, or killed. And even if Germany had won World War II, the victory was never designed to benefit the masses as much as the elites.

American-style Christian nationalism displays some of the very same traits when it promises, with Donald Trump, that America will be made great again, a scheme which once again is designed to benefit the few rather than the many. Economic, political, and religious developments in the United States after Trump’s 2024 election to the presidency tell the story. In all of these examples, images of God are used to support false solidarities, supporting racism, Eurocentrism, nationalism, sexism, etc., assuring that the few stay in power over the many.

Unfortunately, liberal forms of solidarity are not in a position to provide viable alternatives. Too often, these solidarities are based on well-meaning moral appeals to support the victims, to “speak truth to power,” or to be a voice for those who are supposedly voiceless. Comments from those in the struggle explain the problems with liberal solidarity. Lilla Watson, an Australian aboriginal activist, artist, and academic, is

often quoted as saying: “If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”³

In the South African struggle against Apartheid, the theologian Basil Moore had this to say: “Like most of us, I am prepared to trust and stand alongside a man who is fighting for himself and his own freedom if I know that his freedom is bound up with mine. I cannot wholeheartedly trust a man who is fighting for me, for I fear that sooner or later he will tire of the struggle” (Moore 1973, 5). While Watson politely notes the futility of liberal solidarity that ignores the common struggle, Moore points out the underlying problems: Without deeper solidarity, moralising appeals to support others tend to result in people burning out and walking away, sooner or later. Those of us who have been in the struggle for a long time are witnesses to this.

Global Deep Solidarity

If conservative false solidarity is part of the problem and liberal solidarity is not substantial enough to provide alternatives, what are other options? Consider the Abrahamic traditions of the Exodus one more time. Solidarity is at the heart of these stories, although this is often overlooked. Moses is not the lone hero of the story, and not even God is acting unilaterally. Growing up in Pharaoh’s palace, when Moses first wakes up to the exploitation of the Hebrew slaves, he acts alone and kills one of the slave masters. This solipsistic act does not lead to liberation, although it exposes Moses to the false solidarity of the palace, from which he has to flee in order to save his life (Ex 2:11–15). Moses learns the value of solidarity as a working person, realising that he cannot accomplish things by himself. As a result, he acknowledges his solidarity with the people, including his brother Aaron and his sister Miriam.

Even more important, the solidarity in which Moses eventually finds himself has been building all his life. Early on, the Jewish and Christian traditions tell us that his life was saved by the Hebrew midwives Shipra and Puah, his mother and his sister being involved. According to these traditions, Pharaoh’s daughter adopts the baby and raises him. In the Muslim traditions, Pharaoh’s wife, Asiya bint Muzahim, sides with the Hebrew slaves in the end. Asiya is one of only two women in Islam, alongside Maryam the mother of Isa (Jesus), who reached perfection, according to the Prophet Muhammad.

And, finally, in the Exodus stories God openly joins this growing solidarity, shifting the theological tables. This is a major part of these traditions, not only because the divine identified in concrete struggles but also because the dominant idea that the divine is on the side of the powers-that-be is challenged once and for all. Down the road, even the Canaanites seem to have become part of the resistance against the empires and their gods. While some of the ancient stories tell of a conquest, some scholars have argued, based on other ancient stories, that what happened was the formation of solidarity between the former Hebrew slaves and Canaanite peasant populations who were exploited by wealth and powerful city states (Gottwald 1979).

What is the basis of these solidarities? It is not moral exhortation. Neither are general principles like ethnicity, common humanity, or human dignity at the heart of the story. Even the value of religion for solidarity is limited, as religion evolves alongside the formation of solidarity: God eventually joins in solidarity, and the people experience the divine in a process that is never quite complete.

In contrast to all these forms of building solidarity, which have their value, the basis of solidarity in these ancient stories is something many labour unions, beginning with the Industrial Workers of the World

³ Dr. Watson prefers that the quote is attributed to “Aboriginal Activists Group Queensland, 1970s.” <https://uniting.church/lilla-watson-let-us-work-together/>.

(IWW, the so-called Wobblies), still recognise: “An injury to one is an injury to all.” The emerging solidarity is the solidarity of enslaved people. The apostle Paul says as much when he concludes his reversal of the Roman imperial vision of the organically related body by observing that “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor. 12:26).

In the same passage, Paul also challenges how the dominant body of empire works, building itself up in relation to the labour of others and then trying to ignore it, noting that “the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable” (1 Cor. 12:21–22). Similar experiences of solidarity were made during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the English term *essential workers* was coined, signifying the reality of solidarity that is commonly ignored.

Solidarity is also at the heart of another biblical tradition that is typically presented in moralising terms. The second half of Jesus’ double commandment, “love your God ... and love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30–31) can indeed be read as an ethical exhortation to care about others. But it can also be understood as saying that neighbors are part of the self (following the work of Jewish philosophers Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas). In these interpretations, self and neighbor are connected whether this is realised or not, and the best way to realise this is to embrace it. This is the foundation of deep solidarity (Kwok and Rieger 2012; Rieger and Henkel-Rieger 2016; Rieger 2022).⁴

Deep solidarity reminds us of the deep connections of self and other that are already in place. The important insight to add here is that these solidarities are often produced by outside pressures that weld people together. Combined with an understanding of the Capitalocene as relational flows of power, the relation of self and neighbor can now be observed at all levels, not merely as interpersonal relations (where most philosophers ended their reflections) but also as political and economic ones, which shape us all the way to the core.

