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# Global Christian Shifts and Missional Church Movements: Linking the Postcolonial Global South with the Postmodern West

Stephen P. Lewis

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

GLOBAL CHRISTIAN SHIFTS AND MISSIONAL CHURCH MOVEMENTS:  
LINKING THE POSTCOLONIAL GLOBAL SOUTH  
WITH THE POSTMODERN WEST

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

STEPHEN P. LEWIS

NEWBERG, OREGON

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STEPHEN P. LEWIS

DATE: MARCH 11, 2009

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**GLOBAL CHRISTIAN SHIFTS AND MISSIONAL CHURCH  
MOVEMENTS: LINKING THE POSTCOLONIAL GLOBAL SOUTH  
WITH THE POSTMODERN WEST**

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FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN  
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*Gregory L. Mulholland* *March 11, 2009*  
SIGNATURE DATE

*Jason Clark*  
SIGNATURE DATE



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## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	vii
ABSTRACT .....	ix
Chapter	
1. SETTING THE STAGE FOR CHANGE.....	1
Globalization and Christian Population Change .....	3
Theologizing as Local Behavior .....	8
Networks of Mutual Learning and Sharing .....	13
Present Systems of Power and Control .....	15
Challenging Power Structures .....	18
Redemptive Subversion .....	19
Dealing with Systems of Globalization .....	23
Next Steps .....	25
2. CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES:	
THE FLIP SIDES OF CHRISTENDOM .....	27
The “Up” Side of Christendom: Western Power and Religious Dominance .....	31
The Down Side of “Up” .....	37
The “Underside” of Christendom .....	39
The Up Side of “Down” .....	44
The Post-Christendom Shift .....	47
Christendom in Review .....	51

3.	BIBLICAL MATERIALS .....	53
	<i>Missio Dei</i> as a Framing Structure .....	54
	Abrahamic Covenant .....	56
	Mosaic Covenant .....	57
	Davidic Covenant .....	58
	Messianic / Kingdom Covenant .....	59
	The Church and <i>Missio Dei</i> .....	63
	Communities of Renewal .....	64
	Communities of Resistance .....	67
	Communities of Redemption .....	69
	Principles of Communities within the <i>Missio Dei</i> .....	71
	Unity .....	71
	Equality .....	73
	Diversity in Global Expression and Embodiment .....	74
	Generosity / Hospitality .....	75
	Next Steps .....	77
4.	GLOBALIZATION AS MISSIONAL FRONTIER .....	78
	In Defense of Globalization .....	80
	The Darker Side of Globalization .....	86
	The Glocal Response to Globalization .....	91
	The Opportunities of Globalization .....	97

5.	THE EMERGING CHURCH OF THE WESTERN WORLD:	
	NAVIGATING THE POSTMODERN SHIFT .....	99
	The Postmodern Context: The Framing Conversation of the Emerging Church.	101
	Examples of Postmodernity in Cultural Expression .....	104
	Postmodernity and Theology .....	106
	The Emerging Church in the West: A Missional Response to Postmodernity....	108
	What the Emerging Church May Be Missing .....	114
	What the Emerging Church Has to Offer the Church of the Global South .....	120
	Next Steps .....	122
6.	MISSIONAL CHURCH NETWORKS OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH:	
	POSTCOLONIAL MOVEMENTS OF MATURITY .....	124
	Understanding the Postcolonial Context .....	125
	The Southern Missional Church Response to Postcolonialism .....	132
	Amahoro, Africa .....	134
	La Red del Camino, Latin America .....	137
	Other Networks, Latin America .....	139
	RoH, Malaysia .....	140
	What the Emerging Church Movement Can Learn from the Church of the Global	
	South and East .....	141
	Spiritual Dynamics .....	142
	Liberation .....	144
	Citizenship and Transnationalism .....	146
	Next Steps .....	148

7.	BRINGING GLOBAL MOVEMENTS TOGETHER THROUGH	
	COMMUNITIES OF COMMUNITIES .....	149
	How Churches and Movements Become Missional .....	150
	Assumptions Regarding Points of Contact .....	153
	Points of Contact .....	157
	Existing Forces of Globalization .....	157
	Educational Opportunities .....	159
	Ecumenical Movements .....	162
	Long Distance Friendships .....	167
	Closing Thoughts .....	168
	WORKS CITED .....	171

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation engages current shifts in global Christianity. The problem we are studying is the movement toward the postmodern emerging church in the West and the postcolonial church emerging in the global South, in order to understand both the past failings in the relationship of the Western and Southern church and their present common context, in order to help postmodern and postcolonial churches repent of previous failures and move forward utilizing a common set of experiences and cultural conditions, so that God's people will love and work with one another as co-heirs, co-equals, and co-missionaries of the Kingdom.

In order to address this problem, we will propose that although focusing on the specific contexts in which they find themselves is important for the emerging church of the West and the church emerging in the South, by developing relationships of mutual learning and sharing, these two branches of the body of Christ can develop a way forward in accomplishing the mission of God together that subverts present systems of power and control.

Chapter one explores global Christian shifts, the importance of local theologies and networks of learning, and present political, economic, and social systems of power, in order to consider challenging them with new ways of moving forward. Chapter two is a review of Christian history, focusing on Christendom as a system of religious dominance, and the related implications for global expressions of Christian faith. Chapter three examines biblical and theological concepts surrounding the *missio Dei* as a common base for connecting renewal movements in the global South and the West. Chapter four

discusses the power systems present in globalization as the context for the outworking of the *missio Dei* through renewal movements in the West and global South, and some helpful frameworks for understanding the present opportunities. Chapter five explores the emerging church movement in the West, and how it works out the *missio Dei* within postmodern contexts. In a similar way, chapter six engages missional movements in the global South as a developing response to postcolonial cultural contexts. Chapter seven brings together the conceptual and contextual elements in the previous chapters, in order to propose a model for global connectivity between various renewal movements, that brings about communities of mutual growth and partnership in mission.

## Chapter 1

### Setting the Stage for Change

As we are well into our first decade of the new millennium, it certainly comes as no great shock to acknowledge that the world is a dynamic place of constant change. This has been the case for the history of civilization, obviously, but there has never been a time when so many changes of a significant nature have taken place as at this point in time. The significance lies in the speed of change, as well as the widespread impacts of change. These changes have been fueled by globalization, and will continue to be shaped by what New York Times journalist Thomas Friedman calls a “flat world.”<sup>1</sup>

The many expressions of globalization that surround us today remind us that the world is both bigger than we once thought, and smaller than we once thought. Nothing that happens on the planet can be thought of only as a limited, local event.<sup>2</sup> Within the broad topic of globalization, the specific area most discussed is economics. This is because the impacts can most easily be seen and felt in economic terms. Corporations have taken full advantage of trade agreements in order to lower labor costs for producing their products, as well as to locate the best markets for their products.

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1. Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, 1st Rev. and Expanded ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).

2. Vinoth Ramachandra, "Globalization, Nationalism, and Religious Resurgence," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 213.

There are a range of opinions on whether the economics of globalization are a positive or negative thing. Rebecca Todd Peters discusses the various viewpoints represented.<sup>3</sup> Some argue that wealthy nations, and their corporations have an unfair advantage in the global marketplace, and that their predatory business practices bring harm to the lesser developed areas of the world. A counterpoint that others offer is that despite the profiteering by large companies and nations, there is an ever-increasing array of opportunities for smaller nations and their peoples to make progress in education and standards of living. In fact, arguments are made that globalization brings about benevolent change, and that the social development will ultimately level the playing field. The recent rise of India and China's middle class is often cited as an example of a benefit of globalization.

More often than not, though, commentators are concerned with the economic, cultural, and environmental imbalances brought about by globalization. For example, the United Nations Development Programme reports that the poorest forty percent of the world's population (2.5 billion people) account for just five percent of global income, while the richest ten percent account for fifty-four percent.<sup>4</sup> "Some 1.2 billion people around the world live on less than a dollar a day, while almost 850 million go hungry every night."<sup>5</sup> The gap between the globally rich and poor is widening, not shrinking.<sup>6</sup> And "though global population

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3. Rebecca Todd Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

4. UNDP, *Global Partnership for Development: United Nations Development Programme Annual Report 2006* (New York: UNDP, 2006).

5. UNDP, *Capacity Development: Empowering People and Institutions: United Nations Development Programme Annual Report 2008* (New York: UNDP, 2008), 13.

growth is slowing, it will still grow . . . to 8 to 10 billion by 2050. Of course, most of that growth will be among our poorest neighbours (sic) in densely congested urban areas.”<sup>7</sup>

And though science and technology have fueled much of the growth of globalization, they have also brought about problems on a human, relational level. Hans Kung wryly comments that, “the evil produced by science and technology cannot simply be healed by even more science and technology.”<sup>8</sup> Economics is an important element in bringing up the standards of living in the poorest parts of our world, but the processes put in place must take real people into account, and be concerned with the preservation of the dignity of individuals and their cultures.

### **Globalization and Christian Population Change**

The spread of religion adds another dimension to the economic, political, and cultural dynamics of globalization. The world is well aware of the recent spread of Islam, because of the many terrorist attacks perpetrated by the radical fundamentalists of that religion. However, the Western world is less aware that the number of Christians in the global South and East outnumbers that of Christians in the West. In his widely celebrated work, Philip Jenkins documents the spread of Christianity, and predicts that in the coming

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6. Tom Sine, "Globalization, Creation of Global Culture of Consumption and the Impact on the Church and Its Mission," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 27, no. 4 (2003): 357-58.

7. Ibid., 358.

8. Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 42.

decades, the global population of Christians will be heavily comprised of people in Africa, Central and South America, and Asia.

The most populous sub-Saharan African nations, for example, which have around 200 million Christians today, will have between 330-400 million by 2025. This means that Europe will no longer be the true heartland of Christianity. According to some estimates, Uganda alone could account for more active church membership than four of the five largest European nations combined.<sup>9</sup> If current global population and religious growth trends continue, by 2100 more than three-fourths of all Christians in the world will be living in the global South.<sup>10</sup> Already today, Africans and Asians account for 30 percent of all Christians. And with this rise of Christianity in China, projections suggest that by 2050, China might have the second-largest Christian population in the world, surpassed only by the United States.<sup>11</sup> By that same time, white non-Hispanics could represent just 15 or 20 percent of the world's Christians. To put a more personal face to this, and connect it to the issues of globalization discussed above, Jenkins suggests that the "average Christian" will likely be "an extremely poor person by Western standards, with all that implies in terms of food, water, schooling, transportation, medical care, and a healthy environment."<sup>12</sup>

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9. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 90-91.

10. Todd M. Johnson and Sun Young Chung, "Tracking Global Christianity's Statistical Centre of Gravity, A.D. 33 - A.D. 2100," *International Review of Mission* 93, no. 369 (2004): 171.

11. Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.

12. Philip Jenkins, "Companions of Life: What Must We Learn, and Unlearn?," *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* 2007, 18.

Interestingly, Jenkins also documents that Europe has already seen, and will continue to see significant shifts in Christian populations. In particular, immigration patterns from Africa into Europe are bringing religious changes with them. Many discuss (with fear) the advance of Islam on the continent, but many Christians are also entering the area. Even now, four of Britain's ten largest megachurches are pastored by Africans.<sup>13</sup> In 2005, a new Anglican Archbishop of York was inaugurated – a Ugandan by the name of John Sentamu. The ceremony featured African dance, drumming, and dress.<sup>14</sup> Jenkins notes that, "One [Catholic] diocese in southern France is host to some thirty priests from former colonies such as Senegal, Gambia, and Ivory Coast, men who view their new home with a powerful evangelistic impulse."<sup>15</sup>

The church of the global South and East is moving forward with energy. There are movements in Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and unaffiliated house church communities that take different shapes, and engage culture in different ways. Meanwhile, there are renewal movements taking place in the Western world. Known primarily as the "emerging church," a number of churches and leaders are attempting to rediscover a latent "missional-incarnational" impulse, and re-approach culture in a way that more fittingly embeds the gospel into the fabric of the local community.<sup>16</sup> In both the Western and Southern/Eastern movements within Christianity, there has been an increasing

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13. Philip Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 92.

14. Ibid., 88.

15. Ibid., 91.

16. Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 140.



emphasis on developing local theologies. This “polycentric Christianity” has many cultural homes,<sup>17</sup> and holds much promise in making faith accessible to many more people. With the shifts in world Christian populations, and the ownership of local forms of theology, it is now possible for Christianity to be seen as something other than a Western/white man’s religion.<sup>18</sup>

The importance and the expressions of local theologies will be explored below. However, it is essential that we maintain a global view of the Church. There are biblical and theological reasons that this is so, but also pragmatic reasons. The globalized world is bringing diverse people groups much closer together. In that context, it would be foolish to simply look to be so locally oriented that connecting with others around the world becomes unimportant. Instead, the Church would do well to utilize the opportunities that globalization brings.<sup>19</sup>

Although focusing on the specific contexts in which they find themselves is important for the emerging church of the West and the church emerging in the global South and East, by developing relationships of mutual learning and sharing, these two branches of the body of Christ can develop a way forward in accomplishing the mission of God together that subverts present systems of power and control.

This project will explore the changes in global cultures and the Church that are briefly described above. It will involve developing an understanding of the missionary movements that brought Christianity from the Western world to the global South and

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17. Tite Tienou, "Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 38.

18. Ibid., 41.

19. Jenkins, "Companions of Life: What Must We Learn, and Unlearn?," 20.

East, as well as the institutional systems that were put in place in these areas. This brought many benefits, such as education, training of church leaders, and social assistance projects, but it also brought some unintended negative consequences, such as rigid structures of hierarchical authority, and dependence on outsiders for money and education. The present movements among the church emerging in the global South and East, which is rising up out of postcolonial conditions, and the emerging church movement in the Western world, which has developed as a response to postmodernism, will be highlighted as potential partners for mutual communities of learning and mission. Some of the common experiences of postcolonialism and postmodernism will be detailed in order to provide a basis and language for forward movement.

Bringing the two streams of church movements together will certainly not be done without facing difficulties. In addition to the obvious aspects of language and cultural differences, there is a need for repentance and reconciliation. As we will discover, Western paternalism in the missionary movement has caused many difficulties, and significant adjustments in attitude and practice will be necessary. Also, there are many systems of power and control that will be resistant to change. Knowing how to challenge those in a redemptive, but firm way will be important if these movements are to continue and flourish.

Ultimately, an approach to developing these relationships of learning and sharing will be necessary. The final chapter of this project will set forth a model of community development that will be helpful. Pragmatic steps will also be offered to continue the

working relationships and assist multiple communities of faith in working together toward living out the *missio Dei*.<sup>20</sup>

Before moving forward with these elements, the remainder of this chapter will frame the discussion further by doing an inventory of the current structures of power and control that exist, both in the global South and East, as well as in the West. We will suggest that some of these structures, both in the church and in society need to be actively opposed. We will also discuss how local theologies are able to bring about change in these structures. This will highlight the need for communities of like-minded co-workers to come together in partnership and support.

### **Theologizing as a Local Behavior**

Given the history of the missionary movement and colonialism (which will be discussed in the following chapter), the Church emerging in the global South and East has been shaped largely by Western structures, theologies, and pragmatic approaches. There have been significant efforts to contextualize the Gospel in order for local people groups to truly call it their own, but these changes are taking place slowly, and with mixed results.

In terms of contextualization, one concept that Western theologians and missiologists have historically overlooked is the fact that when missionaries bring the Gospel into a

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20. The term “*missio Dei*,” used throughout this project, essentially means “mission of God,” referring to God’s own redemptive activity in the world.

“new” place, they are also bringing their own culture with them.<sup>21</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah makes a strong point in noting that Westerners refer to theologies from other places as “Latin American theology,” or “African theology,” and yet they do not make the same point about their own theology, by calling it “Western theology” – to them, the assumption is that if it’s standard, orthodox theology, it’s Western.<sup>22</sup> The tool of translation has been enormously helpful in bringing a cultural ownership of scripture to people, though. In this way, images of cultural imperialism on the part of the missionaries is greatly diminished.<sup>23</sup> Still, a heavily Westernized approach to faith is what Christianity represents in many areas of the world. Ironically enough, many indigenous African cultures are quite similar to the cultures of biblical texts, and the process of contextualization could be streamlined significantly, as long as the Western missionaries and overseers were to be sensitive to the opportunities.<sup>24</sup>

Even beyond scripture, theology can be done very effectively on a local level. Clemens Sedmak argues that, “In order to be honest to the local circumstances theology has to be done as local theology, as theology that takes the particular situation seriously. Local theology can be done with basic theological means. It can be done by the people,

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21. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986), 9.

22. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2003), 163.

23. Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, 24.

24. Joseph Enuwosa, "African Cultural Hermeneutics: Interpreting the New Testament in a Cultural Context," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 3, no. 1 (2005): 87.

and it is done with the people.”<sup>25</sup> Some specific cases of this will help demonstrate the possibilities.

One major example of a localized theology is Liberation Theology. In 1968, at a conference of Latin American Catholic Bishops, Liberation Theology was stimulated in response to Western hegemony.<sup>26</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the founders and proponents of the Liberation Theology movement has written extensively on continuing financial and political oppression. He infuses his work with the principles of Marxism in response to what he sees as the problematic dominance of capitalism, describing God as the defender and liberator of the poor.<sup>27</sup> Further, he argues that to be a disciple of Jesus is to be one who practices love for the poor, condemnation of injustice, sharing of bread, and hope for resurrection.<sup>28</sup> He states that “God’s kingdom and social injustice are incompatible.”<sup>29</sup> The poverty and injustices being forced on people by Western economic powers gave impetus to the political and theological systems of thought that empowered the local people. It continues to be an attractive option for people in an era where people themselves have been commodified by multinational forces of globalization.<sup>30</sup>

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25. Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity*, Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 3.

26. David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 327.

27. Gustavo Gutiérrez and James B. Nickoloff, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 105.

28. Ibid., 106.

29. Ibid., 239.

30. M. Daniel Carroll R., "The Challenge of Economic Globalization for Theology: From Latin America to a Hermeneutics of Responsibility," in *Globalizing*

Another significant example of local theology is in the area of the supernatural. In part because of the indigenous religions of Africa, and in part because of their conservative reading of the Bible, belief in the reality of evil, angels and demons, witches, supernatural healings is quite common. The theology of the supernatural, thus, is finely tuned to respond to it – in a way that is often surprising to Westerners, who have been shaped by the Enlightenment, reason, and science.<sup>31</sup> Africans have localized their theology because Western theology is “too small,” that is to say, most Africans live in a “larger, more populated universe” than the West has to offer.<sup>32</sup>

In order for these local theologies to develop and spread without crossing over the line between orthodoxy and heresy, though, there is a need for larger, encompassing theological systems. This should not be thought of as a new challenge. Jaroslav Pelikan points out that the Jerusalem Council in the book of Acts was held to help the Church understand and deal with the challenges of Gentiles coming into the body of believers for the first time.<sup>33</sup> This is where the value of the ancient creeds and confessions of the Church is realized. Throughout the ages, they have been used to guide our understanding of sacred texts, communal fellowship, national vs. spiritual identity, among other things.

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*Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 206.

31. Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, 98-125.

32. Andrew F. Walls, "Globalization and the Study of Christian History," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 75.

33. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 310.

Even denominational structures that are “non-creedal” and “non-confessional” can find guidance here inasmuch as they are founded in what they find to be sound scriptural principles. Whether referred to as creeds and confessions or guiding values and convictions, there are sets of core beliefs that can guide Christians in the way they shape their experiences of life. These are the basic elements that draw us into the life of God.<sup>34</sup>

It should be noted at this point that even though the emerging church movement shares a Western origin with the dominant theologies of the world, the concept of local theologizing can be easily applied here as well. Chapter five will explore some of the new theological directions being taken by this movement, but it should be understood as a contextual approach to theology within postmodern cultures. Local theology is a field of thought most applicable to the cultures of the global South and East, but there remains a need for it in all places.

It is clear from these, and numerous other sources that various versions of a broader, umbrella theology in balance with contextual/indigenous/local theologies are being pursued. This is a hopeful thing, because it empowers and honors the pastors and leaders doing the immediate theology of work with their people in the most sensitive, appropriate ways possible, without disregarding the need for orthodoxy and a basis for global Christian unity. It also allows for continued growth and change within theology, as the world constantly changes.<sup>35</sup>

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34. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 134.

35. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "'One Rule to Rule Them All?' Theological Method in an Era of World Christianity," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of*

## Networks of Mutual Learning and Sharing

In Chapter 7 of this project, we will lay out a model for relationship development between the church of the Western world and the church of the global South and East. It will involve working closely together in ways that are mutually encouraging and stimulating toward co-participation in the *missio Dei* – or God’s mission for redemptive action toward both the church and the world.<sup>36</sup> There is a great need for networks of learning and sharing, within specific regions of the world, as well as over long distances. One of the technological upsides of globalization is the ease of communication via the internet, wireless devices, and relatively fast transportation options. These can and should be utilized for growth within the new forms of Christianity that are emerging.

These networks must be characterized by Christians deeply listening to one another. Sadly, in the global South, there is a distinct impression of Western Christians as bad listeners.<sup>37</sup> This is largely a legacy of the missionary movement, in which the outsiders came into the global South and East as the “experts,” and never took the time to learn from their new sisters and brothers. By now, though, there is plenty of solid Christian maturity and experience to go around, and all parties have something to learn from others. The first step toward this, though is listening – to each others’ love for God and people, to each others’ pain and triumph, to each others’ stories of struggle, to each

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*World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 111.

