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THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON CHURCH MISSION TODAY

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ABSTRACT

This work focused on the relationship between globalisation and Church mission today is one with new possibilities and furthering challenges. On the one hand, while Church mission in this age of globalisation takes advantage of communication and transportation technology, it is at the same time the source of globalisation's greatest resistance by acting as a haven for those standing in opposition to its power. On the other hand, globalisation allows for daily contact, religion enters a circle of conflict in which religions become "more self-conscious of themselves as being world religions. This paper made use of qualitative research method that relied on both primary and secondary sources of data collection and is descriptive in nature. The work found out among other things that globalisation presents both significant opportunities and challenges for Church missions, accelerating communication, travel, and cultural exchange while also promoting secularism and fostering complex cultural dynamics. The impact includes increased access to diverse perspectives and the use of new technologies for spreading the gospel, alongside risks like secularism and the challenge of avoiding Western cultural imposition. Although globalisation paves the way in bringing cultures, identities, and religions in direct contact, this work found out that globalisation brings religions to a circle of conflicts that reinforces their specific identities. The work recommended among other things that using three paradigmatic individuals and their use of religious ideals in their human rights work, this essay provides some suggestions on how not just religions but humanity can use existing religious principles as ways to overlook religious and cultural differences.

Keywords: Impact, Globalization, Church Mission, Contemporary Era.

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has become a principal characteristic feature and inescapable reality. Theological educators and Church leaders cannot remain isolated from its forces. But what will it mean for the education of leaders for the mission of the Church, leaders who are generally prepared through the Churches' agencies of theological education? Globalisation presents both significant opportunities and challenges for Church missions, accelerating communication, travel, and cultural exchange while also promoting secularism and fostering complex cultural dynamics. The impact includes increased access to diverse perspectives and

the use of new technologies for spreading the gospel, alongside risks like secularism and the challenge of avoiding Western cultural imposition. This work takes a look at the impact of globalisation on Church mission today.

Definition of Terms

Globalisation has been view differently by different scholars. According to Robertson, it implies an increasing interdependence of regions and countries through communication, finance and governance; but it also involves an intensification of the subjective consciousness of this interdependence, coined "globality" (124). In other words, globalisation is also about social actors' ideas and perception of the world as a whole: consumption products are bought in a global mass market, military and political issues are linked to the idea of a world order, ecumenism reflects an awareness of an inescapable religious diversity, social movements are increasingly transnational in their organisation and aims, environmental threats are thought on a planetary level (Kurth 42, 63). It is as a result of the multinational and multicultural amalgamations that have occurred globally throughout human history.

Globalisation presents itself as the secular realised eschaton of humankind: it promises universal and lasting salvation. Behind this façade, however, we observe the new dichotomies between rich and poor, the elite and the marginalised, and we observe the social Darwinism, the contempt for democracy, and the colonisation of the primary relations of life. And we also observe the struggle of individuals and groups to create new cultural identities on the borderlines that have become insignificant in the process of globalisation and in the gaps that this process has caused. In other words, globalisation and a new, disorderly pluralism seem to go together. Jonathan Sacks, in *The Dignity of Difference*, observes that the more we are pushed together, the more we are pulled apart (2). The phenomenon of "Tai-kho" youth culture in Taiwan can be seen as a manifestation of reaction against the overwhelming captivity to Japanese, Korean and Euro/American cultures of many of the middle and upper class of this nation's young people.

Globalisation itself is a product of modernity that undermines the "modern" consciousness of clear identities and "missions", and in that respect it also signals the failure of the modern visions of unity which had been so important for the genesis of the ecumenical movement (Ber 21; Samuel 1)."

Church Mission

Pope John Paul II said, "The Church's faith in Jesus is a gift received and a gift to be shared; it is the greatest gift which the Church can offer to Asia. Sharing the truth of Jesus Christ with others is the solemn duty of all who have received the gift of faith" (Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia* 10). Christianity itself is always global-oriented, due to its ideology of mission. It is not exaggerated to say that Christian mission is a kind of global movement concerned with saving souls, planting Churches, and, as a cultural and socio-political movement, with evangelisation of God's Kingdom (Lap-yan 34).

Theological Education

The tiger king had a son whom he sent to the land of the eagles to get the education that would equip him to eventually rule the tigers. When the prince returned home after completing his course work, the royal family was happy and proud. The entire kingdom came to an audience

where he was asked about what he had learned in the foreign land. "I have learnt how to build nests. Hence, from today on we tigers will build nests in trees for our shelters," he replied (Ivan 24).