Once it is clear that deep solidarity is not based in identity or sameness—marching in lockstep, talking, dressing, or looking alike is not necessary—diversity can be reclaimed. Unlike conservative efforts to limit diversity or liberal efforts at tolerating or celebrating diversity, deep solidarity puts diversity to use for the common good. It may seem paradoxical, but diversity strengthens deep solidarity rather than weakening it. Solidarity, grounded where the pressure is greatest, brings together the best of various backgrounds and identities, not to harmonise them but to put them to use. Cultured, ethnicised, racialised, gendered, sexualised, and other identities can now make their own contributions to common liberation. It would be interesting to explore further the wisdom and contributions of indigenous societies, but this is beyond the purview of what can be done here.

Diversity is not accidental to this solidarity, because in the Capitalocene the working majority is the most diverse body the world has ever seen. And this solidarity may eventually prove stronger than any dominionist efforts at controlling people and the planet, as it includes not only human but also other-than-human actors (Moore 2016), an insight that is also deeply rooted in many indigenous traditions. The driving forces of the Capitalocene definitely seem to be worried about this, which is why their pushback is so severe.

⁴ The term ‘deep solidarity’ was developed in various projects, starting with the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011 (Kwok and Rieger 2012; Rieger and Henkel-Rieger 2016; Rieger 2022).

Confusing Privilege and Power

As deep solidarity is produced as an unintended consequence by the pressures exerted by the dominant powers, welding people and planet together, the dominant powers are making every effort to stop it in its tracks. We have already discussed their divide-and-conquer and unite-and-conquer strategies, which have proven to be very successful.

Moving deeper into solidarity, one additional factor must be addressed that constrains solidarity from within. This factor is at work when those seeking to build on the foundations of deep solidarity confuse privilege and power. While this confusion is at work in many well-meaning efforts to transform the world, it may have a special place in faith communities and takes us back to the perils and promises of religion.

Before examining this confusion, it must be stated clearly that privilege is real. It exists in many forms and is often unearned, such as white privilege, male privilege, straight privilege, national privilege, the privilege of physical ability, the privilege of dominant religion, and so on. Still, even a conglomerate of these privileges does not necessarily translate into real power, defined here as the ability to transform the status quo. This power is not merely the ability to make something happen but the ability to transform and substantially change the dominant flows of power which, in the Capitalocene, are in the hands of the very few at the top of the system.

Furthermore, the distinction of privilege and power is not meant to let people with privilege off the hook because of their lack of power. The opposite is the case: Realising that privilege does not necessarily translate into power can enable privileged people to use their privilege differently, which amounts to acts of repentance in which privilege is deconstructed and redirected. Theologically speaking, distinguishing privilege and power is an effort to understand particular forms of sin, without which calls to repentance and even conversion will always be misdirected (Rieger 2022, 170–173).

White supremacy, once again, may serve as an example of confusing privilege and power. In a racialised world, all white people have privilege, but not all white people have the power to change the world. Failure to distinguish privilege and power distributes the blame for systemic racism to all white people evenly, which amounts to letting those who hold real power to change things off the hook. This guarantees that nothing ever changes because without distinguishing privilege and power, the ruling class disappears from view and is able to wield its power without being called out. This, I would argue, is the biggest problem in the Capitalocene, and this is why transformation and change are so hard to accomplish.

Typical challenges to Christian nationalism provide another example for this problem, as the confusion of privilege and power leads to blaming the many foot soldiers of Christian nationalism while letting their enablers and financiers off the hook. This confusion, therefore, reinforces the reign of dominant power rather than challenging it. More importantly, this confusion of privilege and power offers little help in the conversion of these foot soldiers who—receiving all the blame—are now affirmed even more in their own confusion of privilege and power.

Missionaries may serve as another example from the world of theology and religion. When compared to their flocks, missionaries have clear privileges. Nevertheless, the power of most missionaries—except the most prominent ones—is often surprisingly limited. The history of missionaries to the Native Americans may serve as a case in point. Over a period of 400 years, these individuals supported various forms of colonialism, from which they rarely benefited themselves (Tinker 1993).

Failure to realise the confusion of privilege and power directs all blame to the missionaries and lets the colonial powers off easy. Common critiques of settler colonialisms without distinguishing privilege and

power display similar tendencies, sheltering the driving forces. In both cases, when assigning all blame to missionaries and settler colonialists, what is foreclosed is not only a sense of the deeper problems but—and this is most crucial—the path to conversion and the ability to envision the formation of alternative power and solidarity.

Without a more profound understanding of how power flows, the privileged are hobbled by illusions of power, assuming that all they need to do is to “speak truth to power,” or become a “voice for the voiceless.” While such efforts may lead to some improvements, they fail to challenge dominant power at its core. Moreover, the illusion of power by the privileged can prevent others who buy into this illusion from pursuing their own power. Worst of all, it prevents deeper solidarity from being built and it stops in its track what is most needed: the formation of alternative power based on the broad solidarity of the 99 percent. The result is frustration all around; as the many fall back, only the few at the very top advance.