36. Bosch, 10.

37. Tienou, 48.



others' concerns for themselves and the world around them. These stories will carry the unified Church forward.

Sharing of resources will be a necessary component to these networks as well. Finances are a good starting point, but books, recordings, educational opportunities and materials, and time are also very important. It may seem to be a challenge for Christians who come from impoverished areas of the world to have anything to share – especially with wealthy Westerners. But they still have personal resources from which to draw – discipleship in the areas of contentment and generosity, for example. These shared resources will be founded on a common mission. The partnerships that are developed will broaden the impact of the Kingdom of God, and make it possible for more work to get done.

The more that Christians participate together in relationships that demonstrate true equality, respect, and unity in mission, the more the relationships of power and control discussed below will be improved (perhaps by becoming less powerful and controlling). This kind of co-laboring will be a visible demonstration of unity within the Kingdom of God. The vision of the church coming together to accomplish God's mission will provide a significant symbolic as well as practical response to governmental, economic, and ecclesial systems that exist for the purposes of their own interminable maintenance and expansion.

This coming together in unity will also powerfully demonstrate reconciliation. So many evils have been perpetrated over the centuries in the name of Christianity, including countless cases of Christians fighting other Christians that true, deep reconciliation seems like little more than a fantasy. But if these networks are given the space to breathe and

grow, they will produce humble repentance for the sins of the past, repair and healing for the continuing hurts, and forgiveness that produces brotherhood and sisterhood across national, language, and cultural barriers.

### **Present Systems of Power and Control**

As the church throughout history developed structures and institutions, they were brought with them with the core of the Christian gospel when missionaries entered new lands. In addition to these systems, many unconscious cultural practices of the church were brought, which developed into even further understandings of the things that Christians “are supposed to” believe and practice. A more nuanced view of the modern missionary movement will be given in chapter two, by way of describing how these systems came to be, but the following represents an overview of the present structures that Christianity employs.

While it is difficult to pinpoint a starting point to the structures that exist in the Christian world, it is common to trace things back to Constantine and Augustine. Stuart Murray narrates the Roman Emperor Constantine’s conversion to Christianity, and his subsequent adoption of Christianity as the favored civil religion of the empire.<sup>38</sup> As later rulers and now-privileged religious leaders followed, Christendom grew and spread with the empire, and beyond. Murray extensively notes a number of the societal impacts that took place, including: the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the state, the movement of the church from the (often persecuted) margins of society to the core of it,

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38. Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom*, Church and Mission in a Strange New World (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 23-40.

the assumption that all citizens were Christian by birth (a matter reinforced through the practice of infant baptism), a hierarchical ecclesiastical system similar to the state hierarchy, a distinction between clergy and laity, the construction of massive and ornate church buildings, division of the world into “Christendom” and “heathendom,” and a re-orientation of the mission of the church from mission to maintenance.<sup>39</sup> The favored relationship between state and the church certainly had far-reaching effects, well after the Holy Roman Empire had begun to fall apart.<sup>40</sup>

Not only did the hierarchies of power in the church outlast the Roman Empire, they also outlasted the Protestant Reformation. Even the breakaway groups led by Martin Luther and John Calvin retained clear structures of authority. In the centuries since the Reformation, many denominations have formed – the vast majority of which continue to carry on hierarchical positions of power, regardless of geography and cultural context.

The clergy/laity divide also clearly demarcated where theological thought resides. The job of the priesthood is to guard the doctrine of the church in as uniform a way as possible. The universal truths of the creeds as well as the traditions were upheld by and disseminated by this select group of church leaders. While there is certainly ample scriptural support for church leaders being responsible to keep to pure teaching, the kinds of systems put in place by the church of Christendom far surpassed what Saint Paul shared in his pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus.

Down through the centuries of European history, the remnants of Christendom listed above remained. And when the modern missionary movement of the past one hundred years was birthed, they were extended to the places where the gospel was taken. There

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39. Ibid., 82-87.

40. Bosch, 274-75.

are multiple ways in which they continue to hold sway, both in the Western world and in the global South and East. Denominations continue to be the most visible expression of these structures. Given that the largest of these denominations are still based in Western nations, it is not difficult to see the problem of the location of power.

One of the primary vehicles of maintaining systems and structures of control is through seminary and pastoral education. Denominations maintain their own seminaries for the training of pastors and missionaries. In many cases, one cannot be ordained as a pastor or priest without a seminary degree. Even in the global South and East, where access to education, not to mention the money to pay for it are limited, there is a strong push toward seminary education. And once again, in terms of maintaining a Western power base (whether intentionally or unintentionally), theological education takes on a decidedly Western-centric bent. Where the seminaries in the global South and East exist, they are often administered by and staffed by Western professors and the theological content and vocabulary are Western.<sup>41</sup>

Another primary means of maintaining present systems of control and power is through the flow of money. In the global sense, not only did the vast majority of missionaries to the global South and East come from the West, but so did the financial support. As mission stations were established, they were funded primarily through Western-based denominations. In some cases, this created a situation of dependence on the part of the local churches and seminaries. When the Western agencies took on the mentality that each local mission outpost or education center ought to be self-sufficient

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41. Lois McKinney Douglas, "Globalizing Theology and Theological Education," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 270.

after a period of time, it created difficulty for people who had come to rely on the outside support.<sup>42</sup> This is a complex challenge, but the point here is that more often than not, those who supply the money will have the power position when it comes to deciding how it will be spent. The problem with dependence isn't simply that "people should be able to care for themselves," but rather, that people should have more freedom to decide what methods of ministry are most appropriate in their particular contexts. That freedom may be diminished by dependence on resources or authority external to their context.

### **Challenging Power Structures**

One important thing to note is that these examples of systems of power and control are not inherently wrong or misguided. In many cases, they are quite effective at attaining the institutional goals of the denomination or organization that wields the power. In all but a few extreme cases, the strategies at work are developed and implemented with only the best of motives and intentions. It should be assumed that those who are in positions of authority and control are genuinely interested in the work of the Church moving forward.

By way of challenging these systems of power and control, there have been a number of shifts taking place in recent years, in the global South and East, and in the Western world as well. Chapter five will detail many of the critiques brought by the emerging church movement in the West, and some of the ways that authority is being questioned and changed will be discussed. Similarly, chapter six will examine some of the new

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42. Isaac M. T. Mwase, "Shall They Till with Their Own Hoes? Baptists in Zimbabwe and New Patterns of Interdependence, 1950-2000," in *The Changing Face of Christianity*, ed. Lamin O. Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 69-76.

approaches being taken by the postcolonial church of the South and East. For now, it is enough to simply mention that denominational structures of authority are actively being questioned and subverted. Theological work is being taken up by increasingly broad groups of people who are willing to ask contextual questions about scripture and local culture. Education and training of church leaders is being brought into a new era, and new financial models are being tested for sustainability. All of these shifts represent exciting renewal within the global Church.

### Redemptive Subversion

With that said, having some guiding values for the process of critique, challenge, and subversion are in order. One of the unfortunately common traits of renewal and reform movements is that they lack kindness, empathy, compassion, and love. It is far too easy for people to become passionate about the changes they demand, and lose sight of the fact that the systems they are challenging are full of real people – in the church, these people are sisters and brothers in Christ, and outside of the church, these are people who are watching the Church for signs that they truly live out the ideals they say they believe. Instead, it will be helpful for the new movements of Christians to embrace some important values as they proceed. Even when anger is present, it will be most effective if it is expressed in a “generous” and honorable way.<sup>43</sup>

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43. Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 25-26.

### *Humble*

When “speaking truth to power,” it is critical to do so with humility. Without this in place, many of the issues being raised will get lost or dismissed as simple rhetoric being spouted by rebellious people, unwilling to listen. There is a way of holding to convictions deeply, without making arrogant statements about the powers one is opposing, or giving the impression that the issues are motivated by anger or selfishness. If a reconciled approach to doing things in new ways is at all important (and one would hope it is), humility is a non-negotiable.

### *Winsome*

One way of avoiding anger and harsh words when making critical and challenging statements is by concentrating on making changes in a way that communicates friendliness and hospitality. In the world of Christian denominations and mission agencies, it is frequently the case that people have an “all business” attitude, and don’t spend enough time laughing and enjoying the gifts of the Kingdom of God. This is the case, largely because of the nature of our mission – taking the gospel to “the ends of the earth” is a serious calling, and it is good and right to be vigilant about these things. But life in the Kingdom is a joyful journey – one that should be characterized by laughter and pleasurable fellowship.

Agents of reform should keep this in mind, especially as they engage in statements and behaviors of a contrarian nature. Being winsome in a critique can soften the blow,

and remind everyone that we're still on the same team, after all. Nobody enjoys being told that their ways of doing things aren't working, so the people calling for changes would do well to honor those they are challenging for their hearts toward God and their sacrifices on behalf of the Church, even while they are introducing culture shifting realities.

### *Prophetic*

Many of the passionate appeals brought by reformers take the form of radical protest, with actions of symbolic value. For example, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, the protest had a tangible, memorable image to help carry the message. Jewish scripture is full of stories of the prophets of God, calling out to the people for repentance, doing so using what might today be considered performance art – think about Jeremiah taking a clay pot and smashing it in front of Israel's elders, and telling them that this is what God is about to do to them.<sup>44</sup> Michael Frost notes that songs of protest are often a part of prophetic reform movements, and hold enormous symbolic value to the people who sing them.<sup>45</sup>

Whatever format the symbols take, it will be important for those who speak out against the broken systems of power and control to do so fearlessly and with deep conviction. Often times, of course, there are severe consequences for prophetic speech and behavior. It may mean being marginalized within a denomination, being disfellowshipped from the denomination, or in some contexts, it could bring

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44. Jer. 19

45. Frost, 21-24, 317-19.



incarceration. This underscores the importance of being humble, patient, loving, and tenacious in holding convictions.

### *Patient*

Making changes of a significant nature rarely happens quickly. It takes time for people to consider new ways of thinking, theologizing, and working. Resistance to change is to be expected. Bureaucracies, in particular, change very slowly. When proposing some of the shifts employed by the postcolonial church of the global South and East, and the emerging church of the West, there will be some who are “early adopters,” and embrace the change quickly as advocates. Others will be more measured in their responses – many of them may come to the conclusion that changes are in order, but not before taking a period of time to do so.

Patience is critical here, because reformers need all the allies they can get. Often some of the strongest change agents are those who took the longest to “come around.” These people should not be either written off too soon, or chided for their slowness. Instead, they should be welcomed, listened to, and embraced with love and grace. In some cases, their measured thoughtfulness in considering change may be an asset in convincing others of the necessity.

## Dealing with Systems of Globalization

The suggested approaches to challenging systems of power and control given here thus far are primarily directed toward Christian people and entities. However, it will still be the case that those who find themselves pursuing Christian mission will at times come up against corporations and governments that are engaging in behavior detrimental to people and cultures. Many in the postcolonial church of the global South and East, as well as in the Western emerging church movement take up social justice causes that bring them into direct conflict with transnational corporations.<sup>46</sup> In dealing with these secular and governmental systems, Christians will certainly have a large challenge ahead of them.

Perhaps the most difficult issue will be in developing a counter-cultural response to the rampant consumerism that globalization demands. Tom Sine sounds this warning:

A growing chorus of voices express concern that our new global economy is taking on the character of empire. . . What I believe we are witnessing is the global economy also taking on something of the character of a religion by defining for people everywhere what is ultimate.<sup>47</sup>

As advertisements compete for the attention of people everywhere, attempting to imagine for them what the “good life” looks and feels like, Christians are increasingly uncomfortable with messages of consumer products being touted as “the real thing,”

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46. Tom Sine, *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 197-98.

47. *Ibid.*, 68-69.

when they know it's not true.<sup>48</sup> Attempting to push back against these pervasive corporate messages will not be easy, and will require much creativity and tenacity.

But again, this can be done in a winsome way. For example, Adbusters is a secular, Canada-based activist organization, which attempts to organize people against consumerism and the negative aspects of globalization. They have become famous for a campaign called "Buy Nothing Day," an event aimed at getting people to purchase nothing on the day after Thanksgiving Day in the United States, which is one of the busiest shopping days of the year.<sup>49</sup> As a response to this, a group of Christians based in San Diego, California called the Ecclesia Collective decided to put a more positive spin on things, and began a tradition called "Make Something Day." According to their website,

"We applaud Buy Nothing Day... but it isn't enough for us. As followers of Jesus, we believe that giving is a central part of the lifestyle we are trying to embody. So, we replaced the negative with something positive: Make Something Day. Go ahead and give gifts this holiday season. As they say, giving is better than receiving. But that doesn't mean buying something is. So, we encourage folks to avoid shopping on the Friday after Thanksgiving. Instead, stay home, put a log on the fire and try making something for someone."<sup>50</sup>

Not all forms of protest can be handled in this gentle a format, though. There are times when transnational corporations and government entities are faced with protest rallies, boycotts, and acts of civil disobedience done by Christian activists who believe it is their responsibility to speak out against corruption, exploitation of the poor and children, and

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48. Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 165-66.

49. "Buy Nothing Day," Adbusters, <http://www.adbusters.org/campaigns/bnd> (accessed August 3, 2008).

50. "Make Something Day," The Ecclesia Collective, <http://ecclesiacollective.org/makesomethingday> (accessed August 3, 2008).

predatory business practices that damage cultures. Direct action is certainly a controversial matter in the Christian world, but many from across the political spectrum have taken up these methods – anti-abortion protesters to environmental activists.

Of course, there is also a long history of prophetic action by Christians for human rights. The civil rights movement in the United States is a primary example. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led many Christians, as well as others, to employ nonviolent resistance to advance the cause of African Americans. Not only was this movement highly effective in the United States, but several other movements around the world have taken up the vision and actions modeled by Christians of that era.

### **Next Steps**

In our next chapter, we will survey Christian historical perspectives that have defined our present context. These primarily concern the history of Christendom and the modern missionary movement, and the ways that Christendom has itself become a system of power and control. The post-Christendom shift will also be examined as the emerging context for understanding mission.

Chapter three will explore biblical materials that frame our understanding of the *missio Dei* and the Kingdom of God, and how that understanding impacts the ways we live into the present reality. The Kingdom affects everything, and suggests an alternate view of systems of power – from citizenship to vocation to economic forces to our ultimate mission. As we frame our worldview around this, we will see a clear picture of what the proper response of Jesus followers can and ought to be.

Chapter four frames our discussion in terms of globalization. The positive and negative aspects will be explored, as will helpful Christian responses to it. In chapter five, we will describe the emerging church movement in the Western world, and how it is engaging postmodern culture shifts. Chapter six will look to the global South, and discuss missional movements taking place in postcolonial contexts. In both chapters five and six, suggestions will be made as to what the respective movements in the West and the global South have to share with and learn from each other. Chapter seven will present a model for mutual learning and growth through the development of “communities of communities,” connecting the church renewal movements of the global South and the Western world. Practical steps will also be offered.

## Chapter 2

### Christian Historical Perspectives: The Flip Sides of Christendom

In examining the current state of the church in the global South and East, it would seem that the most prominent impact on growth and expansion has been the missionary movement over the past one hundred years. There has certainly been a significant effort from the Christian West toward mobilizing missionaries into all parts of the world, and this has produced many gains for the church. However, a more thorough historical look at the church, and the events that brought it to its current standing (both in the global South and East, as well as in the West), reveals a deeper running thread. More important to the expansion of Christianity in the world than the modern missionary movement was the introduction of Christendom.

The church of Christendom has dominated Christian history for the better part of its 2,000 years. Christendom is defined in many ways, with emphasis placed on a range of focal points. Most references give attention to the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine in the early fourth century. In choosing to worship the Christian God, Constantine was pursuing his own prosperity as well as that of the empire – Christianity was a religion fit for the conquered world.<sup>1</sup> Prior to that point, Christianity had spread throughout the Roman empire, but under circumstances of persecution and suppression. Constantine's shift rapidly changed things, and nearly instantly changed Christianity from being the marginalized minority to being showered with privilege as the favored

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1. Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000*, 2nd ed., The Making of Europe (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 60-61.

religion of the empire.<sup>2</sup> In A.D. 325, he assembled Christian bishops from all parts of the empire for the Council of Nicea, which aimed at bringing uniformity in belief and practice to the Church.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, by the end of the century, other religions were being outlawed and suppressed.<sup>4</sup>

Christendom, though, cannot be understood strictly through a Constantinian perspective.

Constantine may have provided a breakthrough for the Christian movement, but it required a theological reframing into an imperial religion, which was provided by Augustine. Stuart Murray says that, “[R]esponsibility for adapting Christianity to its new and unanticipated role fell primarily on the foremost theologian of the period, who undertook this with imagination and skill, and whose towering influence decisively shaped Western Christendom.”<sup>5</sup> Murray goes on to summarize several of the theological innovations that Augustine brought about, including: justification of oppression of religious opponents; the receiving of converts who had been coerced rather than persuaded; and normalizing the baptism of infants (which allowed for all people in the empire to be considered Christian).<sup>6</sup> Thus, the combined actions of Constantine and Augustine brought about such change that, “whereas Christians began the fourth century

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2. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 8.

3. Brown, 61.

4. Paul Peachey, "Christendom: Affirming by Exposing," *Mission focus* Special issue: East Asia Theological Consultation: Asian and Alternative Responses to David Bosch's *Transforming Mission*., no. 11, suppl. (2003): 180.

5. Murray, 74.

6. Ibid., 76-77.

of the era as a *persecuted* minority, they ended that century as a *persecuting* majority.”<sup>7</sup>

Christian practice assumed the amenities of the state society, such as the use of public buildings and a hierarchical ordering of clergy.<sup>8</sup> Papal power, one of the enduring hallmarks of Christendom’s empowerment of the clergy, became so expansive that by the medieval period, “Christian teaching and church law would imbue every aspect of human life,” and the popes “would exercise an absolute and supreme power over every human being, including political rulers.”<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note here that Christendom and Christianity are not necessarily interchangeable terms. “Christianity,” as a concept or religious system, is set apart from “Christendom,” which has territorial and/or temporal dimensions.<sup>10</sup> Christianity can be thought of as behavioral practice of faith, whereas Christendom is a ruling domain and mindset. For example, there are many areas in the world that Christendom as a cultural paradigm never reached, but where Christianity thrives. Further, most would agree that Christendom as a tangible, ruling domain ended by the late twentieth century, even though there are many vestiges remaining.<sup>11</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch argue that “Christendom, as a paradigm of understanding, as a metanarrative, still exercises an overweening influence on our existing theological, missiological, and ecclesiological

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7. Peachey: 180. Italics original.

8. Craig L. Nesson, “After the Deconstruction of Christendom: Toward a Theological Paradigm for the Global Era,” *Mission Studies* 18, no. 1 (2001): 78.

9. Peter C. Phan, “A New Kind of Christianity, but What Kind?,” *Mission Studies* 22, no. 1 (2005): 63.

10. Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 36.

11. Murray, 178-216.



understandings in church circles. In other words, we still think of the church and its mission in terms of Christendom . . . Constantine, it seems, is still the emperor of our imaginations.”<sup>12</sup>

This chapter will suggest that while the missionary movement has been a major force of the shifting in global Christianity, it is actually the structures and mentalities of Christendom that are the primary change agents. These things exist in no small measure within the missionary movement. Christendom can be a controversial topic. There is no shortage of critics that will speak and write at length about the devastation brought about by this mindset, and yet, the truth remains that the message of Jesus was carried to many remote parts of the world as a result of some of the systems of Christendom. On balance, there are dark sides and bright sides to it, which will be explored here. This will be done by looking first at the “Up” side of Christendom – the people and nations that were the beneficiaries of Christendom’s power. Second, the down, or “Underside” of Christendom will be discussed – the people and nations that were coerced, ruled over, exploited, and undervalued by Christendom. In each of these cases, some ironic elements will be highlighted, in sections describing the “Down side of Up,” and the “Up side of Down.” Christendom is too complex a topic to be treated with simplistic judgments. However, for whatever good may have come from it, there is little question that it has well surpassed its usefulness. With that in mind, some hopeful elements of a post-Christendom experience in the world will also be suggested as a way forward in the church of the global South and East working together with the church of the West.

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12. Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, 9.

## The “Up” Side of Christendom: Western Power and Religious Dominance

In studying the early expansion of the Church documented in the book of Acts, a commonly referenced instance of the spread of the gospel takes place in Acts 8, on the heels of the martyr stoning of Stephen – “And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”<sup>13</sup> The persecution of the church is certainly not a positive, “good news” kind of report, and yet, we also read that “those who had been scattered went about preaching the word,”<sup>14</sup> and,

those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the persecution of Christians, the gospel of Jesus was spread. As noted above, it is common to see seemingly negative events turning into great gain. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. When the Roman Empire suddenly turned from marginalizing and persecuting Christians toward an enthusiastic embrace of them, it was gladly received as a blessing. In retrospect, there were also some dark things to come as a result of the marriage of church and state.<sup>16</sup>

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13. Acts 8:1.

14. Acts 8:4.

15. Acts 11:19-21.

16. Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, 8.

