

Globalization and Christian Missions

9/2005

Globalization can be defined as the breakdown of social and technological barriers across the planet toward the creation of a one-world grid of increasing connection, interdependency and homogeneity. Markets, communications, information, physical access, and culture now, for the first time, have a planetary base. Globalization could be defined as movement toward a one-world culture. Globalization puts hydraulic pressure upon developing-world cultures. Members want what developed nations enjoy, contributing to urban migration and brain-drain, and the pressures to survive without the check of the village. 141,000 non-Christians migrate to the city every day¹.

Many of us now have a shadow-consciousness of the global situation as we form decisions and set priorities. Globalization does not equal a global American cultural or economic hegemony. Information, culture and money travel in too many directions.

Paradoxically, the dual forces of balkanization— which I would describe as the primary identification coming from increasingly narrow religious, tribal and regional political groups—and homogeneity--exposure to global information and messages tending to unify cultures--coexist². People preserve personal identity as they cling to ever-smaller regional or religious identities, yet their cultures tend to homogenize.

According to a report by the U.S. intelligence community, in the coming decades, “governments will have less and less control over flows of information, technology, diseases, migrants, arms, and financial transactions, whether legal or illegal, across their borders....The very concept of ‘belonging’ to a particular state will probably erode.”³

The best and worst of cultures proliferate via media. I last saw one African pastor in full traditional garb (golden robe and round, flat hat). The next year he was beneath an 8-gallon Texas lid, wearing half-tone ruby glasses and jeans. Cellphones (he had one), jeans and rap are current markers of globalization. Seeing Indian, then Kenyan teens moving to Indianized or Africanized rap on TV is astounding. How could Black rap dominate pop youth cultures of both Kenya and India?--through MTV, CDs and radio. Hollywood dominates global cinema. Moral filth flows freely over cables and airwaves and Web, dragging down cultures.

How do we go about Christian missions differently because of globalization?
What do networked nations say to missions?

Impact upon giving

An African pastor asked for well over \$100,000 for land and a house. A missionary tries to raise \$135,000 to serve in Europe. These requests can now be put alongside an opportunity to plant a new church in Uganda for about \$25,000, or giving to MAP for medicines for southern Sudanese (only a 3% overhead), or alongside the \$600 per year it takes to support some indigenous missionaries. Missions is now a global marketplace.

A Christian relief agency whose stated mission is to help the poor pays \$366,000 to its best-paid officer. Because of the Internet, this information is readily available at www.give.org⁴. They ask for more funds to help needy children, but it seems that a better way is to stop helping the rich.

The web provides instant opportunity to contribute to Christian missions via debit and credit cards , speeding up relief funding⁵.

Globalization impacts missionaries, whether or not they realize it. I recently received a full-page newsletter from an Asian missionary which contained one vaguely-worded sentence describing his activities. One-liners don't compete, when any number of missionary reports of substance are available for the asking. It's a one-world market even for Christian missions, with heavy competition for support.

Rapid communication and mission organizations

Websites give missions an inexpensive and comprehensive means to share their mission identity. One mission notes that the Internet is its best source of recruits—better than sending representatives with displays, and far less costly. The three oldest non-denominational African American missionary-sending organizations are not yet on the Web. The Internet provides small, entrepreneurial missions an opportunity to mobilize Christians for increasingly specialized goals.

Web-based communication is an enormous advance. Prayer requests are immediately available from the field. Prayer support groups can be mobilized by sending one email. Airline fare research and reservations can be done entirely by Internet and email.

With cellphones, developing nations have skipped a generation of landline telephone infrastructure. We can inexpensively call African partners on their cell phones. The global neighborhood encourages some churches to bypass mission middlemen and become their own mission agencies. They can save the 5-20% mission administrative overhead, and avoid liberal or inert denominational agencies. Churches can partner directly with national mission organizations of integrity. This is prudent, however, only for the most serious of missionary-minded churches, with a dedicated missions staff and strong infrastructure. Moreover, they must look at long-term missionary support, and be prepared to

make field visits. Missionaries need “member care,” health and retirement provisions, emergency evacuation procedures, field research, supervision and support. Not only are missionaries on a competitive global support grid, missions (middlemen) compete against churches forming their own networks with native or indigenous mission organizations.