Who, then, needs to build alternative power in the Capitalocene? This brings the conversation back to the awareness of the many and the few at the top, which is covered up by the notion of the Anthropocene but crucial for the formation of global solidarities. But even among the many, some distinctions still matter in the formation of solidarity. Marginalised minorities play an important role because they help the many see what the system is really like and what it is capable of. The many can learn from the marginalised not only what compounded exploitation and extraction looks like, but also what resilience looks like. This is perhaps clear in the Global South as well as in the Global North, seeing that, as in the Global North, similar structures of exploitation and extraction are at work that make life hard for increasing numbers of people. Child poverty rates of up to 30 percent in the United States tell their own story.

For those benefiting from privilege but with little power—in the Global North and the Global South—a particular kind of repentance is needed in order to engage in global solidarity. Rather than divesting themselves of their privilege, they can learn to put it to use in building power with the many rather than the few at the top. Only privilege that understands its limits can be redirected and thereby deconstructed, as privilege without understanding the limits of power tends to serve the dominant powers.

Using the example of male privilege, rather than divesting from it, men can use their privilege to dismantle patriarchy, once they recognise their solidarity with women in a patriarchal system built on the backs of women—to wit, the underpayment of women often leads to keep men’s wages down as well. For men, deepening their solidarity with women means that they will become traitors and will be treated as such, but this is precisely how privilege is redirected and alternative power is built, which will eventually benefit everyone.

Finally, building global solidarity in the Capitalocene requires an analysis of power informed by a deeper understanding of social class, which is key in the distinction of privilege and power. The goal of class analysis is not merely to understand the flow of dominant power better, refusing to let the ruling class off the hook, but also to gain the ability to do something about it (Rieger 2022, Chapter 3). Class analysis benefits solidarity by helping to clarify what side people are on at a time when the success of the Capitalocene depends on sowing confusion.

In sum, what ties the many together, extending beyond humanity to other-than-human nature, are structures of exploitation and extraction that make use of human and interspecies diversity for their own benefit. Class—as exploitative and extractive relationships rather than stratification—is still the most difficult topic to address, even after more than five decades of evolving liberation theologies. Solidarity is closely linked to the recognition that the working class is the majority everywhere, even in the Global North. The working

majority is the most diverse conglomerate the world has ever seen, and it extends in various directions: All those who have to work for a living are affiliated with it, even the casually employed and the under- and unemployed, including people with disabilities, all the way to fairly well-paid professionals who may enjoy some privilege but whose power to change things is embarrassingly small.

As global solidarity continues to form, resisting unite-and-conquer strategies and seeing through the confusion of privilege and power, it becomes clear that even the middle class, where many religious professionals both in the Global North and the Global South feel they belong, is not a safe space but is one of the prime places where the battle is being waged. This is true not only for the economy (think middle management), but also for politics (think elections) and religion (think religious nationalisms). Winning the battle will depend on developing global solidarity, starting from below.

Conclusions: Divine Solidarity

These reflections lead back to the place of the divine in the formation of global solidarities. As argued above, in the Abrahamic traditions God is constantly taking sides. This observation leads to an interesting paradox: Taking sides might seem to make God more universal rather than less. How is this possible?

The classical universalism of the Enlightenment, as many critics have argued, was never truly universal because it unwittingly universalised something particular. Classical liberal theology, talking about the human in universal terms, presupposed the particular image of privileged white men with some power. Classical religious theory assumed that universal religious experience was found in its highest forms in dominant cultures. Solidarity seemed unnecessary because the system was oriented towards the top, and it was assumed that what was considered lower sought to imitate what was considered higher (Rieger 2007, Chapter 5).

The emerging global solidarities presented in this essay, by contrast, are oriented towards the bottom. These solidarities might be described in terms of a different kind of love. Mary, the mother of Jesus, notes God's love for the lowly and downtrodden. This is a recurring theme throughout the Bible. Love for the bottom is linked to another phenomenon also prominent in the Bible that is less frequently acknowledged: love for the bottom tends to come with challenges for the top.

Mary herself puts it strongly: The God who lifts up the lowly pushes the powerful from their thrones, and the God who fills the hungry with good things sends the rich away empty (Luke 1:52–53). What happens to the powerful and the rich here may be difficult to discuss in polite company, including faith communities, but it is important—being pushed from their thrones and being sent away empty may be part of divine love. It may be the only hope for the lowly and the hungry, whose lowliness and hunger are not self-caused, but it may also be the only hope for the powerful and the rich who are thus brought to self-awareness and called to repentance. Deep solidarity can take on shape where this love is at work.

Divine love is, therefore, not one-size-fits-all, but neither is global solidarity. The Abrahamic religious traditions push towards this recognition, and the stories of Moses, Asiya, and Jesus serve as timeless reminders that another solidarity—different from the false solidarities of the Capitalocene and the shallow solidarities of the do-gooders—is indeed possible.

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