From the fourth through the eighth centuries, Christendom spread throughout Europe in the form of “micro-Christendoms” that functioned independently of each other, but retained distinctly Christian cultures.<sup>17</sup> Beginning in the eighth century, largely through the reign of the Frankish king Charlemagne, means of coercion were used to convert people to Christianity. By the eleventh century, Christendom had moved into the last pagan areas of Scandinavia (though, in this case, more through osmosis than coercion).<sup>18</sup>

Missiologist and historian Andrew Walls argues that we would do well to focus on 1492 as a new missionary era for Catholics. It is an important milestone, he says, because “it marks an event of immense importance for the history of the Christian faith, because from that time onwards, a Christianity that had become thoroughly identified with and conditioned by the land and life and thought of Europe had to extend its consciousness, its vision, and eventually its theology to cope with the realities of the world beyond Europe.”<sup>19</sup> Columbus’ entry into the Americas was an expansion of an imperial presence, but also a spiritually sanctioned one.

Colonialism, “conceived in crusading zeal,” advanced Christendom to Morocco, the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, India, South Asia, China, and Japan.<sup>20</sup> Portugal, Spain, France, England, and the Netherlands all participated in colonial activities, incorporating the new lands into the Christendom umbrella as they went. They baptized people and

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17. Brown, 364.

18. Murray, 60-61.

19. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith*, 28.

20. Ibid., 38.

quickly instituted their own European cultures, without regard for the local cultures. Meanwhile, the brutality of the representatives of Christendom certainly caused questions about the true Christian mission at work.

It is important to note that in the history of the expansion of Christendom, there were significant movements of change within, in particular, the Protestant Reformation. Serious challenges were brought to the theological and power structures of the church. Surprisingly, though, despite the major disruption caused by the Reformation, many aspects of the Catholic, as well as the Reformed church did not significantly change. Things such as clergy hierarchies and governmental partnerships were not altered.<sup>21</sup> Essentially, says Murray, “The Reformation caused enormous upheaval and produced lasting divisions in the church and European society. But actually nothing much really changed, at least in relation to Christendom. All the defining structures, attitudes, methods, reflexes and processes were still in place.”<sup>22</sup> It seems that all they were interested in was a reformed version of Christendom, and not a more radical disruption. In fact, the Anabaptists (a group never a part of the Catholic church or the Protestant Reformation), who did call for more of an undermining of the core tenets of Christendom, were equally persecuted by Catholics and Protestants.<sup>23</sup>

The European colonial presence lasted well into the twentieth century, which means that the modern missionary movement had begun by the time the colonial powers had commenced their withdrawal from their occupied territories. The World Missionary

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21. Murray, 156-57.

22. Ibid., 159.

23. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith*, 37.

Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 is commonly referred to as the coming out party of the modern missionary movement. It is recognized as the starting point of the modern theology of mission, and perhaps the first glimpse of what a world church would look like.<sup>24</sup> By this time, North Americans had joined European Christians as primary activists in missionary efforts.

The missionary movement, rather than challenging the assumptions of Christendom, actually relied upon them, and utilized them in the work of world evangelization. Even the language used by missionaries and their agencies was in tune with that of empire. The gospel was seen as an “instrument” of transformation, a “weapon” to reduce suffering, and “tool” to bring civilization to pagans.<sup>25</sup> The Christian West was intent on a world takeover of evangelistic conversion. But once again, the methodology of Christendom was still in place. Missionary agencies utilized the presence of Christian governments in colonial areas to their advantage, using everything from transportation infrastructures to medical science to industrial technology, and, of course, wealth, to reach those who were not yet Christian.<sup>26</sup>

The aims of missionary societies were certainly fueled by pious zeal, but they were also intent on “civilizing” the people they reached. “The centerpiece was not personal discipleship of Jesus, but the blessings of modern civilization, including its political

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24. *Ibid.*, 53. Walls notes that the 1910 conference was not the first, or even the largest missionary conference, but it has had the most lasting impact.

25. Bosch, 335-36.

26. *Ibid.*, 337.

institutions, its technology, and its affluence.”<sup>27</sup> In some ways, this effort toward “civilizing” people was condescending and racist, and in other ways, it reflected an attitude of moral, intellectual, and spiritual superiority.<sup>28</sup> To European sensibilities, unclothed bodies and humble huts were not compatible with a Christian conscience. The efforts toward “conversion and civilization were two sides of the same coin, two related means of ‘trading up,’ of accumulating merit and honoring the Glory of God.”<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, by Edinburgh 1910, even in the midst of the Christendom assumptions, there was a growing awareness of the global evil impacts of Western power, and a cautious reevaluation of the methods of missionary activity. However, there was still a strong confidence in Western civilization’s role in taking the gospel to the “backward peoples.”<sup>30</sup> Inherent in this confidence was also the Christendom hierarchical structure of ecclesiastical bodies. The Anglican missionary, Roland Allen wrote in 1927 about how expectations of church structures were actually hindering, rather than helping expansion. He tells stories about movements of Christians that pop up without outside missionary influence, only to be hindered from further growth by the imposition of outside pastors

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27. Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ’s Way: Bible Studies*, W.C.C. Mission Series; No. 8 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987), 6-7.

28. Ryan Dunch, “Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity,” *History & Theory* 41, no. 3 (2002): 309-310.

29. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, Of Revelation and Revolution, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 8.

30. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 8.

and bishops. All of this in the midst of missionary “appeals for funds, and . . . our methods of moving heaven and earth to make a proselyte.”<sup>31</sup>

Several of the missionary societies from the late nineteenth century had theoretical strategies aimed at developing self-sustaining, self-governing churches in the areas they evangelized, but on a practical level, this did not play out. Rather than developing national folk churches, they developed systems and expectations of their congregations that were unrealistic, culturally unnecessary, or judgmental, and these churches would become dependent on the outside missionaries. The condescending attitudes of many missionaries prevented them from deeming their disciples worthy of carrying the mantle of leadership. R. Pierce Beaver declares that “all missions were paternalist and colonialist at the turn of the century.”<sup>32</sup>

One of the most glaring examples of paternalism in missionary activity has to do with theological assumptions. Contextualizing theology for the areas being evangelized was not considered important. Western theology came to assume that there is a set of universal truths that apply to all cultures and ought to be translated into all languages.<sup>33</sup> Of course, it was Western theology that was assumed. When converted people groups were theologically trained, it was primarily done in Western languages, with Western

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31. Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It* (London: The World Dominion Press, 1927).

32. R. Pierce Beaver, "The History of Mission Strategy," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter et al. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 249.

33. Harold Netland, "Introduction: Globalization and Theology Today," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 28.

vocabulary, and it was done by Western professors.<sup>34</sup> The disregard for the importance of local cultures and languages served to reinforce the Christendom assumptions of power and control, as well as to marginalize those being evangelized and trained.

### The Down Side of “Up”

While many of the more negative aspects of Christendom’s history throughout the world, often utilized by the modern missionary movement, have been highlighted, it should be noted that the negative experiences discussed thus far have been for those on the “receiving” end of missionary activity. It was their cultures, their traditions, and their lives that were disregarded and trampled. Obviously, there were many ways in which Christendom lacked a truly Christian character. However, in the midst of discussing these things, it would be easy to make the mistake of assuming that those on the “up” side of Christendom fared very well. While in economic, cultural, and political ways, this may seem to be true, there were also some “down” sides to being “up.”

First, the notions of power that came to drive Christendom were false, and contradictory to the Christian message. This movement’s leader was known to have said things like,

“If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all,”<sup>35</sup> and, “whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but

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34. McKinney Douglas, 270.

35. Mark 9: 35.



to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”<sup>36</sup> Despite the theological innovations brought about by Augustine in defense of the use of earthly power, it is difficult to imagine that spreading the empire of Christendom is compatible with Jesus’ own teaching and lifestyle.<sup>37</sup> The hierarchies of dominance utilized by Christendom defy biblical teachings regarding humility, servanthood, sacrifice, generosity, kindness, hospitality, and love.

Second, the theological and cultural assumptions made by the agents of Christendom were false. Rather than taking on the model of Paul in Acts 17, walking the city of Athens and learning its culture before speaking to it, too many judgments about “civilized society” (or the lack thereof) were made. Where Paul goes so far as to commend his audience for their piety, missionaries of Christendom found the cultures they entered to be inferior and failed to learn from them, even when through conversion, the people became brothers and sisters in Christ. This not only made them guilty of arrogance, it caused them to miss the opportunities of growth by listening to God speak through other cultures. They missed the rich blessing that mutuality in relationships brings.

Third, the spread of Christendom brought about a false sense of security in wealth, intellect, and military might. Christians, whether they were direct agents of a government structure or not, developed confidence in their nationalistic power. But as Eloise Hiebert Meneses notes, “. . . true and lasting power resides not in the state but in the body of Christ and in its ability to transform individuals, groups, and societies as part of God’s

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36. Mark 10:43-45.

37. Murray, 76-82.

kingdom work.”<sup>38</sup> The Holy Spirit is the source of power in the Kingdom of God. But this likely went unnoticed because Christendom had more to do with building other kingdoms, with other motives, and thus used other means. These “down” sides, of course, lack the kind of earthly punch that most people, and certainly political leaders would consider impressive. However, there is a poverty of soul in those who fail to see God at work in people and cultures all around us.

### **The “Underside” of Christendom**

It is obvious from the matters discussed above that the Christendom Church served the interests of national governments and empires, usually at the expense of the colonized outposts of the empires. Some of the ways that Christian missionaries and governments disregarded cultures, people groups, and lives are widely documented. Rather than dwelling on the structures and processes that brought all of this about, this section will highlight some general examples of the impact that Christendom had on those it dominated – those on the “underside” of history. Some of these represent the obvious problems involved, and some represent the hidden implications of what took place.

One of the more obvious negative impacts of Christendom’s colonial takeover of other parts of the world, in particular through means of coercion is that simply because a person “converts” while standing on the wrong end of a threatening spear, does not mean that the “conversion” is genuine or life-changing (at least in a spiritual sense). In the

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38. Eloise Hiebert Meneses, "Bearing Witness in Rome with Theology from the Whole Church: Globalization, Theology, and Nationalism," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 249.

historical process of evangelism by means of military power, the end result is typically a superficial Christianity.<sup>39</sup> Sadly, this reality was acknowledged and accepted by many in positions of power within Christendom. Stuart Murray notes that, “Church leaders knew only a small proportion of converts were serious about following Christ, though they rarely seemed unduly disturbed by this. Many recognized Christendom had achieved breadth at the expense of depth and were willing to operate within this new context rather than wringing their hands over it.”<sup>40</sup>

Another implication of the way that missionaries from the West imported their culture, and “civilization,” along with the gospel, is that important opportunities for contextualization were missed. While translating the Bible into indigenous languages was given much effort, many of the cultural and even geographical nuances of the regions were not. For example, the Roman Catholic Church has long prohibited the development of an Easter liturgy adapted to the context of Latin America. Much of the territory in question is in the southern hemisphere, meaning that Easter takes place in the autumn, when many elements in nature are in a dying, shedding process, rather than a life-giving process abundant in the spring season, when the Church in the northern hemisphere celebrates. While there may be value in uniting the Church around the world on such an important holiday, it is peculiar that serious attempts have not been made to make for a better cultural “fit.”<sup>41</sup>

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39. Ofelia Ortega, "Revolutionary Hope in the Church after Christendom," in *Hope for the World: Mission in a Global Context : Papers from the Campbell Seminar*, ed. Walter Brueggemann (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 116.

40. Murray, 67.

41. Enrique D. Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492-1979)*, trans. Alan Neely (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 64.

To further complicate things, by forcing Western culture into foreign contexts, the missionaries not only disregarded the importance of indigenous ways of life, they also made the Bible much less relevant to people. For example, R.S. Sugirtharajah relates the story of an African Christian who went to Germany to become the first to get a doctorate there. During a celebration to honor his graduation and triumphant return to Africa, a woman became possessed by an evil spirit. The local leaders turned to the newly educated man, expecting him to cast out the spirit, but based on his good German education, he denied that evil spirits exist. The gathered crowd heard this and said, "What is the use of studying in Europe? Before, you could heal. Now you can't."<sup>42</sup> Many of the elements of Christianity which were most relevant to the peoples being evangelized were dismissed or downplayed by those who could have best utilized them, had they not been bound to their own predispositions. The theology brought by Westerners had no place in their small world for the "larger, more populated universe with entities that are outside the Enlightenment worldview . . . They have nothing useful to say on issues involving such things as witchcraft or sorcery, since these do not exist in an Enlightenment universe."<sup>43</sup> Instead of "educating" the supernatural or mysterious dimensions of theology out of the indigenous ministers, it likely would have benefitted the Westerners to learn about this "populated universe" from their pupils.

Unfortunately, many of the negative aspects of Christendom in these "underside" areas persist to the present day. Perhaps the most readily recognizable is in the area of economics. When the colonial powers withdrew from their occupied territories (which

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42. Sugirtharajah, 91.

43. Walls, "Globalization and the Study of Christian History," 75-76.

took place primarily between the 1940s and 1960s), they left behind excited nationalistic leaders who would quickly realize how difficult it is to birth a new nation. Not only did they have to struggle with internal power grabs, but they discovered that political (and spiritual) freedom from the West was a very different thing than economic freedom.<sup>44</sup> The forces of globalization (which will be discussed in greater depth in chapter four) now place pressure on the relatively young nations, which have certainly received mixed messages regarding the “Christian” nations formerly occupying their homelands. Unfortunately, in many of these young nations, there has been significant corruption by people who may have attempted to bring their homelands into an independence era successfully, but got quickly drunk on the power and wealth suddenly afforded them.<sup>45</sup> Ironically, while the World Wars reduced the numbers of Western missionaries in many areas of the colonized world, there was actually a significant increase in the number of Christian congregations and national spiritual leaders in places like Africa.<sup>46</sup>

Pastoral education is another area with lasting vestiges of Christendom. In the missionary efforts of the past two hundred years, many seminaries were developed throughout the world. As mentioned above, though, the languages, theology, and practical teachings offered were overwhelmingly done so in the languages of the empires, with a continuing Western-centric approach. The seminaries tend to be staffed by Westerners, or Western-trained natives. However, despite the rapid growth of the Church

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44. Meneses, 234.

45. George B. N. Ayittey, *Africa Unchained: The Blueprint for Africa's Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 19.

46. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith*, 98.

of the global South and East, in the Western world, ministers are being trained without a thorough knowledge of what the world is really like.<sup>47</sup> Even, worse than that is the fact that Western seminary course syllabi are being exported to Africa and Asia.<sup>48</sup> Further, the few books that are actually written about places like Africa are published at prices that few African institutions can afford.<sup>49</sup>

Denominational hierarchies also remain in place in many of the decolonized areas of the world. The power structures within these denominations frequently involve indigenous church leaders, but control tends to be deferred to the “home offices” in the West. The recent turmoil within the Anglican church between Western and global Southern bishops is certainly illustrative of some of the tension that exists. Bishops from the global South, being good students of the theology their predecessors were taught by Western missionaries, reject the more recent, liberal stances of the Western part of their denomination, especially on issues such as homosexuality. Their voices may be heard, but little change takes place as a result of their protests. Even aside from doctrinal differences that may be present within denominations, there are many ways in which Western denominations dictate Church life in the global South and East. Budgets, training, methods of evaluation, models of ministry, and other elements that affect congregations’ day to day operation usually originate from the West. In these, and several other ways, paternalism continues to exist in the Church.

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47. Walls, "Globalization and the Study of Christian History," 78.

48. *Ibid.*, 79.

49. *Ibid.*, 81.

## The Up Side of “Down”

In spite of the many hindrances that remain in the lasting remnants of Christendom in the global South and East, it would be both unfortunately dour and inaccurate to focus solely on the negative. The truth, however, is that there are certain advantages to being on the “underside” of Christendom. For example, church history is full of examples of how persecution and marginalization actually create environments for growth. David Garrison has documented a number of “Church Planting Movements,” in which churches rapidly multiply among indigenous people groups with little or no outside Christian contact.<sup>50</sup> He notes the presence of ten common factors in these movements, which include there being a “price to pay” for someone to become a Christian, and the frequent suffering that missionaries have to endure. This, of course, is a modern-day repeat of what we find throughout the book of Acts. Whether it is the fact that suffering and hardship force people to own and live into their faith at radical levels, or that God provides people with extra measures of grace during those times, it is remarkable and humbling to see situations like this play out.

Roland Allen, writing many years prior to Garrison, details a story that illustrates this point. In the mid to late nineteenth century, all foreign missionaries were banished from the island of Madagascar. A severe persecution of Christians was instituted. And yet, for the twenty five years that no missionaries were present, the Church there grew ten-fold. After this time frame, missionaries came in, developed institutions, and leadership

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50. V. David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004).

structures, but the outcome was not nearly so impressive after that time frame as it was during the persecution.<sup>51</sup>

Aside from actual persecution of Christians, even a marginalization within a society can bring about a thriving movement of the Church. The Christian movement in China is a striking example. There are multiple Christian expressions in China, including officially registered and recognized churches, and a number of house church networks. The registered church enjoys the ability to operate in the open, with the approval of the government. The house church movement, though, is not recognized by the government, and is often a target of persecution as a result. But the vast majority of Christians in the Chinese Church are involved in the house church movement. Some estimates indicate that well over six times as many people participate in houses churches, compared to the government sanctioned Christian groups.<sup>52</sup> Working on the margins has brought an energy to the house church movement that would likely be lost if they officially registered with the state.

Even when there are no legal structures of marginalization, social structures that push Christians outward in tension with their cultures can also be a proving ground for faith. India is a good example of this. The caste system, which is still pervasive in Indian culture, orders society according to hierarchies of birth. But there are those who fall outside of this hierarchy, and in some ways are thought of as sub-human. These outcasts, or Dalits, as they call themselves, have responded very well to the Christian message.

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51. Allen.

52. Thomas Wang and Sharon Chan, "Christian Witness to the Chinese People," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter et al. (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1999), 640.



Millions have come to faith. It has given them a sense of human dignity in the face of rejection by others.<sup>53</sup> A theological movement has even developed out of the Dalit communities that addresses their place in the Kingdom of God, but also within the larger Indian society. Though still rejected by many, they have come to challenge the systems of power that hold them back.

Marginalization, though, goes well beyond legal and social status. It is present in significant ways on a financial level. The colonial powers may have given the occupied territories freedom, but the forces of globalization have certainly made life difficult for many developing countries. Aggressive practices perpetrated by Western transnational corporations have impoverished many millions. It amounts to an economic reconstitution of colonialism.<sup>54</sup> But it is out of this dire situation that Liberation Theology was born in 1960s Latin America. This theological frame calls out to God's "preferential option for the poor," calls for protest against unfair government and corporate practices, and aims at empowering its followers to allow their voices to be heard.<sup>55</sup> This movement has galvanized much of the Christian community in Latin America, and had a far reaching impact on theological systems in Africa and North America. Liberation Theology has no shortage of critics (especially in the West), but has had more than enough cultural traction in its homelands to demand attention.

These movements demonstrate that being pushed to the margins, while not necessarily preferable, can actually stimulate growth and opportunity for Christians. Those who

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53. Sugirtharajah, 149.

54. Mark Lewis Taylor, "Spirit and Liberation: Achieving Postcolonial Theology in the United States," in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2004), 43.

55. Gutiérrez and Nickoloff, 78-108.

practice their faith in impoverished countries or in places where Christianity is persecuted demonstrate where their faith really lies. In fact, it is they who can often be found praying for the church in the wealthy Western world not to become distracted by materialism and economic gain.

### **The Post-Christendom Shift**

While this chapter has argued at length that Christendom thinking and practice is alive and well, the reality is that in a technical, historical sense, Christendom came to an end in the twentieth century. A number of significant elements actually came together over a course of three to four hundred years, making the demise of Christendom gradual, complex process. Stuart Murray argues that the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a kind of “beginning of the end,” in terms of shaking the power of Christendom’s influence. However, as noted above, the Reformers were in many ways, happy to go along with some of the hierarchies and assumptions of Christendom, as well as the governmental endorsements in some cases.<sup>56</sup>

A major shift also took place in the eighteenth century with the dawn of the Enlightenment period. Scientific and philosophical work was done during this time that challenged many of the assumptions that had given Christendom power in societies. Along with that, the industrial age came into being, which brought about economic and population shifts in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was a time of heavy

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56. Murray, 178-179.

reliance on human potential. Serious re-evaluations of faith and life were taking place at many levels.<sup>57</sup>

Two world wars and another major philosophical shift brought Christendom to a conclusion in the twentieth century. Churches on both sides of the wars used Augustinian “just war” theologies against each other to argue for the righteousness of their respective causes, but the fractured state of the Church would not withstand this. Then, in the 1960s, postmodernism began to have an impact on academia, challenging and relativizing claims to truth and knowledge. The dominant metanarrative that Christendom represented, was now under attack, and the more this form of thought took root, the more Christendom lacked cultural and political traction in the Western world.<sup>58</sup>

Murray notes two additional shifts within the Church that contributed to the end of the Christendom era. First, the long-range implications of the Protestant Reformation were being felt in a major way. There was a proliferation of Christian denominations that had decentralized power and authority in such a way that no one group could speak for all Christians any longer. This lack of a power base caused Christendom to be less relevant to the lives of people, including many Christians in the Western world. Second, the modern missionary movement transformed the global nature of Christianity. As missionaries moved into non-Western nations, despite many of their Christendom assumptions, they did so without the strong-arm coercion tactics of the military colonial takeovers.<sup>59</sup> Andrew Walls argues that colonialism actually helped distinguish

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57. Ibid., 179-181.