One could, in the above story, replace "tiger" with "Taiwanese", "Burmese", "Filipino" or any of a host of Asian ethnicities and use the story as a polemic against overseas study in general. In the case of theological education, one could replace "Tiger king" and "prince" with "congregation" and "enthusiastic believer", and "land of the eagles" with "theological seminary", and the result would be much the same.

Traditionally, seminaries have the tendency to separate themselves from the outside world. …the traditional mission of a seminary is to train people to become clergy (Luna 12). A common criticism that many theological schools face today is that graduates are alienated from the church and society. The churches often accuse theological institutions as elitist and the churches tend to think that the kind of training received in the theological schools is not suitable for the rural context and not helpful to the spiritual nurturing of congregations. Some even assert that the theological graduate with B.D. or M.Div., M.Th. degrees cannot deliver a good sermon relevant to people's situation (Wati 10). Local, contextual theological education is needed in every locale.

Opportunities Created by Globalisation for Church Mission

Enhanced Communication and Collaboration: Modern technologies enable rapid communication and connection across the globe, allowing for immediate sharing of prayer requests and mobilised support groups.

Increased Accessibility: Globalization facilitates international travel and migration, making it easier to reach previously unreached populations and promoting cross-cultural teamwork.

Diverse Perspectives: The interconnectedness offers opportunities to learn from global authors and diverse perspectives, enriching faith and mission practices.

Direct Partnerships: Churches can bypass intermediaries and partner directly with national mission organisations, reducing overhead and promoting more efficient support.

Global Urbanisation: The rapid growth of cities creates new opportunities as people from various cultures gather, allowing for the creation of multicultural churches to reach these populations.

Globalisation brings a culture of pluralism, meaning religions "with overlapping but distinctive ethics and interests" interact with one another. Essentially, the world's leading religious traditions—Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam—teach values such as human dignity, equality, freedom, peace, and solidarity (Martell 78). More specifically, religions maintain the Golden Rule: "what you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others." Therefore, through such religious values, globalisation engenders greater religious tolerance in such areas as politics, economics, and society.

According to Thomas Scott, in political areas, globalisation has built global political forums that integrate cultural, ethnic, and religious differences—ideologies that were once perceived as dividing the world—through a large number of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), as well regional organizations like the European Union (EU), the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), or the African Union (AU) (8). When discussing issues such as international peace and security, health issues, poverty, and environment, these organisations generally share many of the same basic commitments as religious traditions—mainly peace, human dignity, and human equality, as well as conflict resolution in which they actively engage in negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy.

In addition to these political organisations, religious communities such as the Roman Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches, and the Jewish Diaspora also take part in international affairs. For instance, they have taken part in events such the Jubilee 2000, an international effort advocating for cancelling Third World debt by the year 2000, and the World Faiths Development Dialogue, an effort of international faith leaders along with the World Bank to support development agendas corresponding to the UN's Millennium Development Goals. Furthermore, religious organizations have, themselves, been involved in interreligious dialogue. The Parliament of the World's Religions of 1993, first conveyed during the 1893 Chicago World Exhibit, brought the world's diverse faith traditions—from African indigenous religions, the major religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), to any forms of faith that would agree to civil dialogue through mutual encounter—to use their similar values and discuss world affairs (Beyers, 8).

In terms of economics, as the economy of the major countries of the world has grown, the main religions of each of those countries have also grown financially, providing more financial resources for religions to spread their beliefs. For example, although it may seem as an old tactic, missionary work—especially in light of globalization—is strong in many Third World countries where religious representatives convert the natives. As a result, the major religions today have scattered across the globe—Christianity turning "southern" and "black," Islam turning "Asian," and Buddhism turning "white" and "western." Still holding on to their original territorial spaces where their shrines exist, religions are fulfilling their general purpose of spreading their beliefs to people all over the world (Bandchoff, 67).

Finally, religion and the Church to be specific has tremendously benefited from technological advancements. For example, websites provide information and explanations about different religions to any person regardless of his or her geographical location, as well as provide the opportunity to contact others worldwide and hold debates which allow religious ideas to spread. Furthermore, television allows for religious channels that provide visual religious teachings and practices. Hence, by making the leap onto the information superhighway, which brings religious teachings into every home and monitor in a global setting, religions have come together into one setting.

In short, globalisation allows for religions previously isolated from one another to now have regular and unavoidable contact. As a result, globalisation brings to the light the fact that since religions have similar values, not one of them is "correct" and, therefore, can be changed. But

as the next section shows, the same process that engenders greater religious tolerance also creates a backlash of religious parochialism.

