
OneAccord 2022: A Synopsis

Emmanuel Jatau, Dwight S.M. Mutoonono,
Thomas S. Soerens, and Becca Spradlin

A brief overview of the Accord Network's 2022 annual summit's main plenary sessions and the three associated one-day "pre-conference intensives" of the Accord Research Alliance (ARA), Christian Economic Development Network (CED), and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Alliance (WASH).

The Accord Network held its annual OneAccord summit at the Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina this past October 11-13, 2022. Here is a partial summary of the hot topics that kept our attention in the plenary presentation and the three one-day intensives.

The three main *Plenary Sessions* were led by Brian Fikkert, Jayakumar Christian, and Mindy Caliguire. The first two are well-known in Christian Development circles, and Caliguire is director of spiritual formation at Willow Creek Community Church in the Chicago area.

For several decades, **Mindy Caliguire** has helped the Christian community see the importance of caring for our souls, and in this session, she began with the warning that the most threatening humanitarian crisis we are facing globally is the health of our leaders' souls, many of which are suffering through such common ailments as exhaustion and the severe depletion of their faith-oriented energy; in other words, burnout. When Jesus said "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" (Matt 16:26), he was talking to his disciples, not the crowd.

Caliguire noted that a neglected soul experiences disconnection with God. Symptoms include anger, bitterness, rage, insomnia, muscle tensions, digestive problems, fear, panic, dread, isolation, and self-hatred. Well-connected souls, on the other hand experience joy, love, compassion, peace, hope, resilience, motivation, and kindness. For those whose souls are connected, these virtues can exist even in the direst circumstances.

Ultimately, she offered the vital reminder that life does not really depend on us and our own resources, but that it arises in conjunction with our connection to God. No surprise then that everything hinges on remaining connected. Who makes the choice to disconnect or reconnect? We do. The soul's well-being

drives everything else, and care of the soul is thus critical.

For his part, **Brian Fikkert** reviewed key lessons from his and Kelly Kapik's 2019 book, *Becoming Whole: Why the Opposite of Poverty Isn't the American Dream* (See *CRDA* review [here](#)). Fikkert's main point is that so much of humanitarian aid depends on a theory of change that is not rooted in God's story. That is because the dominant theory (or story) of change in the Global North derives from Western naturalism, which is imbibed by the humanitarian community and then imposed on the rest of the world. The main character in this story is "homo economicus," a self-centered, materialistic, autonomous creature whose goal is consumption.

It is true that we should cheer the fact that global *material* poverty has declined as the market system inspired by this story has spread, but we must also acknowledge that, in the most prosperous parts of the world, as people become materially wealthier, they do not become happier. Now, as globalization spreads Western-style markets and capitalism to the rest of the world, these same patterns are emerging. Along with so many others, Christians too have bought into this story. We totally emphasize the material, ritualistically praying to God on Sundays, but adopting the American dream story at the same time. Consequently, Christians too are ever more anxious and depressed.

Contrast this with the biblical story that focuses on a relational, Trinitarian God, in whose image we are also made. Since those early days in the Garden of Eden, humans have witnessed a five-fold set of changes. First, a false story of change and well-being is accepted (many different ones have found favor throughout history); second, image-bearing humans become gradually more broken, which leads to destructive formative practices, broken systems, and, finally, to the entrance of demonic forces. The biblical solution to this dilemma is for Jesus to usher in the kingdom and

reverse this story of decline so that the story turns from one of increasing brokenness to one of restoration of our relationships with God, self, others, and the creation, through Christ. This is the story that Accord members need to adopt and do their best to spread.

In the third plenary session, **Jayakumar Christian** promoted the construction of a theology of transformation, requiring us to search the mind of God. A theology of transformation challenges the tendency of so many of us to play God in the lives of others. When people play God in the lives of others, poverty, oppression, injustice, and abuse are birthed.