58. Ibid., 182-183.

59. Ibid., 184-185.

Christianity from Christendom. Christianity was not thought of in terms of territory or crusade any longer. Indeed, Christian missionaries challenged their parent nations' governments over colonial practices at times. Rather than being in league with the occupying governments, the missionaries could be seen as relatively independent agents.<sup>60</sup>

One of the interesting dimensions of the modern missionary movement, which again, contributed to the demise of Christendom, was the fact that it was heavily driven by volunteers. Independent missionary societies rose up to move forward in practical ways that large denominations were not doing, whether because of church bureaucracies or limited theology. Rather than being weighed down by hierarchical pecking orders or clergy-centered doctrine, volunteer missionaries were given opportunities to serve in capacities that were impossible before, which made the missionary calling more accessible to Christians everywhere.<sup>61</sup>

The newer approaches to missionary activity began to give room for contextualizing the gospel to particular cultures as well. While there was certainly a major emphasis on "civilizing" the heathens, and importing the culture of the Enlightenment to do so, some missionaries began to discover ways of communicating in terms that indigenous peoples could understand. There may have been an air of superiority to the missionary work, but there was also improvement, when compared to the previous generations of missionary engagement. This represented an important first step toward the development of local,

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60. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith*, 43-44.

61. Andrew F. Walls, "Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter et al. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 234-236.

indigenous theologies. In a post-Christendom world, there are increasing numbers of local theologies being offered.

As the post-Christendom reality continues to play out in the world, perhaps the most significant shift is in the globalization of the missionary movement. It used to be the case that nearly all of the world's missionaries were being sent out by churches, denominations, and missionary societies in the Western world. But after multiple generations of Christians have been brought up in the nations formerly known as "mission fields," they are now sending out their own missionaries – often to the Western world. Significant population shifts are currently taking place, with millions of Africans moving into European countries. Christians are a part of this group. As noted in the first chapter, Philip Jenkins reports that several of Great Britain's churches are now pastored by Africans.<sup>62</sup>

Asian nations are also quite active in sending Christian missionaries. South Korea, in particular is heavily oriented toward missionary activity, both cross-culturally to different people groups in their own nation, as well as to overseas countries. South Korea now sends out more missionaries than any other nation except for the United States. India, Japan, and the Philippines are also active in sending missionaries.<sup>63</sup>

Latin America also has significant missionary activity. Chile has sent missionaries to other Latin American nations, such as Argentina. Brazil, also, has come to view itself as

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62. Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis*, 92.

63. James E. Plueddemann, "Theological Implications of Globalizing Missions," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 252.

both a mission field in need of its own workers, and a sending country. Brazilian missionaries have been sent to Portugal and Chile.<sup>64</sup>

China's rapidly growing house church movement is also taking on the missionary mandate. There is an effort under way to continue to grow the church in China, but also begin retracing the ancient missionary routes which originally brought Christianity from Jerusalem to China. The missionary impulse is clearly active well outside the bounds of Christendom's old maps.

### **Christendom in Review**

Obviously, this chapter has expressed a largely unkind view of the history of Christendom in the world. The problems are abundant, and go well beyond the scope of this study. However, it would be naïve to suggest that Christendom was a completely empty process that had no redeeming qualities to it. In fact, Christendom did produce some gains despite its many failings.

While many of the ways in which Christianity was spread through Christendom were violent and oppressive to nations, it cannot be denied that this was the way that Christianity became a truly global faith. That is not to excuse any of the brutality perpetrated by representatives of the Christian West, or to suggest that the ends justified the means. The goals of Christendom's agents were dubious, but in spite of all they did, many people groups of Latin America, Africa, and Asia received the gospel for the first time through that delivery process. That there remain faithful Christians in those areas is

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64. Ibid., 253.

a testament to God's grace. That Christianity continues to grow rapidly in those areas is a testament to God's redemptive love.

With this overview of Christendom, and the beginnings of a new post-Christendom era as a backdrop, we can now examine the new expressions of Christian movements taking place in the global South and East and in the Western world. The nature of the new movements has much to do with the histories out of which they are emerging. Understanding Christendom is an important part of understanding current world movements and their implications even farther into the future.

These movements will be discussed in subsequent chapters. First, though, it is important to spend time examining biblical and theological materials that help frame our understanding of the Kingdom of God and mission. These will help us develop approaches to responding to the global context in helpful ways.

## Chapter 3

### Biblical Materials

In exploring the topics this project covers, there are a number of biblical and theological themes that need to be understood. If scripture is to be thought of as sufficient for all of life, then even political, social, and economic aspects of globalization are worth examining through the lenses of sacred text. Obviously, this can be tricky business, given that scripture can be misunderstood, distorted, and manipulated for personal and/or collective gain. It is also important to note that what may appear to be a simple process – in this case, reading biblical materials – is filled with cultural assumptions. Lesslie Newbigin, for example, notes that even “[t]he simplest verbal statement of the gospel, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ depends for its meaning on the content which that culture gives to the word ‘Lord.’ What kind of thing is ‘lordship’ in the culture in question?”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, many of the problematic issues that this project attempts to raise are born out of readings of scripture, which were assumed to be universal, but in fact were full of cultural assumptions.

With this in mind, we will approach the scriptural themes of this project with humility, seeking to understand both the texts at hand, and the contexts from which they are read and applied. We will develop an understanding of the framing theologies of the *missio Dei* and the Kingdom of God, which will provide a structure to thinking about the Church and specific communities of faith within it. Some of the scriptural aspects of a Church undergoing movements of renewal will be discussed, as will some communal principles

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1. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989), 144.



that characterize healthy relationships within and between churches. We will conclude with the understanding that the biblical mandates that motivate action must be undertaken with the energy of the Holy Spirit.

### ***Missio Dei as a Framing Structure***

The activity of God in the world is a central motif, through which other points of faith and practice can be understood. The nature of the church and the tasks to which she is called are important, but they find their value in the identity, character, and behavior of God. The church of Christendom may have come to understand itself as the center of mission, which gave rise to many of the cultural norms we see in the Western world,<sup>2</sup> but all along, it was God who created the world, God who imbued it with meaning, God who brought humanity into existence, and God who set out to redeem its failed state through God's own mission.

God's mission is demonstrated through covenants that he made with people – these will be explored below. Before we do this, though, we must first understand the missional<sup>3</sup> nature of God. The Trinitarian dynamics of the Godhead form the basis of the work of the Church.

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2. Darrell L. Guder, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 4.

3. The word missional has become an increasingly widely used term, generally referring to the nature of “being sent.” In its use here, God is a missionary God. When used in a church sense, it typically refers to the church being sent out into the world. Previously, the church may have seen itself as the sending body, but a missional understanding is that of a body being sent.

The gospel of John highlights this relationship. In John 3, we find the famous conversation between the Pharisee, Nicodemus, and Jesus, who says that it was God who had sent the Son into the world in order to save it, rather than condemn it for sin (vv. 16-17). Later, in chapter 17, we find Jesus praying to the Father, acknowledging the reciprocal nature of their relationship, and that the Father had sent the Son to bring eternal life (v. 3), which would be the basis of the Son sending his followers out into the world (v. 18). A similar exchange is repeated in chapter 20 – as the resurrected Jesus says to his disciples: “as the Father has sent Me, I also send you”(v. 21) – and as he does so, “he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (v. 22). The Son, here, as well as in Acts 1-2, empowers his followers to participate in the gospel, through the sending of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we have a Trinitarian expression of the mission of redemption in the world. That the *missio Dei* also involved the church is an important development, but one that must be placed in the proper order.

The *missio Dei* can be demonstrated throughout history and can be readily observed from the beginnings of the Hebrew scriptures. The way it is consistently expressed to mankind is through a series of covenantal relationships, all of which point to the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom ordering of things can be seen even in God’s institution of the family through Adam, and through his descendants.<sup>4</sup>

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4. Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 73.

### Abrahamic Covenant

The most explicit early covenant that demonstrates God's missional intentions is in his calling of Abram/Abraham. On multiple occasions, God states clearly to him that he has chosen Abraham and promised to bless him and his children, but this would actually be God's avenue of blessing the entire world. In Genesis 12, God calls Abram to leave his homeland to a new place God has in mind, promising him that, "In you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (v. 3). In Genesis 18, when God appears to Abraham and Sarah in order to promise that they would have a son in their old age, the "three men" mention that "Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (v. 18). God's intention to bless the world through Abraham and his descendants is repeated again in Genesis 22, after Abraham's obedient willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac (22:18); in Genesis 26, when God blesses Isaac (v. 4); and in Genesis 28, when God blesses Jacob in a dream (v. 14).

It is clear from the repetition of the blessings that God has something greater in mind than simply to redeem one family or nation. His mission is to bring about a fulfillment of a Kingdom reality. This reality starts with His most precious creation, mankind, whom He had created in His own image. The nation of God's choosing, though, would bear out another level of his Kingdom covenant and mission.

## Mosaic Covenant

If we flash forward from Jacob to the liberation of his descendents from their Egyptian captivity, we find the nation of Israel camped in front of Mt. Sinai, waiting for a word from God. The well known word they receive is the covenant of the Ten Commandments. Meredith Kline traces similarities between ancient near east documents and scriptural texts, in the way they include oaths, stipulations, witnesses, sanctions, and curses and blessings.<sup>5</sup> The covenant here, in particular, establishes a kind of government – one in which God is the king, and Israel is his people. Interestingly, though, this is not a relationship of dominance and oppression, but one of love and blessing. Indeed, the people themselves are to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the books of the law, God is calling them to a lifestyle of holiness and devotion to him as their king, but consistently reminding them of the purpose of their obedience, namely his identification with them. As the laws are given, a phrase repeatedly comes to the fore: “I am the LORD.” That phrase appears six times in Leviticus 18, fifteen times in chapter nineteen, and a total of 38 times in chapters 18-23. The centrality of God’s ownership of the covenant places him not just over them as king, but *with* them.

We see once again that the *missio Dei* does start with God, but includes His people. This inclusion is important, as the naming of Israel as a nation of priests, as co-workers with God, is repeated in Isaiah (61:6) as well as in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:5). Even

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5. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1972), 35.

6. Exod. 19:6.

the apocalyptic writings of Revelation include mentions of the kingdom of priests.<sup>7</sup> It is God's intention to share his Kingdom with His people.

### Davidic Covenant

After God's institution of a governmental form of covenant with the Israelites at Sinai, of course, there are a series of rebellions. Initially, these resulted in additional years of wandering the desert before being allowed to enter God's promised land. But ultimately, the people rejected God Himself as their king, demanding instead that they have a human king, like all the other nations around them.<sup>8</sup> God allowed this to take place, first through the prophet Samuel's anointing of King Saul, and then through David.

God's covenant with David in 1 Samuel 7 was that He would be faithful to David and his descendants, as they were faithful to God. He promised a long line of children that would remain on the throne of Israel, and that David's kingdom would "be established forever" (v. 16). This covenant would be repeated throughout the rest of the Old Testament, and ultimately be fulfilled as Jesus of Nazareth was born in the line of David as the King Eternal.<sup>9</sup>

The explicit activity of the *missio Dei* may be less readily apparent here, but God's activity in turning the world toward himself is still present. N.T. Wright finds a number

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7. Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6.

8. 1 Sam. 8.

9. See Matt. 1 and Luke 3 for the Davidic lineage of Jesus of Nazareth

of parallels between the life of David and the life of the son of David, Jesus.<sup>10</sup> They are both in unlikely positions to be designated as king, according to the expectations of man; David and Jesus both move through life as outcasts, leading rag-tag groups of followers across the Judean wilderness, and at climactic moments of covenant, both received words from God: “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me,”<sup>11</sup> and “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”<sup>12</sup> Further, Wright contends that,

Luke’s Davidic theme is indeed typological – Jesus really is seen as the ‘true David’ – but this is neither random nor arbitrary: it is held firmly *within a historical* scheme. Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, and the sending of the divine spirit, are the end-product of the long story that began with David and the divine promises made to him. The similarities, the parallels, are there because of the overall story, not vice versa. Luke is telling the story of Jesus *as* the fulfillment, the completion, of the story of David and his kingdom.<sup>13</sup>

#### Messianic/Kingdom Covenant

The most obvious example of the covenantal nature of the *missio Dei* can be found in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Not only did he establish the living, present reality of the reign of God, but he did so in a way that both fulfilled and transcended the expectations of the long-awaited Messiah. The covenants of Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David are all fulfilled in Jesus – in a manner of speaking, Jesus is all at once the “new Adam,” the “new Abraham,” “the new Moses,” and “the new David.” All of this is not to say, of

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10. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 1st North American ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 378-84.

11. 2 Sam. 7:14.

12. Matt. 3:17.

13. Wright, 381. (*Italics original*).

course, that he was readily recognized as the Messiah/king by his contemporaries. We well know that this was not always the case.

As mentioned above, Jesus fits the description of *missio Dei* perfectly, in the sense that he was sent in the world by the Father, with a purpose. In addition to the redemptive elements of his sacrificial death and resurrection, Jesus set out constantly to announce the kingdom of God. Because of the presence of kingdom language throughout Israel's history prior to Jesus, when Jesus entered the scene and immediately began preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,"<sup>14</sup> it was not a completely radical statement. Israel was already so familiar with this that Dallas Willard notes that first century Palestinians would not have been surprised by this message, any more than they would have been if Jesus had told them that Moses had given laws.<sup>15</sup> The kingdom that Jesus preached was not a concept to be believed in, but *a reality to be lived into*.

The kingdom of God was an embraced concept, because people were ready to acknowledge that God reigns. The "kingdom" to which Jesus continuously refers can be understood as, "the range of his effective will, where what he wants done is done."<sup>16</sup> Once again, we notice that mission is something that God Himself is actively engaged in. It is not something that requires the assignment and obedience of people to accomplish (though, of course, that is often called for, as well). Jesus represents the Father's sending of the Son, and the Son's redeeming message and action toward people.

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14. Matt. 4: 17.

15. Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 26.

16. Ibid., 25.

“The kingdom of God,” is a concept that embodies the hope of Israel. It announces boldly that Israel’s God will rule, and neither Caesar, nor Herod, nor any other political figure will.<sup>17</sup> Jesus’ announcement that the kingdom is at hand is an invitation to live life in a different dimension of reality. It is one that is certainly unpredictable and counter-intuitive in many ways, but one that is infused with power, joy, and love.

Jesus makes the kingdom a central theme of his ministry on earth. He is often found saying “the kingdom of God is like . . .” in order to give his listeners an understanding of the true nature of God’s domain, or making a pronouncement about the kingdom that goes against the grain of what people are wanting to hear. At times, the kingdom indicates an upside-down economy – rather than the wealthy people running the show and ruling over others, Jesus says that “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>18</sup> It isn’t those who show off their public works of righteousness that are in good standing with God, but those who do their work toward him discreetly and genuinely. Those who serve others are considered higher in the kingdom than those who rule over them. The laws of behavior are superseded by the laws of the heart – in this light, injunctions against adultery and murder actually become injunctions against lust and anger. The moral code that Jesus lays down doesn’t destroy the laws that Moses had given Israel, but rather elevates them to their proper place. It’s not so much about doing the right kinds of things, but becoming the right kind of people, out of whom those right things will naturally flow.<sup>19</sup>

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17. Wright, 302.

18. Mark 10:25.

19. Willard, 142-43.



Ultimately, the kingdom of God and the mission of God (*missio Dei*) are inseparable. God is at work in the world to bring it back in line with his original intentions. “God is a missionary God,”<sup>20</sup> and so the Father sends the Son, and the Son sends the Spirit. This is done to bring about a kingdom ordering of things, where, once again, what God wants done is done. The *missio Dei* is aimed at bringing about that kingdom reality.

Interestingly, at least for Christians of the Western world, it may come as a surprise that the kingdom reality is not primarily one that takes place in a far off time frame, but in the here and now. The eternal nature of the kingdom means that it encompasses both the present and the future. God’s work is active, and the treasures of the kingdom of heaven are available as a result.<sup>21</sup>

If we bring the discussion of kingdom and *missio Dei* back around to the covenants of God, we can see how the work of Christ, the Messiah has brought these things together. The book of Hebrews beautifully summarizes this, demonstrating the ways in which Christ fulfills the law of Moses, becomes the ultimate high priest, and renews God’s covenant with Israel through his own blood. The writer of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31, which promises that God will make a new covenant with Israel to replace the one that had been violated. This new covenant, says Hebrews, was inaugurated by Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup>

The covenants of God with man are a theme encompassing the entire story of God. God covenants with Abraham in order to bless all nations through him. God covenants with Israel through Moses in the giving of law, which redeems and hints at his ordering

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20. Bosch, 390.

21. Willard, 207-8.

22. Heb. 8-9.

of things in the kingdom (in which the people are priests). God covenants with David in order to demonstrate who Israel's true king is. The story finds its climax in the work of Christ, who embodies all of the previous covenants perfectly.

The *missio Dei* is, indeed, born out of God's activity. But again, it is an activity that the Church has been invited to. Even before Jesus' work on the cross had been done, he sent his followers out to engage their world in his name – and he gave them kingdom resources to do the work, which included healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing the lepers, and casting out demons. All the while, these disciples were to be preaching, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."<sup>23</sup> This inclusion in the *missio Dei* continues even now. Jesus' final words to his followers explicitly sets the course of how the church is to carry the kingdom activity forward. The ways this takes place are the topic of our next section.

### **The Church and *Missio Dei***

In the church of Christendom, it is easy to make the mistake of thinking that the maintenance of the church is of primary importance. However, the more institutionalized church has become, the less it has focused on mission.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, it is also easy to get so caught up in a mission-mindset that we begin to lose focus on the church. This is possibly a mistake of over-correction. We ought not elevate mission over the church, or vice-versa. Instead, both are to be embraced together in the *missio Dei*.<sup>25</sup>

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23. Matt. 10: 1-15.

24. Murray, 129.

25. Bosch, 370.

The apostle Paul demonstrates a helpful harmony of mission and church health. In addition to his own involvement in carrying the message of Jesus to the Gentiles, he regularly pleads for the Christians to “preach the word . . . in season and out of season,”<sup>26</sup> And yet he also cares for the ongoing health of the churches he has helped to establish, through instructions regarding orderliness in worship,<sup>27</sup> the use of spiritual gifts toward the unity of the body of Christ,<sup>28</sup> and the establishment of local church leaders.<sup>29</sup> Neither church health nor mission takes priority over the other. Instead, as the church adopts the understanding of the *missio Dei* as a cooperative effort of God’s initiative, “rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation.”<sup>30</sup>

In order to stay true to the focus of this project, and the ways in which the church of the Global South and East, and the church of the Western world can interact together in a supportive and respectful relationship, some scriptural elements of how the church can form itself in line with the *missio Dei* will be explored in this section and the next.

### Communities of Renewal

Throughout the long history of God’s people, there have been a number of covenants in which God promises to prosper his people if they will follow him and give their hearts to him. Unfortunately, in each case, the people move from agreeing with God toward

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26. 2 Tim. 4:2.

27. 1 Cor. 14.

28. Eph. 4.

29. 1 Tim. 3.

30. Guder, ed., 4.

rebellion and a choosing of their own ways. These often result in painful consequences – exile to foreign lands, occupation by outside empires, and natural disasters, to name a few. In some cases, God sends a prophet to give people his rebuke and call for repentance. As God’s people repent and return to him, he hears their cries for mercy, and brings relief. This cycle is repeated numerous times throughout the Old Testament. There are renewal movements that get people (especially those who “ought to know better”) back on track.

Into this kind of environment comes John the Baptist, and then Jesus of Nazareth. Israel is in a state of exile at home, living under Roman occupation, and these prophetic men come, calling for repentance. John baptizes many people in the Jordan River, who are coming to him from all over. When the Pharisees and Sadducees come to him, he calls out rebukes to them, telling them to produce the fruit of repentance.<sup>31</sup> These are the religious power brokers – those who hold positions of influence with the people, despite not having any real authority under the Roman regime. In Matthew 4, Jesus begins his preaching career in much the same way – calling for people to repent, because the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The people who heard these words were, for the most part, quite aware of the laws of Moses. They were observant of religious festivals, worshipped in synagogues, and generally built their lives around the practices of their faith. And yet, they were being called out, chastised for not following God from their hearts, but rather, going through the motions in faith. The religious power holders, of course, were criticized for their

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31. Matt. 3.

abuse of privilege and comfort. It was in their best interest to go along with the present systems of political power.

The renewal movements taking place in the postcolonial church of the global South and East, and in the emerging church of the West have several points of similarity. First, they arise within apparently “orthodox” forms of faith. John the Baptist and Jesus were born into a culture of Jewish faith – they learned the law, practiced the Sabbath, celebrated the holidays. The movements that they sparked were not a rebellious rejection of Judaism, but rather a call to live up to what true Israel was expected by God to be. As Jesus says, he was there not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.<sup>32</sup>

In the same way, the renewal movements taking place within the post-Christendom, post-colonial church are not a complete rejection of what they believe to be an apostate faith. For the most part, they affirm the church and find great value in it. However, they do challenge some of the norms of church life that they find to be culturally accommodating, and do call for reflective adjustments. In some cases, this takes the form of strongly worded rebuke, and at others, it is a lower-key moving away from practices they find to be wrong-headed. The challenges are born out of a call to move back to scriptural approaches to mission, evangelism, worship, social justice, and spiritual formation. The content of their critiques will be explored at length in chapters five and six of this project.