Challenges that Globalisation Posed to Church Mission

Secularism and Skepticism: Globalisation can contribute to increased secularism and religious skepticism, posing an obstacle to the spread of the gospel.

Cultural Contextualisation: There is a risk of imposing Western cultural norms and strategies onto other cultures, which can hinder effective communication of the gospel.

Competing Influences: Technology can also be used aggressively by other groups to spread competing teachings, creating a challenging environment for the church.

Complex Cultural Dynamics: Missionaries must navigate complex cultural dynamics and engage in interfaith dialogue while maintaining the integrity of the Christian message.

Competition for Support: The global marketplace for missions creates a competitive environment for funding and support, requiring clear communication and effective reports from missionaries.

The Impact of Globalisation on Church Mission

The Church's mission extends to the international sphere. In the twenty first century many countries are still living with the legacy of previous centuries' oppression and injustice. Countries that struggled under colonialism are now suffering from a poverty-inducing neo-liberal economy driven by economic globalisation. Such death-dealing structures and systems should not have the last word in a world where God has broken the finality of death.

In the Traditional "Sending Churches"

Globalisation has spread knowledge of the Western model of life around the world and has homogenised various basic levels of understanding through churches on all continents. One commentator has characterised this as "McWorld." It has also moved significant populations of people from nations "on the traditional periphery" to nations "at the center" where ethnic communities have formed. These have subsequently created the need for social and religious services in native languages and culturally appropriate forms in those communities, and have given opportunity to social service providers (doctors, travel agents, etc.) and clergy to go to serve scattered flocks. Witness the Taiwanese churches in Brazil and Vienna, for example. Traditional "sending churches" become "receiving churches" for clergy and members from the nations where they once "went as missionaries." Inside the building of the First Reformed Church in New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA, the Taiwanese American Fellowship Presbyterian Church met to worship for years. Outside, in the church-yard are the graves of the first generation of the Scudder family, pioneer missionaries of the Reformed Church to South India. Not too many miles away is Grace Christian Church of Staten Island, NY, an Asian (largely Taiwanese) congregation of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). During the years that this congregation was in formation it met for a time at a Huguenot Church where hymns were sung and sermons preached in Taiwanese beneath stained glass windows wherein were depicted the heroes of the Protestant Reformation in France. Grace Christian

Church's Taiwanese founders had chosen to affiliate with the RCA in part because of the experience some of the congregation's leaders had with RCA missionaries in Taiwan.

Globalisation has been a source of benefit to the traditional sending churches because they are able to recruit overseas mission personnel from one country on the periphery to serve in other places at costs far lower than it would take to hire, train and send "first world" personnel. In the 1880's the RCA declined to support the pioneer mission work of Horace G. Underwood to Korea, and was not present there in a missionary capacity until the late 1990's when it sent a Filipino fraternal worker to serve the needs of Filipino migrants in a port city. The RCA now works in a similar way in Central America and East Africa.

But globalisation is not all positive for the traditional sending churches. Their mission support structures are often built on personal connections between the personnel they employ and the congregations that supply the funding. This personal connection is nurtured through visits. But when the visiting "missionary" does not speak English clearly, the congregation is less inclined to contribute. Further, as in many industrial arrangements where workers feel on the backs of their necks hot breath of foreign, low-wage competition for their jobs, these "bargain basement" fraternal workers are a source of lowered morale within the ranks of the career mission personnel from the "first world."

Among the "older" churches in the western world there has been a loss of missionary self-confidence, and a tendency to redefine missionary work in the direction of projects of interchurch aid or "serving presence". The influence of postmodernism, pluralism, and globalization in the daily lives of people does not diminish the concern for other human beings or the desire to participate in a faithful community, but it does weaken the strong sense of conviction associated with "heavy" words such as mission and unity in earlier times.

In the Traditional "Receiving Churches"

Globalisation is, on occasion, positive. When the Rev. Zaidarhzauva, a CWM missionary from Mizoram in India, was installed as a pastor in the Paiwan Presbytery of the PCT, the moderator testified to a bit of perceptual dissonance. This missionary, unlike those who had preceded him "looks like us." The Paiwan were accustomed to large Western people. To have an indigenous Asian pastor among them didn't "appear" like the mission to which they were accustomed. But to have a missionary that "looks like us" is a positive thing, because it inspires our own people to consider and aspire to mission service, whether at home or abroad, themselves.

But globalisation can also be seen as negative to "receiving churches". Traditional Western missionaries came with something beyond their presence. They saw needs, wrote home, raised money, and applied it to them. All of their own support needs were met by the sending churches without requiring a cent of input from the receiving churches. In this globalised world where income is not distributed justly there yet exists knowledge of how much a "receiving" church or agency might be able to afford to support of a foreign missionary. Though payments or support might be considered "token", yet they are required. The receivers do not "get" without "giving".