Like Fikkert, Christian argued that secular ideologies have hijacked the humanitarian industry. We need to heed the message of 2 Cor 10: 4-6, in which we are called to demolish any ideology that does not properly honor God. Such a theology requires us to challenge the system itself with the “scandal of the cross,” which challenges today’s dominant worldviews. The story of the demon-possessed man in Mark 5:1-13 provides four transformational principles for constructing this theology:

1. A shift from the crowd to one person. The poor, oppressed, and abused are often so marginalized that they are not called by name. God invites us to the margins where each person is known by their name.
2. Status quo reversal. If the poor rise, or are blessed or developed, the mainstream becomes disturbed. When we work with the poor we are in the business of challenging and reversing the status quo.
3. He is calm and they were afraid. When the poor are blessed, the rich become disturbed. The poor’s identity should not be marred through dehumanization and instrumentalization. They are made in the God’s image, not outcasts or cursed or a statistic. Our presence with the poor must be an incarnational presence. Not necessarily geographically present. Incarnation can be defined as giving up what rightly belongs to one. It is an investment of life. Our character and spirituality matter. Time with God matters.
4. Empowerment is not just about transfer of power; it is redefining power itself. The agent of transformation in this story was the demon-possessed man. It causes us to encounter the God of the kingdom, to go and tell others what God has done for us.

In addition to plenary sessions, there were three one-day “intensives,” each organized by one of three thematic groups, WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) Alliance, ARA (Accord Research Alliance), and CED Network (Christian Economic Develop-

ment). In each of these sessions, invited speakers shared their ideas, after which participants talked them over in small groups, shared their own experiences, and ultimately tried to learn from each other.

The WASH Alliance intensive addressed the theme of “Innovations in Water Delivery” in a session attendees referred to informally as “Revenge of the Engineers” due to an intentional focus on the technical. Even so, technically- and practically-minded people in the session continued to root their hopes for clean water and sanitation in a broader vision of God’s kingdom coming.

Citing evidence from World Vision’s experience, Ray Norman spoke on the need to include Christian and Muslim faith leaders in the implementation of WASH programs. As trusted and credible authorities in communities, they are key to the successful implementation of health programs (Norman and Odotei 2019).

Abe Wright and Michael Cook from Design Outreach updated their progress on fighting against a global epidemic of handpump maladies, noting that way too many handpumps around the world are broken and inoperable. Among the technical innovations discussed during the day were the following:

- Remote monitoring of hand-pumps that provides real-time information on handpump performance
- Solar-Powered Water System (SPWS) that include design tool software for designing solar water pumping systems.
- Effective community water pumping stations.
- Best practices in water well drilling.
- Working through ever-present challenges.

Thomas Soerens closed with reflections on “What Engineers Can Learn from Missionary Pioneers” pointing out that the most successful missionaries have always followed what today we call “holistic” or “integral mission” strategies.

Brian Fikkert kicked off **the CED Network** intensive by challenging and encouraging participants in their pursuit of transformative economic development.

Fikkert’s opening talk led into a highly participatory learning session that revolved around five communities of practice that fall under the CED umbrella: 1) Microfinance, Small and Medium Enterprises, and Impact Investing, 2) Savings Groups, 3) Agriculture, 4) Integral Mission, and 5) Business Training and Mentoring.

Group conversations were initiated by presentations on cases from member organizations. Under the theme “Innovation to Overcome Challenges in Christ-centered Economic Development,”

participants formed teams that built off of the case studies presented. These groups enjoyed the opportunity to practice using holistic, design-thinking principles in a session facilitated by Tabitha Kapic, Chalmers Center's director of innovation. The [Innovate](#) curriculum she used, which is available at the Chalmers Center for both majority world deployment and main office contexts, fed into rich and sustained discussions among all the participants.

As CED steering committee chair, Becca Spradlin, said, "God answered our many prayers for this event. Brian and Tabitha were incredibly intentional in their preparation and shared generously with participants from their rich, global experience."

To learn about future CED events and to join for free, visit cednetwork.org. Special thanks to [HOPE International](#) for their many years of sponsoring the CED Network and generously providing event support staff to make this gathering a success!