Of course, as in the cases of John the Baptist and Jesus, there are certainly oppositional voices. These generally come from people who are in positions of religious influence. They may cite scripture in their critiques, but this does not do very much to

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32. Matt. 5:17.

silence the up and coming voices, often because scriptures tend to be used in a way to protect the status quo, or in other ways that manipulate, and not to present the gospel's true intent. These issues will also be explored in more depth in later chapters. It is important to note here, that this comparison to Jesus is not meant to take sides or overly inflate the value of the emerging church of the West or the postcolonial church in the global South, which could easily be misunderstood when comparing a movement to Jesus' own work! It is not an exact comparison, but one that gives a potentially helpful viewpoint on what is currently taking place in the church.

### Communities of Resistance

In addition to bringing renewal within existing religious structures, one of the important thrusts of the movements in the global South and East, as well as in the West, is making stands against injustice in the world. There are certainly cases in which church structures perpetuate injustice, but there are many more political, social, and especially economic powers that are in need of critique. Corrupt governments and politicians that become wealthy on the backs of their poor neighbors, and transnational corporations that seek out profit through predatory contracts and harsh work conditions for their employees (who are often children) in developing countries have created situations where resistance movements have become necessary – including groups of Christians who are willing to make prophetic stands.

Throughout scripture there are commands to care for the poor, not treat them harshly. The law of Moses had many accommodations for the poor included – from leaving

farmland fallow every seventh year and allowing the poor to eat from the natural produce,<sup>33</sup> to instructions not to harvest fields to the edges in order to leave something behind for the poor and foreigners.<sup>34</sup> The Old Testament prophets rebuked the corruption of Israel and Judah's leaders for their mistreatment of the poor.<sup>35</sup> There is a long tradition of looking out for the causes of the poor. Indeed, when John the Baptist is in prison and sends his disciples to verify that Jesus is the Messiah, one of Jesus' own indicators that he is the one Israel has been waiting for, is that "the poor have the gospel preached to them."<sup>36</sup>

Inasmuch as Christians read scriptures like this and believe in them, there is certainly great impetus for the church to speak out on behalf of the poor in the world. It is certainly not any great surprise that the Liberation Theology movement gained much traction in Latin American countries beginning in the late 1960s. Christians like Gustavo Gutierrez spoke and wrote widely of God's "preferential option for the poor,"<sup>37</sup> which motivated change, both in the church and in the governments of several countries.

In addition to the massive issue that poverty in the world presents, there are other issues of injustice that demand the attention of those who call themselves by God's name. Violent government regimes, human trafficking, lack of medical care in nations devastated by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the caste system in India, and far too many others to count are ongoing causes for concern. Christians – especially those in the wealthier,

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33. Exod. 23:10-11.

34. Lev. 23:22.

35. For example, see Ezek. 18:12, 22:29; Amos 5:11-12.

36. Matt. 11:1-6.

37. Gutiérrez and Nickoloff, 143-46.

freer Western world – have the ability to effect change, but it will take a number of organized, sustained efforts. For any church with means to sit idly by is nothing less than a violation of the heart of scripture. God’s heart is toward justice and mercy, and the church has an opportunity to be expressive of these values, and demonstrate once again, that the kingdom of God is at hand.

### Communities of Redemption

At the very heart of the *missio Dei* is the truth that the work of God is to bring the world back to a place of wholeness and healing. Redemption is an important theological concept in terms of the forgiveness of sin, accomplished through Christ’s death and resurrection. But it goes farther than that. “The *missio Dei* is God’s activity, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church may be privileged to participate.”<sup>38</sup> The question raised here is, “How does the *missio Dei* ‘embrace the world?’”

My contention is that just as we understood the *missio Dei* earlier as the Father sending the Son, and the Son sending the Spirit, we need to understand what that entails as it relates to the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that the Spirit would, “convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment,” and would “guide [Jesus’ followers] into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative.”<sup>39</sup> The Holy Spirit’s activity in the world is expansive, and its redemptive nature can be seen everywhere.

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38. Bosch, 391.

39. John 16:8, 13.



In the dynamics of the church of the global South and East, it is critically important to note that the Holy Spirit's role is central. The Pentecostal movement is growing rapidly, and adherents regularly experience (and expect to experience) supernatural healings, exorcisms, and other spiritual dynamics not typically seen in the intellectual world of the West.<sup>40</sup> However, the lack of "ecstatic" gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit in non-Pentecostals should not be mistaken for a lack of the Spirit's presence and work. Redemption is continuing to be worked out.

Specifically, the work of the Holy Spirit in the *missio Dei* can be understood through the familiar lens of the "Fruit of the Spirit" passage in the book of Galatians: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."<sup>41</sup> While Paul wrote these words to Christians, who "live by the Spirit,"<sup>42</sup> it should be understood that the Spirit's work in the church and the individual lives of believers, it not necessarily limited to those domains. What could bring about more redemptive work in the world than love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control?

Reconciliation, one component of redemption, is certainly needed in areas of violent conflict. If the fruit of the Spirit were an active aspect of reconciliation efforts, one is left to wonder what conflicts would remain. Forgiveness, understanding, compassion, respect, generosity, and sacrifice are all things the world is in desperately short supply of, and all of these are in abundant supply in the domain of the Holy Spirit. This is clearly an

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40. Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, 114, 98.

41. Gal. 5:22-23.

42. Gal. 5:25.

instance in which Jesus' kingdom prayer, asking for God's will to be done on earth as in heaven is desperately needed. Once again, we see that the *missio Dei* is an essentially Trinitarian reality. The church's role is to continually seek the presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, as well as the discernment to see the many ways in which the fruit of the Spirit is already at work in the world around them.

### **Principles of Communities within the *Missio Dei***

If the emerging church of the Western world is to effectively develop relationships of mutual support, learning, and encouragement with the postcolonial church of the global South and East, some core values and guiding principles will be helpful. It is not enough to simply assume that the churches will operate on the same biblical principles, given that there will be different readings of scripture according to culture and experience. The number of principles needed will exceed the scope of this section, but some brief mentions of scriptural steps will be given.

#### **Unity**

It is an acknowledged misnomer to continually distinguish "the postcolonial church of the global South and East" from "the postmodern emerging church of the West." In reality, there is only one true church. Paul's words to the church of Ephesus are particularly instructive, as he eliminates the distinction between Gentile and Jew:

Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by

human hands-- remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.<sup>43</sup>

Unity is, of course, a difficult topic, given the massive diversity in Christian expression in the world. Even with the various ecumenical movements over the past sixty years, there are still many theological differences between groups. However, the reality remains that Christ has broken down barriers and unified us in himself, and given us access to the Father through the one Spirit. If this principle is ignored, the various movements taking place around the world will continue to exist independently from one another, which will deprive many churches of the support, encouragement, and opportunities to serve one another.

Quite frankly, unity is an often ignored principle, in part because it was assumed that under a Christendom mentality, we were all the same. This assumption may have never really been accurate, but now more than ever, we have the capacity to enjoy our distinctives, even as we celebrate the one Spirit that brings us together as sisters and brothers around the world. Unity does not mean that we will all necessarily sign off on the same doctrinal statement, but it does mean that we acknowledge our status as co-heirs of the kingdom and co-laborers in the *missio Dei*.

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43. Eph. 2:11-19.

## Equality

Once again, the aspect of equality seems as though it should be an automatic assumption. However, there are far too many examples to the contrary to allow this assumption to go unchallenged. As discussed in the opening chapter of this project, the Western church has dominated relationships in the global conversation, because of its wealth, institutionalized education system, and global power position.

Similar to the passage cited above from Ephesians, Paul writes to the Galatian church:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.<sup>44</sup>

There can be no ethnic, economic, political, or social hierarchy in the body of Christ. The doctrine of the “priesthood of the believer” holds special value here, as it empowers all people to move and act as God’s agents of mission in the world. While this principle has been repeatedly violated, and there are negative consequences because of it, the new movements of Christians around the world are in a better position than ever before to overcome the differences. Communication and travel technologies have brought us together in a way that has begun to level the playing field.

This principle of equality may take more effort on the part of the church of the West to fully employ. Westerners must be willing to shed their wealth, education, and mobility to fully engage in equal relationships. This is more difficult than most are willing to acknowledge. In most cases, Westerners have been empowered at a higher level for so

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44. Gal. 3:26-29.

long that they have come to expect it, even without realizing it. This is how the perception persists that partnership from a Western perspective often implies “do what we say” to the rest of the world.<sup>45</sup>

### Diversity in Global Expression and Embodiment

The fact that unity and equality are listed here as important guiding principles for churches of various cultures in order to fully benefit from their relationships together certainly does not mean that there should be no distinctiveness. The effectiveness of the *missio Dei* depends, in part, on the localized expressions of the church. It would be counter-productive, then, to assume that as churches come together to share, learn from, and encourage each other, that they should check their cultures at the door (if such a thing were even possible).

The apostle Paul, of course, understood this very well. In 1 Corinthians 9, he describes his approach to working with different kinds of people.

And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”<sup>46</sup>

There is no indication that once Paul has “won” these people, they must conform to what he is. Quite the contrary, in fact. The famous Jerusalem Council was held to determine

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45. Bosch, 466.

46. 1 Cor. 9:20-23.

whether Gentile men should be required to be circumcised upon putting faith in Christ. It was decided together that they should not make it difficult for Gentiles to turn toward God. Instead, they simply requested that the Gentiles “abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.”<sup>47</sup>

Culture differences are not only to be respected, but also celebrated. It is the particularity of each member’s cultural background that gives them the ability to share well with people of other cultures. Lesslie Newbigin notes that one of the real benefits of ecumenical theology is that people from multiple cultures can show their co-laborers the ways in which Christ may have become blurred by their native cultures.<sup>48</sup>

The increasing move toward contextualized forms of theology will continue to diversify this dynamic. This is a hopeful, exciting thing. It may ultimately require more patience and intentional listening at deep levels in order to understand one another, but in the church, this is to be received as a gift, not a burden.

### Generosity / Hospitality

From the earliest days of the New Testament church, the principle of generous sharing within the body of Christ has been evident. Acts 2:44-45 tells us that, “All those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.” The church, which was in the middle of a phase of explosive growth and change became

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47. Acts 15: 20.

48. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, 9.

a hotbed of generosity and hospitality. This was not an isolated case, either. In Romans

15, Paul indicates that,

Now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.<sup>49</sup>

The churches that were able, contributed generously to those who were poor in Jerusalem.

This generosity is at least partially being repeated today. Many churches in the wealthy Western world are giving financially to churches in the developing world. And yet, there is much more potential for generosity from the West. Many Westerners, in fact, are surprised to find that when they visit poorer countries of the world, the people there are far more generous in their spirits and gifts than most Westerners. Contentment and generosity are exhibited at higher levels by those who would seem to have the least capacity to afford it.

One important aspect of generosity and hospitality to note is the two-way nature involved. In their truest forms, generosity and hospitality are not simply about what a person gives or shares with others. These qualities also include the ability to graciously *receive* from others. Giving and sharing are born out of gratitude. Often it is difficult for people to receive help from others – this may be an indication of pride, but it may also mean that the spirit of generosity has not yet been fully learned.

The reason this principle is of importance is that as co-equals in the *missio Dei*, who have an interest in sharing together, both the church of the Western world, and the church

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49. Rom. 15:25-28.

of the global South and East will be in positions to give and receive. Once again, financial resources are most likely to flow out of the West, but that certainly does not mean that the South and East have nothing to share. Later chapters of this project will explore some of the lessons that each group has to share, but there are vast non-financial resources available to all in the kingdom. But they must first be acknowledged and welcomed with gratitude.

### **Next Steps**

The scriptural background provided here helps frame the nature of the *missio Dei*, and what the role of the church is in fulfilling it. This understanding has been developed in recent years on the heels of a reevaluation of the modern missionary movement, and of Christendom itself. In some ways, good principles of evangelization were employed, and in others, the culture of imperial colonizers came through as more prominent than the gospel itself. The next chapter will look at the complex aspects of globalization that have shaped our world. There are both positive and negative aspects, each with important opportunities for Christians motivated by the Kingdom of God and mission.



## Chapter 4

### Globalization as Missional Frontier

In chapter one, we introduced one of the important framing contexts for this discussion, in globalization. It has certainly changed the way people relate to one another, do business with one another, and provide for life's necessities in the places they live. As noted, there is a wide variety of assessments of the value of globalization, a variety of definitions for it, and a variety of descriptions of what it entails. There are even debates as to which field of study globalization belongs to – philosophy, economics, anthropology – and how interdisciplinary approaches ought to be navigated. These debates highlight the complexity involved, and make clear the reasons why it can be a highly controversial issue.<sup>1</sup>

Attempting a definition is tricky, because the risks for overly simplistic parameters and the risks for overly inclusive and broad parameters are both significant. Roland Robertson has done as well as anyone in saying that globalization is, “the compression of the world.” By this he means that there is both an increasing sociocultural density and a rapidly expanding consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Again, there are many other elements that could be added to this, but this provides us with a helpful starting point. The aspect of compression points to how quickly and easily nearly anyone can “reach out and touch” someone on the other side of the globe. Rapidly expanding consciousness describes how much more

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1. Peters, 6.

2. Roland Robertson, "Globalization and the Future of 'Traditional Religion'," in *God and Globalization. Vol. 1, Religion and the Powers of the Common Life*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse and Peter J. Paris (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 53.

aware people are of other nations, cultures, languages, economies, and environmental impacts and how they fit into a grand network of relationships as a result.

Many books and articles have been written in the past decade in particular, arguing for the merits or the drawbacks of globalization. As mentioned in the first chapter, there are compelling arguments to be found on both sides of the debate. But one thing is clear – regardless of which side wins the debate and takes the lead in the way people talk about globalization, it will not change the fact that globalization is a fixture of life in the twenty-first century. As such, there comes a time when the relative benefits vs. losses become somewhat irrelevant, simply because globalization just *is*.<sup>3</sup> Ironically enough, even the arguments made by anti-globalization movements feed into and contribute to the globalization process by “expanding and deepening consciousness of the world as a whole.”<sup>4</sup>

When it comes to how the Church interacts with, and responds to the agents and systems of globalization, it would be beneficial if there was an agreement to set aside the pros and cons arguments in favor of working with the context that simply *is*. If there are pros (and based on the discussion to follow, it is safe to assume that there are some), they should be utilized for the sake of the *missio Dei*. If there are cons (also, based on the discussion to follow, there certainly are some), they should be prophetically and creatively addressed by followers of Jesus in order to bring justice, equity, and healing, especially to those being exploited. Rather than spending inordinate amounts of time

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3. Mark Engler, *How to Rule the World: The Coming Battle over the Global Economy* (New York: Nation, 2008), 8.

4. Robertson, 61.

debating this issue, it is far better to allow God to move and use the called out people to announce and advance God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

This chapter will continue to explore some the better aspects as well as the low points of globalization, with a particular eye toward understanding the Church's role (or lack thereof) in influencing the forces of globalization. Some of the better aspects of this condensing of the world will be discussed, such as technology, education, and transportation, as will some of the evils being perpetuated in the name of globalization. A discussion of how the Church can respond well to the cultural, financial, and economic stresses of this system will be offered, especially where it concerns points of contact between the postcolonial church of the global South and East, and the emerging church of the Western world.

### **In Defense of Globalization**

While it is certainly true that there are many examples of the ways globalization has brought harm to people groups and the environment, it must be acknowledged that life in the twenty-first century has improved for hundreds of millions of people in the world. Technological advances have raised the standards of living in a number of ways. For example, in the field of communications, wireless services give people access to telephones and the internet in remote areas where wired infrastructures have never been able to reach.<sup>5</sup> This allows even some of the most "primitive" farmers in developing

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5. Friedman, 186-88, 215.

countries to gain access to market information, coordinate transportation of crops, and obtain labor for harvest much more quickly, and at lower cost.

Medical technology is another aspect of globalization that is making life better for people in developing countries. New vaccines and medications hold promise for people at high risk for HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other preventable and curable diseases. More medicine in the hands of more doctors means more people are getting relief. The advances in medicine are easily overshadowed by the tremendous need for more, and the lack of wider availability because of money, but that should not cause us to forget that progress is being made. As medical technology continues to advance in the wealthy West, there is a trickle-down effect that has tremendous potential to bring health to many who are the most vulnerable now.

Educational advances are another good example of how technology combines with globalization to make things better in the world. In the past ten years, Thomas Friedman reports that there have more than 1.5 billion new workers entering the global work force, which has largely been made possible by greater access to education. Particularly, nations such as India and China are increasingly able to educate children and university students in computer science fields that further expand their capacity to grow in high technology economic markets. Many of these students are studying in Western countries, and taking the technologies back to their home countries.<sup>6</sup>

Farming technology has also made possible greater crop yields and efficient harvesting techniques. The expansion of food production has the potential to help solve global food shortages. However, this is a highly controversial field on numerous fronts.

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6. Ibid., 213-14.

The recent surge in fuel technologies using ethanol have diverted large portions of corn crops to be used for industry, rather than for food.<sup>7</sup> In other areas of agri-business, large corporations have developed higher yield and more nutritious seeds for food production, which has obvious benefits. Many cry foul, though, because these same corporations have used bioengineering to create seeds that grow healthy crops, but do not produce viable seeds that farmers could use for the next growing cycle – meaning that the farmers are forced to return to the corporations to purchase more seed.<sup>8</sup>

Advances in transportation technology, as well as the development of greater transportation infrastructures have also contributed to a rise in global standards of living. Not only is it easier for farmers to get their products to wider markets because of access to transportation, it is easier for people who are from rural areas to access larger urban centers for work and access to financial gain. This includes long distance migrations in which people from poorer nations are able to travel to wealthier nations for work and opportunities to support their families back in their homelands.<sup>9</sup> The poor economic conditions in their home countries is obviously less than ideal, but transportation at least gives people a wider array of choices in determining how they can discover opportunities.

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7. C. Ford Runge and Benjamin Senauer, "How Ethanol Fuels the Food Crisis," Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20080528faupdate87376/c-ford-runge-benjamin-senauer/how-ethanol-fuels-the-food-crisis.html> (accessed September 28, 2008).

8. Brian Wolf, "The Monopolization of Biodiversity: Terminator Bioscience and the Criminalization of the Harvest," *Theory & Science*, <http://theoryandscience.icaap.org/content/vol9.3/wolf.html> (accessed September 28, 2008).

9. Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis*, 91-92.

Transportation advances also make it easier for wealthier nations to bring assistance to poor countries. Through official government aid efforts, and well as many non-governmental organizations, medical supplies, building materials, farming machinery, and other helpful tools are able to be sent to places that were formerly very difficult to reach. Additionally, as more people have easy access to long distance transportation, more people from Western countries are traveling to the global South and East, on relief work trips, short-term missionary trips, business trips, and vacations. This gives these people the opportunity to make cultural observations and discover physical and financial needs in the places they visit, and carry their stories home with them to the West where more resources can be mobilized.

Ease of transportation also makes it increasingly possible for two-way relationships in the Christian world. It is one thing for an individual or team of people from a Western church to travel to Latin America, for example, but quite another for someone from Latin America to be able to travel to the West to meet with partner churches, and tell their stories to a wider audience. This is one of the potentially helpful ways forward that will be explored later in terms of relationship development between the churches of the global South and East, and church of the West.

Poverty reduction is another controversial, but important topic in terms of how globalization is improving standards of living throughout the world. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works to address poverty in developing countries, through addressing issues of a lack of income, poor health, illiteracy, lack of access to social services, and lack of participation in positions of social influence. According to the UNDP's Strategies and Policies for Poverty Reduction web page, "We believe that

economic growth is necessary for sustained poverty reduction, but it is not sufficient.

Poor people should not only benefit equitably from economic growth, they should have the opportunity to actively contribute to its generation. Equity is a major dimension of the economic growth-poverty reduction nexus.”<sup>10</sup>

One of the primary vehicles of poverty reduction used by the UNDP is the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) program, which “promote poverty reduction, education, maternal health, gender equality, and aim at combating child mortality, AIDS and other diseases.”<sup>11</sup> Wealthy nations committed to goals that include a fifty percent reduction in the number of people in the world who live on less than one dollar per day by the year 2015. Unfortunately, progress toward these goals has been slowed significantly by the recent financial crisis in the United States, which has spillover effects in the rest of the world. Not only are many wealthy nations behind in their financial contributions, with soaring energy and food costs, many of the poorer nations are at risk for losing ground.<sup>12</sup> There are many public critics of the wealthy countries for having delayed on fulfilling their commitments, but this does leave open more opportunities for philanthropists and corporations that benefit from the global economy to take the lead. It remains to be seen whether this will actually happen.

One of the more promising poverty eradication efforts taking advantage of global communications is microfinance. This entered firmly into widespread consciousness in

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10. "Poverty Reduction," United Nations Development Programme, <http://www.undp.org/poverty/propoor.htm> (accessed September 28, 2008).