Further, many traditional missionaries had contacts to educational resources and scholarship funds in their home countries. An ambitious and aspiring person could take advantage of a missionary's presence to get an introduction or letter of reference that might result in the chance to go to the West to study for an advanced degree. In today's globalised world, when the foreign missionary might come from Zambia, Fiji, or Argentina, connections to overseas learning opportunities in places other than Europe and North America carry little attraction.

Religion provides answers to questions concerning self-identity. However, in providing such answers, religion also institutes a notion of "truth," which implies an automatic exclusion of the one—called an "abject"—who does not adhere to such "truth." In times of uncertainty like globalisation, therefore, collective identity is reduced to a number of cultural religious characteristics —"them" and "us" and "they" and "our" (Kinnvall, 34). In other words, the abject suddenly becomes recognized as a threat.

For example, since the 9/11 attacks, there has been a tendency of the West to link the religion of Islam with terrorist practices while Al-Qaeda links the US as Christian or a Judeo-Christian nation. On the one hand, Al-Qaeda men who hijacked the planes on 9/11 saw the passengers and those working in the World Trade Center and Pentagon as "abjects" of Islam. On the other hand, the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and then Iraq turned into wars of "Islamofacism" and a "crusade" to the divine in getting rid of evil (Turner, 12). Moreover, other attacks on innocent people based on cultural religious characteristics occur today: Muslims in the United States, Western Europe, or India, Kurds in Iraq, and Jews in France. In other words, though socially constructed, these cultural religious characteristics become a unifying force against others not adhering to a particular truth.

Interestingly then, the idea of religious identity in this era of globalization may hold in-line with Huntington's thesis. According to Huntington, while conflict during the Cold War occurred between the Capitalist West and the Communist Bloc East, current and future conflicts are most likely to occur between the world's major civilizations, and not the states, including Western, Latin American, Islamic, Sinic (Chinese), Hindu, Orthodox, Japanese, and the African (56). In a broader sense, having paved the way for religions to come in direct contacts with one another, globalization has, indeed, brought religions to a circle of competition and conflicts. As long as religions see themselves as "world religions" and reinforce their specific identities, the chance for religions to avoid conflict among one another is grey.

The Impact of Globalisation on Theological Education

Globalisation equipped with information technology has exposed many theological educators as ill-equipped to meet the challenges of cyber culture. Theological education must take this issue into consideration or lose its impact. If people at the bottom of social stratification are unequipped to make use of cyber-technology, then theological education must not neglect them. While theological education "ramps up" into the world of Information Technology, it must consciously integrate the perspective of marginalized people in its whole process.

Theological schools must also teach in a way that exposes the motives of profit and greed behind globalisation. Christian solidarity and the traditional values of community, family,

respect of life and hospitality must be modeled and taught. As globalisation brings people of different religious faiths closer, curricula must include a greater focus on studying them.

Having already fallen into the trap set by modern global educational philosophy, theological education has become skill oriented. It has been reduced to an abstract and intellectual exercise leaving very little scope for action-reflection. We need rigorous theoretical reflection of the Word of God, but it should accompany social and cultural analysis of our context. They should form an integral part of the theological curriculum.

The Dangerous Opportunity Presented by Theological Education by Extension (TEE)

Since its creation in the 1960's in Guatemala (in response to the need for trained Presbyterian clergy but the difficulty of bringing people to a central campus for long enough to become sufficiently "professionalized" to be regarded as Presbyterian clergy), Theological Education by Extension (TEE) has enabled local people to become trained church leaders without leaving the village or parish for an appreciable length of time. TEE differed from "correspondence school" in that it gathered the students into regional classes that met at regular intervals to work through materials together. It is based on the beliefs that learning occurs best when the study and practice of ministry are closely related, people have the opportunity to study at their own pace and on their own level, and innovative educational technology is used widely. In a Native American Diocese of the Anglican Church of Canada, TEE trained deacons, lay readers and others who were already leaders of their communities come to interpret the Gospel in their own cultures without having to leave the village environment.

Globalisation and cyber technology step right into the TEE model, making it possible for those local village leaders to get training from anywhere else in the world that they can reach with a modem-equipped computer. Distance has been collapsed and time has been made relative. Participants equipped with fast enough connections and camera equipped computers need no longer even leave their homes, the seminar can come to them in living colour in real time.