Mission organizations can more easily partner with other missions for specific projects. Missions share personnel, ministry resources (such as the Jesus Film), data bases, and facilities. Potential partners use it to evaluate national ministries. Near-instantaneous communication means that temporary alliances can be made to accomplish a goal, and then shelved when accomplished. The church where we belong partnered with RMNI, an Africa Inland Church employee, and a missionary from Calvary Chapel to fund three elementary schools in southern Sudan. This was accomplished through the purchase and operation of a corn grinding mill, located in Uganda in a Sudanese refugee settlement. The Calvary Chapel missionary monitored the mill operation and saw that funds reached the schools. Now we’re in dialogue to create another four-way partnership among local African American churches, RMNI, another church and the same Calvary Chapel missionary for other Sudanese projects, if the Lord wills.

Rapid information

The fabulous information lode of the web provides information access to virtually any religion, cult or people group⁶. Prosperity cults market their messages well. Christianity competes in the global marketplace of religions and philosophies. We can research unreached people groups⁷. We can better pray for an unreached people group (www.peopleteams.org) or study a country⁸. 440 million computers are in Christian use⁹. WorldChristianDatabase.com takes advantage of this. Newsgroups such as Brigada provide weekly updated resources to the missions community.

Globalization and the missionary

A missionary translator can reduce language acquisition by years with software which operates from a cognate language. S/he can study the target culture and even take courses in missions online. Websites provide anthropologic studies online via libraries or paid access. The Evangelical Missions Quarterly is available online (www.emqonline.com), as are publications of other journals¹⁰. S/he has access to specialized outfitters for items such as solar power systems and water purifiers, and can shop for the best prices.

Globalization and specialization

Since missions are now globalized—most cross-cultural missionaries coming from non-Western nations—and specialized, we must ask, What can fulltime American missionaries do best? Where can we make the greatest contribution to the Church’s missionary efforts? Americans often have advantages which can lead to contributions in these fields: education, English-related ministries, financial support and project oversight, technical support—doctors, engineers,

statisticians, technology supply, Bible translation--and pioneer work to create networks. Americans are less needed in planting churches cross-culturally and discipling national leaders, if a strong indigenous Christian church exists.

A theological perspective

Globalization is a sign of end times. "But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth [Interstate], and knowledge will increase [Internet]." (Dan. 12:4, NAS). If the "last hour" (1 Jn. 2:18) was about 1900 years ago, when John looked for the antichrist, we're close now. Many will think, What better way to reverse the increasingly fragmented political order (if not culture) than to support one-world government and one ruler? In Rev. 13:7-8, the "beast" from the sea was given authority over "every tribe, people, language and nation." "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast-- all whose names have not been written in the book of life...." (NIV). The beast will eventually be destroyed (Rev. 20:10). Here is central political and religious authority on earth by a malevolent leader over tribes, nations and peoples. We see today the escalating interconnectedness of the planet which makes universal rule feasible.

In sum, Christian mission is not to promote one culture (or English or democracy or capitalism, except as they allow us share the gospel). Each culture fails in some way to conform to the standards of the Bible. Our mission is to extend the global Kingdom of God, one soul at a time. Globalization is here, and Christians can use its advantages for the glory of God, while exposing its detriments and serving those disoriented or enthralled in its energy field.

1 David B. Barrett & Todd Johnson www.globalchristianity.org/resources.htm mid-2005

2 See Dan Bowers "Globalization and the Missionary Potential of International Churches," EMQ, July 2005

3 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, ISBN:0195168917, p. 11.

4 Other such groups are www.Charitywatch.org , www.Wallwatchers.org and www.Guidestar.com

5 Credit cards are fine to use as a convenience, rather than as a way to get deeper into debt.

6 <http://wri.leaderu.com>; www.ankerberg.com

7 <http://calebproject.org/> ; www.afm-us.org

8 www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook

9 www.globalchristianity.org/IBMR2005.pdf)

10 www.ijfm.org; www.asmweb.com.

Jim Sutherland, Ph.D.