11. "Millennium Development Goals," United Nations Development Programme, <http://www.undp.org/mdg/> (accessed September 28, 2008).

12. UNDP, *Capacity Development: Empowering People and Institutions: United Nations Development Programme Annual Report 2008*, 1.

2006, when Muhammad Yunus was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work with Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. Microfinance gives small business owners in developing countries the opportunity to borrow money in small amounts in order to develop their businesses – whether it be a family farm or a clothing assembly operation or a coffee cart. Typically, the amounts of the loans are so small that many “normal” banks would not bother with them, and they would be skeptical about the small business owner’s ability to pay back the loans. However, microfinance lending institutions do loan money in small amounts, and have had a very high success rate in loan repayments.

Again, using the tools of communications technology, microfinance has not only become more widely known, but regular people in wealthy (usually Western) countries are able to utilize non-governmental organizations such as Kiva to make their own microloans. Users can search Kiva’s website in order to read profiles on small business owners from around the world who are in need of additional funding. They can identify one of these individuals, and make a loan directly via credit card. When the loan is paid off, the Kiva users can either get their original money back, or re-loan the money to another small business owner.<sup>13</sup> When Western users see how little money is being requested, they are more able to understand how little it takes to help improve the lives of people around the world.

Non-governmental organizations are also playing an important role in eradicating extreme poverty. Dozens of organizations exist, but the most well known are the ONE campaign, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. They work alongside the UNDP in helping developing countries gain access to the kinds of resources that are in keeping

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13. "Kiva," <http://kiva.org/> (accessed September 28, 2008).



with the MDGs. They use their notoriety not only to rally political and business leaders, but also individuals, to learn and act on issues at small levels.

In each of these efforts, there are avenues in which the Church can be active. Whether it is by participating directly in the ONE campaign, which many churches and Christian parachurch organizations have done, or by lobbying their national governments to follow through on promises and relief efforts, or by leading protests or awareness rallies, there are a number of ways to advocate for growth and change. Globalization allows stories to be shared around the world, in brief periods of time, and the Church would be foolish to allow those opportunities to pass.

### **The Darker Side of Globalization**

Regardless of the degree to which globalization has brought about growth and opportunity to people groups around the world, there are major signs that it brings with it many negative impacts. Commentators on the issue are quick to note the environmental impacts, the exploitive trade agreements negotiated by transnational corporations, and poor worker conditions involved. But what these individual elements add up to is actually a disturbing trend toward a different kind of colonialism, even in the postcolonial era.

Under this new era – a neocolonial one – the colonizers are a combination of trading countries, transnational corporations, and international agencies, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. The countries being colonized by them are lured into visions of wealth, Western affluence, and comfort, but in reality the

opportunities for advancement, especially in urban centers are few.<sup>14</sup> Instead, they become increasingly dependent on the new colonizers, through foreign loans, creating a downward spiral that they find it impossible to escape.<sup>15</sup> The conditions for repayment of loans make it extremely difficult for poorer countries to maintain.

Another way of looking at this new economic and political dynamic is to see it as “super-imperialism.” Rather than foreign governments, the colonized are subject to the imperial activities of the IMF, WTO, and the World Bank.<sup>16</sup> The weak economies of many developing countries, though, makes them vulnerable to transnational corporations’ desires to utilize the “host countries” for natural resources, but when these resources are taken, they are used in manufacturing in other countries, and the profits from the sale of these products is extracted by the corporations and deposited in Western banks, and given as bonuses to Western CEOs and stockholders. The local economy barely benefits from this arrangement, but bears the load of having to support it. So-called “free trade” agreements work in such a way as to reward the corporate producers of products for offering the lowest prices on their items, even if they have achieved low prices through the avenues of child labor, unsafe work conditions, and environmental degradation.<sup>17</sup>

Engler makes the case of neocolonialism in a more nuanced way than others, by distinguishing between economic globalization and imperial globalization. In other words, while much attention is focused on the global economy, there is a shift toward

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14. Peters, 142-43.

15. Ibid., 145.

16. Mary Njeri Kinyanjui and Felix Kiruthu, "Super-Imperialism: A Perspective from East Africa," in *Regional Perspectives on Globalization*, ed. Paul Bowles (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 136-38.

17. Peters, 148.

solidifying empire, particularly in the U.S.<sup>18</sup> It is one of militarism and expanding corporate power, which feeds back into cycles of financial dominance. It is clearly not a level playing field.

The transnational corporations involved in developing countries are becoming a major part of globalization as well. Some of these corporate powers have more wealth than some of the small countries of the world, which in turn, leads them to gain as much political leverage as possible.<sup>19</sup> Their political power, and the fact that they are “transnational,” meaning, not tied down to any one nation, allows them to transcend national allegiances in favor of gaining the most profitable positions, without regard to local laws, cultures, or the environment.<sup>20</sup>

Once again, we come to the question of how the Church can respond well within this particular context. It is highly unlikely that the political and economic scenarios faced by Christians in the developing world will change for the better in the near future. Their responses, though, can still make a significant impact, in particular when they are focused on the local level.

Wherever the church is able to identify environmental damage caused by transnational corporations – for example, the fouling of local water supplies – they can respond by organizing efforts to gain access to better alternatives, whether through the assistance of outside groups, or through their own increased efforts of service and sacrifice. They can also gather people together in order to speak truth to power. It is often the case that political corruption takes place simply because it is allowed. If Christians rallied people

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18. Engler, 4-5.

19. Peters, 149.

20. Ibid., 88.

for responsible political change, the leaders would begin to understand that they cannot get away with corrupt behavior any longer. Direct political involvement, of course, does carry with it several risks, and it is easy to lose the gospel within a political frame of battle. However, if Christians could unite around basic human causes, as an expression of their desire to follow Jesus, significant change could take place, or, at the very least, people would see the Christians serving others and meeting needs, and inquire about their motivations and vision.

When economic and political forces are brought to bear, it is also inevitable that there will be important cultural ramifications. Many of these go undetected, and thus are not scrutinized, often to the peril of those in the lesser developed countries. Tom Sine describes a “borderless youth culture,” in which people are “wearing the same jeans, drinking the same soda and hard-wired into the same American pop-consumer culture.”<sup>21</sup> This homogenization of cultures convinces people in all parts of the world to desire the same products, lifestyles, and preferences. The global media communicates these “values” through movies, music, and television.<sup>22</sup>

Western culture, indeed, has arguably overtaken much of the world in a more pervasive and powerful manner than the physical imperial governments of generations gone by. And this is not a morally neutral reality. The most notable cultural value of globalization is consumerism. Descartes may have come to an important philosophical moment when he stated, “I think, therefore I am,” but the global citizen has now adopted

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21. Sine, “Globalization, Creation of Global Culture of Consumption and the Impact on the Church and Its Mission,” 360.

22. Richard Osmer, “The Teaching Ministry in a Multicultural World,” in *God and Globalization. Vol.2: The Spirit and the Modern Authorities*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse and Don S. Browning (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 44-45.

a new mentality: “I *buy*, therefore I am.”<sup>23</sup> The construction of a global consumer consciousness is the goal – “more than your pocketbook, globalism wants your soul.”<sup>24</sup> In the end, says Benjamin Barber, “Globalization leaves markets free from any need to justify their anarchic ways, whether they breed prosperity or misery, new investment opportunities or an eclipse of national social programs, more productivity or fewer jobs, greater private liberty or great social injustice.”<sup>25</sup> They exist for their own ends, and the ends justify the means.

Unfortunately, while the Western marketing machines may achieve some success in selling its products, the true Western lifestyle cannot be universalized. This is, in part, because of the environmental impacts that would be caused. If the whole world polluted at the levels of Western countries, life as we know would already have been altered beyond repair. But unlike the wealthy West, the developing nations of the global South do not have the money and resources necessary to clean up after themselves in terms of air quality, water quality, and lifestyle safety issues. So, these people are persuaded to pursue the Western lifestyle of consumer comforts, but they are ultimately left unable to fully realize them.<sup>26</sup>

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23. Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 60.

24. Walsh and Keesmaat, 29.

25. Benjamin R. Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 164.

26. Jurgen Moltmann, "The Destruction and Healing of the Earth," in *God and Globalization. Vol.2: The Spirit and the Modern Authorities*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse and Don S. Browning (Harrisburg, PA.: Trinity Press International, 2001), 168.

Christians faced with a consumeristic culture – one that is pervasive in most parts of the world - have a challenge before them. To reject the messages of the corporations, and live counter-culturally is difficult. But it is worth the effort. It is about more than simply consuming less, it is about decoding culture, and seeing through the influence of the cultural marketers.<sup>27</sup> In the Western world, pursuing a spiritually driven simplicity for the sake of the rest of the world is a good starting place. In the global South, where these messages are less a part of the natural human landscape, Christians can firmly insist that this is not an area in which they are willing for the cultural imperialists to have their way.

### **The Glocal Response to Globalization**

Thus far in this chapter, we have looked at the fact that regardless of the many positive and negative implications of globalization, it is clear that this is the context in which we live. Instead of spending time arguing for or against it, Christians would do well to accept that it is a reality, and respond in creative, redemptive ways. One of the ways that the Church can do this is first by owning its identity as a *glocal* church - it can act simultaneously in a global and a local mode of mission.<sup>28</sup> Charles Van Engen traces multiple uses of the word glocal, and finds it used in a number of different fields, including education, advertising and economics, organizational management, and human

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27. Sine, *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time*, 89-90.

28. Charles E. Van Engen, "The Glocal Church: Locality and Catholicity in a Globalizing World," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 157. Van Engen also notes the use of the term "glocal" in a contemporary church application by Leonard Sweet in his 1999 book, *Soul Tsunami*.

rights and social work, among others.<sup>29</sup> The interweaving of relationships between global forces of economics and politics with the local effects and products can also be readily applied to Christianity.

In globalization, most of the discussion tends to focus on the global aspects at work, only stopping to focus on the local impacts of the global forces. However, approaching things from a glocal perspective may give us the opportunity to push past some of the debates that pit modernity vs. postmodernity, or postcolonial issues. These are important elements to understand contextually, but it is easy to get weighed down in the theories and debates. Instead, glocalization looks to establish the simultaneity of the global and the local, in order to understand the “dynamic, always-changing, multidimensional interrelatedness”<sup>30</sup> of the two. The local actions taken by a church congregation can be understood in terms of their impact on the global community, just as easily as global movements of the Church can be seen to have local expressions.

The importance of the local church, in particular, is significant in glocalization. Bob Roberts Jr. argues that glocal requires the “decentralization of everything – power, government, all of it, even, and especially the church. The church must be decentralized, and for that to happen we have to leave behind models of the church that focus it on a superstar speaker, singer, educator, and shepherd. Instead, glocalization involves everyone, center stage.”<sup>31</sup> In this approach, the local churches, wherever they may be

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29. Ibid., 158.

30. Ibid., 159.

31. Bob Roberts, *Glocalization: How Followers of Jesus Engage the New Flat World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 21.

located, take on a primary role of the embodying and blessing of the gospel. Indeed, it isn't just about the churches "way over there." Rather, it is the far-away churches and the churches close to home at the same time, thus the glocal church.<sup>32</sup>

In some cases, people in the Church will increasingly be required to be bi-cultural. In other words, with globalization and the spread of Christianity into many new areas in the past hundred years, the Church is "at home" in a number of different cultures without being completely tied down to any of them. This presents an opportunity to understand a new and fluid identity in the globalized world.<sup>33</sup> If globalization has brought the various corners of the world closer together, then missional Christians must increasingly be at home in multiple cultures. Indeed, just as there are transnational corporations, there will be a need for "trans-cultural" followers of Jesus who are able to live and work well in a number of places, mediating the gospel to their communities as they go.<sup>34</sup> This holds much promise for global Christian movements, in that the local expressions of the Church will decreasingly be seen as a "Western" or "white man's religion."<sup>35</sup> Instead, Christians will increasingly be able to support one another's work from all over the globe, supporting the unity and catholicity of the Church, while at the same time, retaining a sense of local calling and contextualized expression.

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32. Ibid., 27.

33. Tienou, 38.

34. Paul G. Hiebert, "The Missionary as Mediator of Global Theologizing," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 301.

35. Tienou, 41.



Van Engen suggests that Church in the twenty-first century should be glocal in the way it handles theology. The kind of theologizing that a globalizing world requires holds an emphasis both on the oneness of the church and the vast array of gifts that together make up the body of Christ.<sup>36</sup> In times past, the church has made the mistake of assuming that the unity of the church required a rigid theology that would transcend culture, and thus, there would essentially be one theology for all Christians around the world. As a result, the Christendom assumption was made, that the theology for all would be the theology of the Western world, which required no substantial changes, despite the fact that nearly every other facet of life on earth was changing.<sup>37</sup>

Fortunately, in recent years there has been a move toward contextual theologies. Missionaries, theologians, and pastors have recognized that local theology is necessary to address the peoples and lifestyles of particular places and times. As noted in chapter one, Clemens Sedmak argues that, “In order to be honest to the local circumstances theology has to be done as local theology, as theology that takes the particular situation seriously . . . [and] can be done by the people, and it is done with the people.”<sup>38</sup> And yet, even as theology localizes, it retains a global dimension that Paul Hiebert refers to as “metatheology.”

To move from local theologies to an understanding of transcultural truths revealed in Scripture, we need a metatheology, a theological reflection on how local theologies should be done and how to mediate the dialogue among them. For evangelicals, the first requisite of such a metatheology is the affirmation that Scripture is divine revelation and the final authority in all matters it addresses. If

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36. Van Engen, 172-73.

37. Tienou, 38.

38. Sedmak, 3.

we affirm the priesthood of all believers and encourage everyone to study Scripture for themselves, our common ground becomes the Bible and its objective truthfulness.<sup>39</sup>

Metatheology gives enough of a structural framework to maintain orthodoxy in keeping with the Christian tradition, but without such heavy constraints that it doesn't allow for particular expressions. It should be noted that "objective truthfulness" presents a difficulty in the face of postmodernity (which will be discussed in the next chapter) and its distrust of objective truth. Hiebert recognizes this, and clarifies that "To the extent that our [local] theologies are rooted in Scripture, they contain objective truth, even though as human understandings in particular human contexts they are partial and colored by personal and cultural biases. We may see truth through a glass darkly, but we do see enough to hear and respond to God's Word to us."<sup>40</sup>

This kind of glocalizing of theology does not just happen on its own. Van Engen notes that ". . . this deepening and enriching of our understanding of God's revelation in the Bible are possible only if there is an ongoing conversation between the local congregations and churches and the church globally by way of mutually enriching process of critical theologizing."<sup>41</sup> Some of the ways to bring about this conversation between the local and the global will be discussed in depth in chapter seven.

In addition to developing a glocal approach to theology, it is important to employ this same mindset to mission. While there are certainly some positive aspects of globalization that can be utilized for the sake of the *missio Dei*, a further suggestion could help to frame it in a different light. What if globalization was not an economic system, or a

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39. Hiebert, 306.

40. Ibid.

41. Van Engen, 175.

political system, or a transportation system, or a technological system, but instead, *a worldview that characterizes a vast people group*? In other words, what if we were to approach globalization in much the same way a missionary would approach her or his work in a culture other than the one she or he was raised in? We would likely end up with a glocal understanding of our task. We would certainly understand the use of language, values, strengths and weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and assets awaiting our response.

If cultural homogenization is one of the hallmarks of a globalized world, then there should be ample opportunity to embody the gospel story, and do so in a way that can actually cross multiple cultures at once in the global sense. Every culture has many points of contact in which the gospel story connects with people, and the culture of globalization is very similar. Most of the points of contact currently have to do with consumer goods and media offerings, but in an age of many means of communication, the ability to understand cultural expressions and interact with them is exactly the kind of activity that will produce relationships both inside and outside the Church.

In approaching globalization as a culture in need of a gospel/*missio Dei* embodiment, we can use a missionary approach to understanding that culture and responding well within it. This may seem to be a counter-intuitive exercise, especially for people in the Western world, which dominates the globalized approach to life, but it will be effective in getting Westerners aware of the ways their culture(s) are so influential throughout the world.

As noted in the previous chapter, there has actually been a glocalization of the mission in terms of where missionaries are coming from, and where they are going. “For the first

time in two thousand years, cross-cultural missionaries have the potential of being sent from every country of the world.”<sup>42</sup> Local churches have the ability to work alongside mission agencies to extend the gospel in evangelism and church planting efforts. Even when vocational missionaries are not set apart to do the task of mission, global migration patterns continue to aid the spread of the gospel in much the same way as the early church spread throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.<sup>43</sup> The global vision demonstrated on the local level readily connects people in the body of Christ to one another.

### **The Opportunities of Globalization**

While there are, indeed, many challenges and negative impacts of a globalized environment, there are many exciting ways in which the new tools of communication and relationship development can be utilized by churches as well as individual Christians around the world. For example, with improved transportation systems and technologies, it is increasingly easy for people to travel, and carry the *missio Dei* with them. Typically it has been the case that only people from the West had access to international modes of travel, but people from the global South are now able to join in as well, which will benefit the church of the Western world in being able to interact with people from other areas directly.

Relationships are also more easily developed and maintained with improved communications technologies. From internet phone and webcam services to social

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42. Plueddemann, 264.

43. See Acts 8:1-17.

networking websites, it is possible for people in various parts of the world to engage in deep levels of relationship with one another. The more we get to know one another in these ways, the more we are able to sensitively respond to one another's needs, whether those are individual, community, church, or even national needs. Sharing of resources, whether they are financial, educational, physical, or simply stories of hope, are critical ways of co-laboring together, even across great distance.

As an overflow of these relationships there are also times when a glocal approach to living in the Church will bring about the calling and opportunity to “speak truth to power.” Critiquing the lifestyles of globalization, politics, and theology are made possible by the access that so many people around the world have to information. Seemingly isolated injustices often gain international attention and traction, simply from videos and written stories posted on the internet.

As the next two chapters will demonstrate, there are gifts, opportunities, and movements at work in the global Church. The church of the global South is exploding in growth, and appears to be poised to more greatly influence world Christianity in the near future. Meanwhile the emerging church of the Western world has begun to reignite the imaginations of new generations of people, specifically young people with a global consciousness. These glocal movements have created powerful change, and will be the keys to moving the *missio Dei* to the next level of human experience.

## Chapter 5

### The Emerging Church of the Western World: Navigating the Postmodern Shift

In previous chapters, we have explored the significant shifts taking place in the world as a result of the global growth of Christianity and the economic, social, and technological aspects of globalization. As Christians in all parts of the world seek contextualized expressions of their faith, there have also been major changes in Christian doctrine and practice. Chapter six will examine some of these changes taking place in the postcolonial church of the global South, which are readily apparent to even casual observers. However, we are also in a time of much change in the Western world of Christianity.

Over the past twenty years, a growing number of Christians – primarily younger people – have begun to re-evaluate their faith at a deep level and re-shape it according to their experiences of the world. In part, this can be seen as a Christian critical evaluation of the increasing disconnect between church and culture, which has led to the decline of many denominations and their churches. In part, this can be seen as the Christian expression of major philosophical shifts taking place in culture at large. Denominational structures and hierarchies are being challenged. Theological systems are being thoroughly critiqued. Political and cultural assumptions of the Christian community are being dismantled. This process is still relatively recent and its impact on Christianity as a whole has not been fully felt yet, but this growing movement is gaining influence, as witnessed by the increased planting of churches that take on “new” ideals, the number of

books being written and sold which are in an “emergent/emerging church” classification, and even the attention paid to these challenges by major Christian seminaries.

Though in its young history, the movement has been known by a number of names – “Alternative Worship,” “GenX Church,” “Postmodern Church” – the title with the broadest use has been the “emerging church.” It has come with a degree of resistance and controversy – both from those outside of the movement, and from those within. Attempting a widely acceptable description of the emerging church is a challenge, because it is theologically and pragmatically diverse, continuously changing in scope and focus, and reflective of the elusive nature of postmodern categorization to which it is responding. As Peter Rollins notes, “While the term ‘emerging church’ is increasingly being employed to describe a well-defined and well-equipped religious movement, in actual fact it is currently little more than a fragile, embryonic and diverse conversation being held between individuals over the Internet and at various small gatherings.”<sup>1</sup> There is increasing attention to emerging church authors, values, and practices, but it remains a small segment of the Western church at large. Nevertheless, this chapter will give an overview of this “conversation,” in terms of its history, values, and practices. Attention will be given to the ways in which it holds potential for partnerships with postcolonial church expressions in the global South, and some of the ways in which it could benefit from listening to the voices and challenges that come from the South.

Because many aspects of the emerging church movement are considered controversial, it is important to note here that this material is not intended as an apologetic for the theology or any given practices of emerging churches. Similar to the

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1. Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2006), 5.

suggestion offered in the previous chapter regarding globalization, this chapter will not advocate for or argue against the emerging church, but rather, treat it as a movement that *just is*. As such, it holds potential for a helpful connective expression of the Kingdom of God, both in the Western world and in the global South.

### **The Postmodern Context: The Framing Conversation of the Emerging Church**

In thinking about a world in which globalization is the norm, and many cultures and peoples are closer to one another via transportation and communication technologies, postmodernity is an unavoidable topic. The competing worldviews, hermeneutics, and questioning of forms of authority are all at play, signaling the fundamental shifts that have taken place in understanding meaning and truth. Things that were formerly unquestioned are now freely challenged, and seemingly anyone can be an expert on anything – at least enough of an expert to publish freely on the internet via their blogs or book reviews on Amazon.com.