The Accord Research Alliance's focus for its 2022 intensive was the issue of decolonization, with the theme being "Nothing About Us Without Us: A Kingdom Perspective for Sharing Love & Power in Evaluation and Research Practice." Through presentations by Jayakumar Christian, Nina Kurlberg and Jo Cribben from Tearfund; video case studies that included presenters from both the global North and South from Tearfund, Sustainable Medical Missions, and 4Africa; and a panel consisting of Jayakumar Christian, Nina Kurlberg, Jo Cribbin, David Snyder (Sustainable Medical Missions), and Christian Marin (4Africa); the main points of the day were the following:

1. When used in relation to relief and development (R&D), the term decolonization today refers to the undoing of colonial rule and empire. It describes how colonialism continues to influence R&D through logics dependent on structures, systems, and organizational cultures developed in the world's previous colonial centers.
2. Decolonization is a commitment to giving power away, a commitment to the process of inclusion. Previously marginalized people who were the passive recipients of benevolence need to be treated as fully human and able not only to contribute to the discussion about interventions, but to lead the process.
3. For Christian organizations, this task is especially complex because of the way that the world of humanitarian assistance has been hijacked by secularism. Based on 2 Cor 10: 4-6, Christians are called to pull down strongholds and cast down arguments raised against the knowledge of God. This means challenging structures, processes, and

the worldviews behind them. The kingdom of God is based on the relationship of the triune God. We should therefore focus on relationships. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should not just be program-based, but relationally-driven, inclusive, and collaborative.

4. The decolonizing approach to research and M&E points us toward seeking epistemic justice. Research must be mutually beneficial, mutually constructive, and justice seeking. Justice comes through moving to margins and decentering power. The process should place the voices and epistemologies of people from the "Global South" in the center.
5. Tearfund has developed a theological framework for inclusion. They have also discovered interpreting inclusion depends on the context. *Access, participation, and acceptance* are some of the words researchers found people using to describe it. Tearfund's theological framework includes the following components:
 - a. **Power analysis** - To identify marginalized voices, we first need to identify where power sits. Where does power sit? How is it used? Who sets the research objectives?
 - b. **Intentional listening** - As we identify these voices, we need to make sure we are listening.
 - c. **Co-construction** - Are we working beyond colonial languages? For example, who decides what rich, high-quality research looks like? Who defines such concepts as "well-being," "quality of life," or "development?" Is our research explicit about the context that it is developed in and for? What will participants gain from the research?
 - d. **Rhythms and practices of discernment** - Creating spaces for colleagues to discern both individually and collectively. Recognize that discernment prayer and fasting are tools.
 - e. **The legitimacy of difference** - Giving up power, and hearing from many different people.
6. One risk of moving to the margins is that new structures of colonizing power can be established. New dominant voices can arise. Things can continue to be done in the same way, and listening can stop.

Finally, in consideration of the role of spiritual metrics, Jayakumar Christian proposed the thesis that poverty is embedded in people's spirituality, meaning that sustainable impact is not possible unless spirituality is addressed. Spirituality is people's articulation of profound issues like God's purpose and the purpose of life. These conceptions are embedded in our worldviews. The moment a separate slice or domain

called spirituality is created, it can be co-opted into a program and even relegated to the periphery. Spirituality needs to be at the center of the conversation, because it is about restoring the sense of God-imaging, and we should not slice off the measuring of spiritual impact from the whole.

The presentations for the ARA and WASH intensives are available [here](#).

References

- Fikkert, Brian and Kelly M. Kapik. 2019. *Becoming Whole: Why the Opposite of Poverty Isn't the American Dream*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.
- Norman, Ray and Odei Odotei. 2019. "Faith Integration and Christian Witness in Relief and Development: Reflections and Practical Guidance for Field Teams." *Christian Relief, Development, and Advocacy: The Journal of the Accord Network* 1(1): 31-43.
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Emmanuel Jatau is a doctoral student at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Dwight S.M. Mutonono serves on the international council his church, Faith Ministries.

Thomas S. Soerens is professor of civil and environmental engineering at Messiah University.

Becca Spradlin is the founder of [On Mission Advisors](#).