But it is no longer the regional denominational seminary that offers an extension course in a nearby village for local leaders. The "super cyber seminary" in North America now passes along homogenised and non-contextualised versions of a globalised gospel. So long as one can connect and pay up, the contents will come through the wire unfiltered by locally "savvy" teachers who can help to sort the messages and put them into context. Theology, once removed from its roots in the story telling community by the necessity of going to the seminary to study it, is now removed from its roots in the community by the necessity of modern technology to access it.

This level of TEE is still available only to the elite who are computer literate and equipped for connection to the internet. The disparities are great. One TEE course in South Africa found a student who wanted the materials on a floppy disk to use in his computer, while another requested the same printed in larger type so he could read them by candlelight. The cyber-world is as class-riven as any large city in North America or Europe.

TEE certainly offers a lot insofar as training people in situ, however it dangerously opens those same people to an ideologically loaded, elitist oriented, and anti-contextual theological world

which, funded as it is from the centers of globalized economy, must be regarded with the utmost suspicion.

How the Church Can Respond

Embrace Adaptability and Sensitivity: The church needs to be adaptable and culturally sensitive, developing innovative approaches to fulfill the Great Commission in a constantly changing global context.

Contextualise the Gospel: The gospel message must be presented in ways that are relevant and understandable within different cultural frameworks, addressing practical life experiences through narratives and testimonies.

Foster Global Partnerships: Churches should aim to develop broader and deeper perspectives by listening to and partnering with the global church, particularly those in the "Global South". Strengthen Theological Education: Theological education must evolve to equip leaders who can respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by a globalized world, fostering contextualised theological understanding.

Focus on Holistic Transformation: Mission efforts should encompass not only individual salvation but also the transformation of social, political, and economic orders, recognizing the interconnectedness of the entire world.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of globalisation has had a profound impact on Church mission and education, and threatens local Churches that strive towards contextualised theological education for their ministers. Religious movements were among the earliest cultural elements to globalise, being spread by force, migration, evangelists, imperialists and traders. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, African Religion, and more recently sects such as Mormonism, which have taken root and influenced endemic cultures in places far from their origins.

In a time in which globalisation has yet to fully complete its process, religions must use the communication easily available through advanced technology to focus more on the humane and pluralistic forms of their teachings—values such as human dignity and human freedom—as means to manage religious diversity and avoid violence. In other words, religious should be open to other traditions and what they can teach. In fact, though having "fixed texts," the major world religions do not have "fixed beliefs," "only fixed interpretations of those beliefs," meaning their beliefs can be "rediscovered, reinvented, and reconceptualised.

As interesting examples, in their attempt to create the tradition of nonviolence from diverse religions and cultures, three paradigmatic individuals—Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr.—have, indeed, "rediscovered, reinvented, and reconceptualised" the beliefs of the world's major religions. The three individuals indicate that "it is possible for narrative diversity to generate a shared ethic without sacrificing the diversity of particular religions."

As this essay's previous sections show, religions have, indeed, taken part in dialogues beforehand. As a further example, religious leaders gathered at the UN's Millennium Peace

Summit in September 2000 to mark the turn of the millennium. A milestone in itself, as the UN is not a common ground in the sense of a ecumenical meeting inside a Church, synagogue, or mosque but rather a global common ground, the Summit's conversation encouraged that world's religious communities stop fighting and arguing amongst themselves and begin working together for peace, justice, and social harmony. As then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan addressed to the Summit, "Whatever your past, whatever your calling, and whatever the differences among you, your presence here at the United Nations signifies your commitment to our global mission of tolerance, development, and peace (Annan, 45).

Moreover, as transnational corporations increasingly become actors in the international system, one could argue that religious communities have agreed on "the emerging global ethic" which consists of three major components: 1) corporations are prohibited from involving in bribes and corruption, 2) corporations are prohibited from discriminating on the grounds of race, religion, ethnicity, or gender in the conduct of business, and 3) corporations are prohibited from activities that pose a significant threat to human life and health. Simply put, these components are, in themselves, religious values used to regulate the way transitional corporations increasingly engage in the global market.

The bottom line is that the pieces of interreligious dialogue to manage religious diversity and to avoid violence are there, but the problem may be of globalisation's intentional and/or unintentional consequence of making religions more conscious of themselves as "world religions," as well as the undesirable consequences of disrupting traditional communities, causing economic marginalisation, and bringing individuals mental stress—all reinforcing religious cultural characteristics and identities. Hence, the relationship between religion and globalisation has brought new possibilities but also furthering challenges. To respond effectively, Churches must embrace adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and innovative approaches, fostering partnerships and contextualising the gospel message to engage effectively in the globalised world.

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