Postmodernity, though born out of many challenging writings over the past one hundred years, gained prominence in the 1970s, initially in the form of architecture, and then in other cultural products, such as art, theater, literature, and film.<sup>2</sup> As a philosophical movement, postmodernism presented a challenge to modernity, which had been largely built on the ideals of the Enlightenment. One of the most prominent points of attack from the postmodernists was to question the nature of knowledge. The previously accepted notions of rationality, developed by Rene Descartes and Isaac

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2. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 2.



Newton were now being scrutinized. Whereas Enlightenment thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Richard Rorty considered knowledge to be objective, optimistic, and certain, postmodern philosophers were no longer willing to automatically accept those notions.<sup>3</sup>

Science, which had become the ultimate process by which to obtain truth was now being confronted for its inadequacies. For example, Michael Polanyi refers to science not as a *method*, but as a “system of beliefs” to which people commit themselves.<sup>4</sup> He goes so far as to say that “objectivity as usually attributed to the exact sciences is a delusion and is in fact a false ideal.”<sup>5</sup> The real meaning of discoverable facts in the world has everything to do with the meaning ascribed to them by scientists, coming from particular times and places in history.<sup>6</sup> It is notable that Polanyi was not just a philosopher, but also a celebrated physical chemist.

One of the most striking aspects of postmodernity, perhaps the one that creates the most discomfort in the minds of modernists is the rejection of “absolute truth.” Rather than pursuing a transcendent, universal, and timeless truth, it is viewed as a community-centered base. Truth is to be understood as developed within communities in which people participate, and is relative to each particular community’s place in history, culture, and geography.<sup>7</sup> A striking cultural example of this is the online encyclopedia,

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3. Ibid., 4-6.

4. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 171.

5. Ibid., 18.

6. Ibid., 135.

7. Walsh and Keesmaat, 19.

Wikipedia.<sup>8</sup> The entries for more than two-and-a-half million articles are made and edited by the online community, not just by experts in any given field. Students in higher education are often cautioned by their professors, concerning the potential inaccuracies that might result from biased or fallacious data being submitted, but “truth” in this sense is seen to be a collaborative process. While it is certainly not a respected academic resource, it is very frequently used by people as a starting point in information gathering ventures.

The inherent goodness of knowledge is also questioned in postmodernity. The optimistic view of knowledge fueling progress has given way to what Stanley Grenz describes as a “gnawing pessimism. Gone is the belief that every day, in every way, we are getting better and better.”<sup>9</sup> Postmoderns no longer assume that they will be more prosperous than their parents, or that science will solve all of the world’s problems. This is, in part, because of the way knowledge has been used by people in power to enforce control in ways that are increasingly suspect.<sup>10</sup>

The notion of progress is no longer held in such high regard. For example, the industrial revolution, which brought about great “progress” in the form of inventions that improved the quality of life for many people, also brought about problems of environmental degradation that are unsustainable and threaten the ecosystem.<sup>11</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, the “progress” of genetic medicine also gave transnational

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8. "Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia.," Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page) (accessed October 25, 2008).

9. Grenz, 7.

10. Ibid., 6-7.

11. Ibid., 13.

agriculture corporations the ability to modify seeds in such a way as to produce crops, but without the ability to reproduce seeds to be used for future plantings, thus ensuring that farmers become dependent upon the corporation long-term.<sup>12</sup>

Pluralism is another of the major hallmarks of postmodernity, and another one of the things that critics love to hate. The attitude of pluralism treats multiple forms of religious faith and practice as equally legitimate, even when they contradict one another on key points of doctrine. In one sense, this is a healthy indicator of civility, in that as Western societies become more diverse, it is important that all people be respected and honored. However, it does present challenges to Christians who hold to an exclusive view of Christ and salvation – most commonly understood through a conservative reading of verses such as John 14:6, where Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

### Examples of Postmodernity in Cultural Expression

The outworking of postmodernity in Western culture over the past thirty to forty years has been evident in a number of ways. In terms of pluralism, though Christianity in the Western world is still dominant, other forms of faith have grown rapidly, both by means of conversion and by immigration. Philip Jenkins documents the significant migrations taking place across Europe, which are changing the religious landscape of countries once dominated by Christendom. Rather than being a graveyard for religion as many perceive

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12. Wolf.

it to be, he argues that Europe may be a laboratory for new forms of faith.<sup>13</sup> Not only is Islam making a significant advance, there is a strong Christian migration from African nations into Europe. Additionally, it is possible that with an influx of people from other religions, Europeans may be primed for renewed interest in their own Christian heritage.<sup>14</sup> In some cases, this has brought cultural tension to the fore, but in others, multiple faiths appear to be integrating relatively smoothly.

Hierarchies of power and linear thinking, characteristics of modernity, are also being visibly challenged in creative cultural expressions. Most notably, the age of the internet has democratized communication in many ways. The presence of blogs and social networking websites, such as Facebook<sup>15</sup> and MySpace<sup>16</sup> have become some of the most popular sites in the world. These allow people to move in and out of communities of their own choosing, whether it is around themes of region, politics, musical preferences, sports, or educational institutions. Video sites, such as YouTube,<sup>17</sup> also allow for direct creative expression and response from within the online communities. "Video mashups," or videos in which movies or television shows are edited together in a such a way as to communicate something very different than the original message, are some of the most

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13. Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis*, 19.

14. Ibid., 261.

15. "Facebook: Home," Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/> (accessed October 25, 2008).

16. "Myspace," MySpace.com, <http://www.myspace.com/> (accessed October 25, 2008).

17. "Youtube: Broadcast Yourself," YouTube, LLC, <http://www.youtube.com/> (accessed October 25, 2008).

watched products on YouTube. The user has enormous control and the ability to create a mini-movement if their video catches on with people and goes “viral.”

Another example of hierarchies of authority being challenged, or avoided, can be seen in the expansion of the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) all over the world. People are no longer willing to trust governments to respond in compassionate ways in cases of natural disaster, extreme poverty, or disease. This may be because of the financial deals that governments around the world have made with transnational corporations that have been exploitive to the host countries, or because of government corruption in aid-receiving countries. Whatever the case, there are an increasing number of NGOs that focus on everything from medical aid to microfinance to clean water projects to fair trade coffee organizations. People in the wealthy countries in the West do not have to hope that their home nations make good on their Millennium Development Goals commitments – they can give directly to organizations connected to the United Nations Development Programme.

### Postmodernity and Theology

Clearly, there are some theological challenges raised by the postmodern shift. Some are somewhat obvious, such as the pluralism challenge to the exclusivity of Christ noted above. Others may seem obvious, but aren't as direct a confrontation with Christian theology as they might at first appear. For example, the postmodern challenge to absolute truth is not necessarily a devastating approach. Indeed, the suggestion that truth can only be arrived at within the context of community, can actually be quite invigorating for

Christians, because it lends power to the Christian impulse to be found in fellowship with other believers. The pursuit of truth as a worshipping community – whether in the form of a large, institutional church, or in a small house church gathering – is part of the Christian story from the first century until today.

The challenges to Enlightenment thinking also appear on the surface to present numerous challenges to Christian orthodoxy. However, upon further examination, it can be argued that many of the charges against postmodernity are actually not made primarily from a position of Christian orthodoxy. Often when people call attention to postmodernity's alleged threats to orthodox evangelical Christianity, they are unintentionally betraying an allegiance to modernity.<sup>18</sup> Some of the cautions are certainly well worth considering, but there are just as many weak points in modernist thought, which tend to go unchallenged. Arguments in favor of “absolute truth,” for example, can just as easily be an over-intellectualized rationalist approach to theology, rather than making a case for a relationship with Jesus, who claims to embody Truth in himself (which would be a common postmodern position on truth).<sup>19</sup> Christians would do well to be equally cautious of any philosophical system, willing to take on its most hopeful traits, but not so bound to it as to get caught in its weaknesses.

Systematic theology is another example of a postmodern target. The argument here is that theology is not a linear, formulaic matter to be condensed into outlines and simplistic or dualistic statements. The elements of mystery in theological discourse, and practical expressions of doctrinal positions are much preferred by postmodern theologians and practitioners. Peter Rollins notes that orthodoxy is usually understood as “right belief,”

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18. Grenz, 161.

19. John 14:6.

but a more biblically consistent approach to orthodoxy is “believing in the right way – that is, believing in a loving, sacrificial, and Christlike manner . . . Thus orthodoxy is no longer (mis)understood as the opposite of heresy but rather is understood as a term that signals a way of being in the world rather than a means of believing things about the world.”<sup>20</sup>

### **The Emerging Church in the West: A Missional Response to Postmodernity**

In the mid to late 1990s, the beginnings of what is now called the emerging church were forming in Great Britain and North America. It initially involved stylistic changes to traditional forms of evangelical worship, but soon began to exhibit a more significant shift taking place. This had to do with the questions being raised by postmodern thought, and the critiques being offered of modernity and Christendom.<sup>21</sup>

From a small handful of new churches, and “churches within churches,” grew a significant number of congregations that not only looked and felt different than typical mainstream evangelical churches, but were actually functioning according to a different set of assumptions and values. Much of the thinking in these congregations was deconstructing the faith and practices that had developed in the Western world during the

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20. Rollins, 2-3.

21. Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 27-46. Gibbs and Bolger have the most thoroughly documented study of the emerging church movement, complete with many case studies. The reader is directed to this book for examples of the specific churches that this project is not able to fully explore.

era of the Enlightenment. Everything was up for questioning – church leadership structures, systematic theology, clergy identity, church buildings, seminary training, finances, community involvement, political alliances, and social justice, to name a small handful.

Gatherings and conferences among emerging church people began to pop up in pockets around Great Britain and North America. These gave a voice to many pastors of mainstream as well as emerging churches, who were trying to find a “new way” to approach faith in community, but did not have a road mǎp.<sup>22</sup> Music festivals, “learning parties,” websites, and a large number of books began to be produced, which gave language to questions being asked, and stimulated further conversations on new ways forward. General subcategories for the diverse practitioners within the emerging church movement have begun to coalesce, highlighting a range of expressions of theology, church structure, and missional vision.<sup>23</sup>

And while this movement is still in its infancy in many ways, and continuing to change, it is important to mark where the emerging church is at present. However, for the sake of clarity, a couple of preliminary statements need to be made. First, there is a sense in which there is no such thing as the “emerging church.” In other words, there is no denomination, no statement of faith or creed, no formal organization or membership, no clearly defined parameters by which a person or a church can identify as being part of

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22. Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 41-51.

23. Scot McKnight. 2006. "What Is the Emerging Church?" (Fall Contemporary Issues Conference, Westminster Theological Seminary, October 26-27, 2006).



this movement. There are a number of loose affiliations and gatherings, such as Emergent Village<sup>24</sup> and Emergent-UK,<sup>25</sup> which act as hubs of conversation and fellowship, but those are completely voluntary. As a result, there is a strikingly wide diversity of theological viewpoints represented in the movement. Second, because the movement is growing at such a rapid rate, with increasing numbers of conferences and books available, and because it is growing in influence, more and more people are “joining” the movement all the time. Therefore, the statements made here should be understood to be of a general, descriptive nature, and only for this point in time.<sup>26</sup>

The emerging church at present is focusing on four major thrusts: philosophy and theology, ecclesiology, missiology in a Western context, and social awareness/action. In terms of *philosophy and theology*, the emerging church is attempting to integrate many of the constructs of postmodern thought into a way of practice. In philosophical terms, there is a questioning of foundationalism, and the assumptions of rationality associated with it. As noted earlier in this chapter, the nature of truth as “objective” is also challenged, with

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24. Emergent Village is a loose organization in North America, driven off of a website: <http://www.emergentvillage.com/>. Regular theological conversations and gatherings are organized, but a distinct attempt is made to limit the size and scope of the organization itself.

25. Emergent-UK is similar to Emergent Village, but based in the United Kingdom. See <http://www.emergent-uk.org/index.php>.

26. As an example of the fluid nature of these young emerging churches, as an appendix to Gibbs and Bolger’s book *Emerging Churches*, which was published in 2005, there are fifty stories of various emerging churches in the United States and the U.K., written in the words of the pastors. From my own experience and friendships, I know of no less than ten of these pastors who are either no longer with the churches cited in the book, or the churches no longer exist. This does not necessarily indicate “failure” on any of their accounts, but does indicate the young, often fragile, and transient nature of this movement.

a communitarian approach to truth being favored.<sup>27</sup> Knowledge as an assumed virtue is also often challenged, especially where it regards the assumption that more knowledge equals more virtue.

Theologically, this works itself out most frequently among evangelicals who have come to question many of the values they may have been taught.<sup>28</sup> Once again, systematic theology is seen as overly linear, transactional, and formulaic.<sup>29</sup> The ambiguity of mystery and faith is embraced. Whereas previous generations of theologians and practitioners may have been trained to build on the foundations of the creeds and the church traditions, many have begun to ask how these things came into being in the first place, and whether they are truly timeless non-negotiables that necessarily must carry forward into the present context.

The theology of the Kingdom of God has also gained prominence in the emerging church movement. A refreshed understanding of the teaching and work of Jesus, as inaugurating a Kingdom in the here and now has become important to many. This is in contrast to much of evangelicalism, which focuses more attention on the future orientation of the Kingdom of heaven. A lot of the shift in thinking can be credited to the

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27. Grenz, 168.

28. Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 47-54.

29. Ibid., 83-93.

theological work of Anglican bishop N.T. Wright,<sup>30</sup> as well as Anabaptist theologians such as John Howard Yoder<sup>31</sup> and Stuart Murray.<sup>32</sup>

In terms of *ecclesiology*, the emerging church has challenged the notions of church structures, especially regarding leadership. In many evangelical churches, the pastor functions as CEO, and the organizations operate on common business principles, rather than on things that can be derived directly from scripture.<sup>33</sup> Many in this movement have called into question things that seem like givens to previous generations of churches – the need for paid, professional clergy, the need and function of church buildings, denominational affiliations, the nature of worship services, and how teaching/preaching is done. It is important to note that just because these things are called into question does not mean that they are necessarily rejected. Indeed, in many cases, the value of these elements is affirmed, and utilized in emerging churches (in many cases, with more relevance), but the intentionality of the questioning process is helpful.

Another very important value of many emerging churches is missional ecclesiology. Being a missional church is distinctly different than most standard evangelical congregations, in that the whole church is seen as being sent into its culture to minister. This is different than the model of church in which people looking for God are expected

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30. See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 1st North American ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996).

31. See John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus; Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1972).

32. See Murray.

33. Webber, 147.

to come to church, rather than the church going out to them.<sup>34</sup> This sometimes takes the tangible shape of churches meeting in (or even owning/operating their own) coffee shops and pubs, rather than traditional church buildings. Simply put, it is the difference between “going to church” and “being the church.”

The *missiology* employed in much of the emerging church applies a post-Christendom mentality. In a manner of speaking, the missiology of the movement is “inward.” No longer is missions considered something that Western nations do in order to reach the unreached people of overseas nations. Instead, there is an increasing acknowledgement that the nations of the Western world themselves, indeed, the immediate communities in which these emerging churches are located, are unreached, and un-Christian. This leads to a focus on incarnational ministry in the particular communities.<sup>35</sup>

There may still be an emphasis on “foreign” missions, but not to the neglect of the potential ministries that are close to home. This is a timely shift in thinking, given that there are increasing migration patterns within the Western world that bring the nations of the world to the neighborhood. This is a trend that is certain to continue, and the opportunity to have global impact may require only a local effort.<sup>36</sup>

*Social awareness and action* are also important values to most emerging churches. There is a greater awareness than ever of global poverty, disease, human rights violations, hunger, and natural disasters. The causes for justice have become central, as many churches have taken the Beatitudes to heart. At times, there is a direct expression in

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34. Guder, ed., 4.

35. Hirsch, 133-44.

36. Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis*.

ministry to the poor nearby, and at others, there are fundraising efforts and international trips organized to work with people in need around the world. This topic will be discussed at greater length below, but it warrants mention here, given its importance in emerging church conversation and practice.

### **What the Emerging Church May Be Missing**

As previously noted, there are a number of other points around which emerging church practitioners organize and converse, but the four described above are a good introduction. These elements represent difficult, creative, and exhausting work for many. However, there are some things that are not being discussed widely in the movement – specifically things that prevent the emerging church from having a greater understanding of its global context, as well as a greater impact on the unity and ministry of the world Christian community. The elements described in this section are not intended as a harsh critique or condemnation, but as challenges to better utilize this catalytic point in the history of the Church.

One of the things that emerging churches are lacking, as a general rule, has to do with a depth of global engagement. Many do have an awareness of the economic, social, and political elements of globalization. They may even have an organized response, but few seem to have a grasp on the nature of the church in the global South and East. This may actually indicate a continuation of Western-centric thinking, based on some of the remaining echoes of Christendom. The emerging church movement, with few exceptions

remains a very white, wealthy movement that maintains the same systems of power that the practitioners often critique. Their level of involvement in global efforts, in most cases, has to do with participating in relief efforts, such as the ONE Campaign, Invisible Children, or tsunami relief in South Asia. They may have interests in political protest movements, such as anti-war efforts in Iraq, or over the government crackdown on Buddhist monks in Burma.

Unfortunately, awareness campaigns, and even financial gifts are well short of actual global connectivity. Connectivity suggests that there is a deeper level, two-way relationship between the parties involved. Many in the emerging church have taken up a compassionate stance toward world poverty and have participated in “social justice” campaigns. However, few have taken the theological and spiritual questions of justice into consideration. They may have helped in some personal ways, but again, may have limited their real impact by not considering the causes of poverty, hunger, disease, and poor human rights conditions. If they were to take up the root causes of those situations, they might discover some immediate action points. For example, many of the problems of poverty and injustice in Africa have to do with government corruption – George Ayittey, an African economist, claims that \$148 billion per year disappears due to corrupt leadership.<sup>37</sup> One potential response to this would be to “give aid” in the form of

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37. George B. N. Ayittey, "T.E.D. Talks: Cheetahs Vs. Hippos for Africa's Future," TED, <http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/view/id/151> (accessed December 9, 2008).

microfinance loans, directly to the people – which is actually what one emerging church, Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan is doing.<sup>38</sup>

One of the problems that exists when money is simply given to causes without a significant level of connectivity is that it can lead to a reinforced sense of Western hegemony. Some of the issues of injustice have to do with Western transnational corporations taking unfair advantage of workers in the developing world.<sup>39</sup> But then when foreign aid comes from the countries where those corporations are based, it can double the pain involved. Even when churches are involved, and when they have the very best of intentions, it can create mixed signals in the receiving countries. Liberation theologian Gustavo Guitierrez notes that the poor are becoming increasingly aware that their underdevelopment is only the by-product of the development of other countries.<sup>40</sup> The emerging church, even with an increased awareness and responsiveness to global issues, runs the risk of repeating previous generations' paternalistic behavior, which all too easily leads to paternalistic attitudes and/or dependency. Tomas Yaccino, one of the leaders of La Red del Camino network in Latin America confirms that this "is a learned habit from context and historical relating patterns. The most well meaning servants who

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38. Mars Hill Bible Church has a campaign called "FOCUS [xyz]," one component of which is working with microfinance lending groups in Burundi. Mars Hill Bible Church, "The poorest in the world: [z], Mars Hill," Mars Hill Bible Church, <http://www.marshall.org/serving/focus/z/> (accessed December 9, 2007).

39. Peters, 88.

40. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 26.

come out of contexts of power, resources, knowledge and influence assume they can determine the problem from outside and configure the necessary solutions to fix it.”<sup>41</sup>

Bob Roberts proposes a healthy approach to becoming meaningfully involved. Rather than just giving charity, he is involved in organizing efforts that help build factories and village infrastructure around the world that help the people who are currently in need become self-sufficient through their own labor. This is a process in which wealthy Western world people and churches can give of what they have, actually go to the places they’re aiding, and bring dignity to the people they are aiding by giving them the opportunities to work for themselves.<sup>42</sup>

Claudio Oliver, also from La Red del Camino, has a suggestion for Western groups. “When you think about people coming from other countries, lots of times, you think about ‘mission trips.’ Mission trips for the majority of the people means ‘do something’ – like paint the walls or put some bricks together . . . We could take a different approach for those trips, and we could call them ‘friendship trips.’ And friendship is the most important thing.”<sup>43</sup>

An example of what this might look like can be found in a college setting at the University of Washington, in Seattle. A program for Christian college students, called *inter::mission*,<sup>44</sup> involves a “culture project” each year, in order to develop friendships of

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41. E-mail communication with the author, dated November 5, 2008.

42. Roberts, 47.

43. "Youtube - Friendship Trips," [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHW35\\_3vp0A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHW35_3vp0A) (accessed December 3, 2008).

44. “inter::mission,” <http://intermissionseattle.com/> (accessed January 29, 2009).



learning in cultures significantly different than their own. In 2008, they traveled to India, to work with Christians who work to overcome the cultural impacts of the remaining caste system, which marginalizes hundreds of millions of people. They met with church leaders, activists, artists, and business leaders with the intention of learning from them, rather than imparting Western “wisdom” to them. They did serve people while there, but their orientation was to develop relationships over and above merely accomplishing tasks.

The other major thing that the emerging church is missing out on currently is the theological input from the global South and East. Aside from perhaps hearing stories about the explosive house church movement in China, or getting reports back from Western missionaries, there is very little information circulated in the emerging church about the nature and expressions of Christian faith in other parts of the world. The fact that the number of Christians in the global South has already surpassed the number of Christians in the Western world would likely surprise many in this movement. Even more surprising would be the fact that there are significant theological contributions being made in other parts of the world.

At present, it does not appear that the emerging church has the ears to hear the theologians of the global South and East. Some of the networks in Africa (such as Amahoro) and Latin America (such as La Red del Camino), which will be discussed in chapter six, are slowly becoming more widely known in emerging church circles, but in general, there is very little discussion of what is happening outside of the Western context. Media sources, in particular, Christian publishers of books and magazines, may spend time on global crises, but rarely, if ever, mention church activity or any of the

major local players in the Christian response.<sup>45</sup> If all that most people hear about from these parts of the world is poverty, famine, disease, and natural disaster, this condition is unlikely to change.

It will require some effort on the parts of emerging church practitioners to become more widely read. However, as the next section will suggest, the effort may provide worthwhile results to those who are willing to take the time. As noted previously, the emerging church responses to postmodernism have significant overlap with many theological responses to postcolonialism, and there are certainly some global insights that can be shared that will enhance the pathways of thinking and living.<sup>46</sup> Once again, it is important to note that many in this movement have worked very hard in their contexts, and have focused more than ever on the missiological nature of their task. I am arguing here that this specialization on the local has come somewhat at the expense of an awareness of the global theological movements. This, ironically, has limited the benefit that they might otherwise have received locally. The “glocal” concept explored in chapter four would be quite fitting in this context. Indeed, if emerging church practitioners were not only to listen to missional leaders from the global South, but also invite them into prominent positions of influence, they could extend the impact of their friends to the South. Some refer to this as “passing the microphone,” indicating a humility in submitting to other public voices.

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45. Brian McLaren, as a leader in the emerging church movement has written a book called *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), but this is a good example of problem/solution focused work that does not identify many global theological voices. Rather, it is a Western theological and practical attempt at increasing awareness. McLaren raises important issues, but they are of a different nature than what I am suggesting here.

46. Vanhoozer, 89.

## **What the Emerging Church Has to Offer the Church of the Global South**

As the emerging church movement continues to gain traction in the Western context, it is important to realize that there is much that can be offered to sister churches and movements in the global South. Of course, some caution is in order, in order to avoid many of the mistakes made by Westerners during the missionary movements of the past one hundred years, as well as cultural mistakes made by political and cultural leaders. Western hegemony is the last thing that either the global South or the West needs to have perpetuated at this time in history. With that in mind, there are some specific things that can be done by emerging churches in the West that can be helpful to those in the global South. A few of these will be briefly discussed here, while others will be explored within the context of creating “communities of communities” in chapter seven of this project.

One of the most obvious ways in which the emerging church can continue to be of assistance to the global South, and the churches there, is to expand their involvement in global issues of social justice. There is currently a lot of cultural resonance over issues such as human trafficking, HIV/AIDS relief, clean water, and fair trade products. This level of involvement can be strengthened through local campaigns in the West, where emerging churches exist. Additionally, more public lobbying can be taken up by these churches and their members, on behalf of those in the global South. One of the keys for issues of injustice to be attended to is for people in the West to hear about the problems and become active in them. The more that emerging churches are willing to “speak truth

to power,” and act as voices for those who do not have the same resources, the more helpful they will become, and the more a bond of brotherhood/sisterhood will be formed.

The Western world, by virtue of its wealth and technological advancement, is highly “wired” with the communications capacities that make networks of long-distance relationships possible. As chapter seven will highlight, developing relationships between missional networks is an important factor in forming supportive and energizing partnerships. The communication technology available in the West can be extended, and funded in areas of the global South where these infrastructures are limited. If emerging church networks from the West could help establish communications in the South, it will make it far easier to hear the important stories, share training resources, and “flatten” the nature of the glocal Church.

As these tools of communication are established, the emerging church in the West can begin to develop listening forums, in which church leaders from the global South can share their stories in the West. For example, with relatively minimal financial investment, a pastor from Ecuador could appear live via webcam in an emerging church in Austin, Texas, and tell his or her story to a church in the West. It’s one thing for a Western church to send a mission team to the global South for a short-term service project, and report back to the church when they return; but quite another for the actual people from these countries to tell their stories in their own words. Providing places for church leaders from the global South to tell their stories will help them gain support and assistance from the West, but do so on their own terms.

Financial assistance is another more obvious area in which the emerging church of the West can be helpful. While money should not be used to leverage control over the people to whom it is given, the truth is that the vast majority of people in the Western world have enormous wealth when compared to people in the global South. Emerging churches can be active in sharing their resources with sister churches in the South. As noted above, many emerging churches have a very local focus in their service and giving, which is a good thing. However, by getting financially involved in peoples' lives in other parts of the world, emerging churches could extend their members' own worldviews in such a way as to own their identities as global citizens. In many cases, because emerging churches have rejected the mainstream evangelical church structures, which fund large church buildings and pastoral salaries, they are much more flexible with their finances, and able to be responsive to needs in their home communities, as well as around the world.

### **Next Steps**

This chapter has taken a brief overview of philosophical and ecclesiological movements in the Western world. While these continue to grow in scope and influence culturally, it is important to that people become increasingly aware of movements taking place in other parts of the world. As noted throughout this project, global Christianity has grown and changed drastically, and we in the West are no longer in the majority of the world's Christian populations. As we come to terms with this reality, it is critically

important that we be more attentive to the theological and practical voices coming out of the global South.

The following chapter will explore some of the missional movements taking place in the global South, as well as the postcolonial context out which they arise. Some of the ways that they are facing poverty, oppression, and other social injustices will be examined, as will the lessons that they have to share with the emerging church of the West. As postcolonial cultural dynamics are described, some common areas of experience will emerge that will provide points of connection with the postmodern experience of the Western world.

## Chapter 6

### Missional Church Networks of the Global South: Postcolonial Movements of Maturity

Even as the postmodern philosophical movement was taking shape and gaining momentum in academic circles, new nations were being birthed in the global South. In the wake of the dissolution of colonial power in nations across Africa and Latin America, the countries that were formed had the task of developing national identities, economic and political structures, military presences, and new societal norms. In the majority of these cases, the transitions did not go smoothly, and several nations remain in turmoil a full four decades later.

Wars, genocide, political and financial corruption, and an increased dependency on the West for aid are very common. As discussed in previous chapters, financial independence has come slowly for these new nations in the global South. Aggressive trade agreements with transnational corporations have limited the income from goods produced there. Further, the systems of government employed in many of these cases were not implemented smoothly. After having been ruled for a long period of time by the colonial states, their own indigenous forms of tribal government were inadequate for the modern world, and yet they were unaccustomed to the kinds of systems and structures that would make for healthy nations.<sup>1</sup>

The postcolonial conditions present in the global South have created the milieu for religious changes as well. As noted in chapter three, the Christian missionary movement coincided with colonialism. Interestingly, postcolonialism came about at nearly the same

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1. Ayittey, *Africa Unchained: The Blueprint for Africa's Future*, 58-59.

time as a restructuring of missionary methods did. This has given space for rapid expansion of Christianity in the global South. A number of forms of Christianity have seen growth, the most prominent of which being in Pentecostal expressions. Meanwhile, on a smaller, quieter scale, there have also developed networks of missional expressions of the church, which mirror the emerging church in the West in many ways. These have not necessarily been connected with the Western emerging church, but there have been some shared influences and similar stories of growth and movement.

This chapter will explore the postcolonial cultural context of the global South as a way of understanding some of the missional movements taking place there. Some of the prominent themes of postcolonialism, such as freedom, justice, racism, and Liberation Theology will be highlighted, as will the church's response to these things. Examples of missional networks will be given. Finally, some of the ways in which the Southern Missional Church can contribute to the development of the emerging church in the West will be suggested.

### **Understanding the Postcolonial Context**

Much of what is written about postcolonialism is of an academic nature. Social and literary criticism that examines the nature of power is frequently referred to in the literature, as is the nature of identity within cultures affected by colonialism. Like postmodernism, it has a multiplicity of meanings, depending on the location and specific



subject matter being discussed. Typically, though, it is seen as an oppositional way of critiquing Eurocentric ways of thinking.<sup>2</sup>

Kevin Vanhoozer notes that there are similarities between postmodernism and postcolonialism as well. He writes, “Postmodernity is largely a reaction to the subject-object distinction and to its concomitant assumption that truth can be discovered by induction and deduction,” which he claims holds similarities to a postcolonial rejection of the distinction between theology and action, demonstrated in an ecumenical meeting of “Third World Theologians.”<sup>3</sup> False categories are challenged in both areas, as are notions of objectivity. In terms of academic pursuits, though, Sugirtharajah makes clear that postcolonialism has made an impact on a number of academic fields, but biblical scholarship is not one of them.<sup>4</sup> This does seem to be changing, though, as non-Western thinkers increasingly question the categories and content of classical academic theology.<sup>5</sup>

On a more practical front, Brian McLaren argues in relation to postmodernism and postcolonialism,

Both, I think, involve ‘getting enlightened about the Enlightenment.’ In the global north, as Europeans looked back and realized that the modern era had meant two world wars, a holocaust, environmental destruction, apartheid, the slave trade, chauvinism, and the whole colonial project ... they had a kind of crisis of conscience. They began to realize what they had done in the name of civilization and progress. Meanwhile, in the global south, the formerly colonized were seeing - or being free to begin saying - the same things. So both north and south begin to critique modernity, not just as an intellectual phenomenon, but as a social and economic phenomenon as well.<sup>6</sup>

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2. Sugirtharajah, 15.

3. Vanhoozer, 89-90.

4. Sugirtharajah, 100.

5. Vanhoozer, 89.

6. Brian McLaren, e-mail message to author, September 30, 2008.

Edward Said, a Columbia University Literature professor wrote seminal books in this field, dealing primarily with identity and nationalism, which stimulated work in a number of other expressions of his theories.<sup>7</sup> Other academic areas of emphasis in postcolonialism include the roles of women, racism inherent in postcolonialism, the politics of decolonization, and the development of caste and hierarchy in postcolonial societies. Each of these has a significant amount of literature devoted to it, even as the field of postcolonial theology continues to grow.

Aside from the academic pursuits of postcolonial theory, there are some more concrete ways in which the conversations are being negotiated. One of the primary topics at work is the notion of freedom. When the colonized nations of the global South struggled and anticipated the time when their colonial rulers would release them from the presence of outsiders, they often did so with a somewhat short-sighted view. And in the 1950s and 1960s, when a majority of the global South's nations gained independence, they often stumbled badly as a result.

Part of the reason for this is that it is not enough to focus attention on what you are gaining freedom *from*. It is also critically important to look to what you are gaining freedom *to*. In other words, looking only to the past and what is being escaped, will not help people develop better ways forward, once freedom is achieved. Plans for development and governance came together with difficulty, and there were a number of political coups in many of these newly "free" states.

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7. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).; and Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993).

For example, a discussion of Africa's postcolonial leaders can be controversial. On the one hand, many respect their struggles against the colonial powers, and the sacrifices they made on behalf of their peoples. However, once they got into power, they quickly attempted to prove to their Western colonizers that they were capable of prosperity, but without having developed the intermediate steps of education and measured growth. Instead, these leaders indulged in the window-dressing of prosperity, in their extravagant use of money and possessions. Meanwhile, the people who produce Africa's real wealth (things like coffee, tea, cocoa, gold, and diamonds) have been left out of the development cycle.<sup>8</sup> In so doing, the elites took the promises of freedom and hoarded them for themselves, without delivering the real liberation to the people they had once represented. Similar scenarios developed in Latin American states, bringing about perpetual instability and corrupt systems.

In Latin America, though, the postcolonial theme of justice has become prominent. There have been a number of political and social movements since decolonization aimed at going beyond mere freedom from outside rule, toward a truly just treatment of all people. Social hierarchies that marginalize the poor are challenged in these justice movements. These have included prominent Marxist leaders, such as Che Guevara, who led multiple revolutionary efforts throughout Latin America. These, of course, are controversial methods to achieving justice, but they serve as an example of the value placed on justice by the people living under the every day conditions of postcolonialism.

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8. Ayittey, *Africa Unchained: The Blueprint for Africa's Future*, 10-14.

Brian McLaren notes that “social questions of justice . . . are ultimately questions about the moral uses of power.”<sup>9</sup> The “truth” sought by postmodernists and postcolonialists both must be achieved by understanding that truth without justice, and justice without truth, are both inadequate. He continues,

if the truth is that God doesn’t play favorites, if the truth is that land theft and slave labor are wrong even (especially!) when done by people who call themselves Christians, if the truth is that all human beings are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with equal dignity, even sanctity – then we must face the injustices of our past and seek justice for everybody everywhere. That is the only way that the world of tomorrow will be a better place, and it is the only way to live by the truth.<sup>10</sup>

The expressions of power are the clearest indicators of how serious nations and their leaders are about justice. When power is used in order to expand wealth at the expense of the people on the underside of society, there is little justice. However, when power is leveraged in a way that looks after the needs of the powerless, and protects the most innocent, it is being used well. The postcolonial critique of Western power is that there has been too much of the former, and not enough of the latter.

Another major theme of postcolonialism is a response to the continuing cultural imperialism of the Western world. We have noted some of the ways in which cultural products, from blue jeans to movies have become globalized, such that young people in Sao Paulo have largely similar lives to those in Detroit. It goes beyond globalization to cultural imperialism, though, when it is acknowledged that the dominant culture represented throughout the world is Western (and white). Occasionally, a Bollywood star from India will gain international prominence, or a sports hero from Latin America will

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9. Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 45.

10. Ibid.

become widely recognizable. But for the most part, the consumer products that are most recognizable, the movie stars that people follow, and the music that is commonly heard originates in the West.

Additionally, the cultural imperialism gets enforced through the avenues of development. Beyond the trade practices forced on impoverished countries in the global South, the notions of what “acceptable” lifestyles most commonly stem from perceptions of the West. While it is often true that the quality of life, and the health of the nations improves through development, these things often come at the cost of indigenous cultures that are forgotten as Western lifestyles are taken up in their place.

The cultural dominance of the West does not go unnoticed. Indeed, it is certainly the case that global terrorism networks are fueled by their common hatred of Western culture, and the ways in which it is perceived to “invade” nations and cultures that have not invited it. As a result, religious extremists do what little they can to slow the progress of this different form of imperialism – through bombings, threats, and propaganda.

Literary critiques, artistic statements, and increasing activism from people in the West are beginning to draw attention to cultural imperialism. Just as the missionary movement became aware of the ways in which it was importing foreign cultures along with the gospel, philanthropic organizations, activists, and even outside corporations are increasingly careful to respect indigenous cultures, and even utilize them in their work.

One of the clearest responses to Western domination that has arisen out of the postcolonial context is Liberation Theology. As noted multiple times, this field of study and work has become a central theological movement, and has galvanized many, both in Latin America and in Africa. Gustavo Gutierrez, widely acknowledged as the father of

Liberation Theology spoke clearly to this: “Working free of the colonial mentality is undoubtedly one of the major tasks confronting the Christian community of Latin America. It will also be one way in which we can contribute to the authentic enrichment of the universal church.”<sup>11</sup> The Marxist underpinnings of Liberation Theology certainly contain many critiques of colonial power and economic structures. The Western capitalists are seen as greedy, wealthy, and powerful – in other words, exactly the kinds of people Jesus so regularly spoke out against.

Interestingly, though, Liberation Theology is not simply focused on the dominant West. Rather, it spends much time discussing God’s “preferential option for the poor,” and the ways in which the poor are able to (and should) rise up against the powerful oppressors. Liberation Theology has more to do with the victims of injustice, and less to do with the victors.<sup>12</sup> In this way, for all of the theological controversy that it creates, Liberation Theology represents an important move forward – once again, it is important to understand what and who freedom is *for*, rather than simply what that freedom is *from*. Indeed, it is a praxis oriented theology, which becomes the way people live and move, rather than simply a set of actions that they take.<sup>13</sup> Further, Liberation Theology envisions God as the defender of the poor. In this way, the Beatitudes actually reveal more about God than about the poor.<sup>14</sup>

Liberation can be thought of along multiple fronts, as well. Rather than focusing on the political and economic aspects, there are cultural dynamics at work, as individuals

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11. Gutiérrez and Nickoloff, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*, 241.

12. Sugirtharajah, 171.

13. Vanhoozer, 96.

14. Gutiérrez and Nickoloff, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*, 105.

increasingly take responsibility for their own destinies. Additionally, it must not be forgotten that liberation is understood within a theological frame, which certainly adds a spiritual dimension. Reconciling with God becomes an avenue through which people gain liberation from sin and their broken relationships with one another.<sup>15</sup>

Before leaving the topic of postcolonialism, as it parallels postmodernism in some interesting ways, it is also worth mentioning that some of the dynamics of post-Christendom are relevant here. Each of these forms of thought and work involve a critique of systems of power and control, which are enforced in physical, economic, and cultural ways. These powers are rooted in the Western world, which requires that people in the global South raise their voices in confidence, and speak truth. Fortunately, with the challenges brought by postmodernism, postcolonialism, and post-Christendom, there is an increased openness in the West to hearing the critiques, and responding well to them. As we look now at some of the ways the Southern Missional Church has worked, we will be able to see practical action to turn the tide of history.

### **The Southern Missional Church Response to Postcolonialism**

In the wake and in the mix of all of the changes that have come with postcolonialism in the global South, Christianity has seen rapid growth. The number of Christians in the world noted in the opening pages of this project help to chart the change. In some cases, growth is a result of spontaneous church planting movements, while in others, it is fueled by supernatural phenomena that have taken place within Pentecostalism. At a time when

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15. Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, 99.

Christianity is in a state of serious decline in the Western world, it is very much alive and well in the South.

This growth signals much change, but it is important to examine the kinds of changes taking place, and not merely get caught up in the excitement of the growth statistics. For example, we would do well to ask why Pentecostalism has expanded at a faster rate than other forms, and what that might indicate about theology and practice. On the one hand, the spiritual dynamics at work in most expressions of Pentecostal Christianity are very congruent with the indigenous religious practices in much of the global South, so the fact that healing and prophetic ministries thrive makes sense. Given the extreme poverty of so many areas of the global South, it is also easy to understand why there is a lot of growth around the Pentecostal prosperity movements. People are suffering from poor health and financial conditions, so the kinds of Christianity that appeal to people are those that communicate hope and even some control over their situations, provided that they have enough faith and/or maintain a life of obedient devotion to God. The ecstatic forms of worship common in Pentecostalism also feel familiar to some indigenous people, given their tribal histories of music and dance.

Liberation Theology's resonance in the cultures of the global South is also easy to understand. It provides people with a theological framework that communicates to them that God sees and understands their suffering, and that God is on their side in the midst of oppressive living conditions. And similar to the Pentecostals' appeal to personal control, Liberation Theology gives the people tangible things to do in response to their difficult living conditions.



Both of these forms of faith have their merits, to be sure. But they are also both quite controversial. There is concern about Pentecostal growth, because of the way it seems to enrich the leaders of the movements without bringing significant benefit to those who flock to the churches and are told to “sow seeds of prosperity” by giving money.<sup>16</sup> As noted previously, there is also concern over Liberation Theology’s blending of Marxist politics with Christian faith. Even as this theology brings a strong critique of capitalism and colonialism, some argue that it is making the same mistake of becoming overly bound to a particular (human) system of government.

Rather than engaging in a theological, political, or cultural critique of these forms of Christian faith, it is more fitting for the purposes of this project to highlight the development of some new networks of relationships in the global South. These networks are congruent with and, in some cases, related to various expressions of the emerging church movement in the West. They are young and relatively small, but appear to hold promise, both in their particular contexts, and in their potential to link together in global friendships of mutual learning and support.

#### Amahoro, Africa

One such network is called Amahoro, and is located in Africa. It is a collective of leaders who are attempting to “rediscover” what God had in mind for the church in Africa. The word amahoro is a greeting that communicates a deep hope for peace in the world. Those involved in this network recognize that even as Christianity is spreading

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16. Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, 91-94.

into new areas of Africa for the first time, it is in need of revitalization, even in areas in which the continent was Christianized. According to the network's website,

Too often in the colonial era, Christian missionaries in Africa spread a message of grace and forgiveness for life after death, but did not integrate that proclamation with the profound Biblical message of justice, peace, and reconciliation in this life on earth. Many spoke longingly of amahoro in the afterlife, but missed Jesus' ultimate point: peace enters our story now, not just in the far-off future!<sup>17</sup>

They recognize the shifts that have taken place from the modern to postmodern and postcolonial world. They are well aware of the shifts taking place in the Western world, through the emerging church movement, but are interested in bringing about a specifically African understanding of the gospel and its implications. For example, they are forced to grapple with what a greeting of "amahoro" must include, when used in a Rwandan context, which was the home to mass killings between the warring Hutu and Tutsi tribes – both of which are Christian.

This situation is the same in neighboring Burundi. One of the key leaders of Amahoro, Claude Nikondeha, is from Burundi, and despite growing up in a Christianized nation, he understands the context of genocide, and that he and his fellow Christians had been taught an incomplete gospel. Brian McLaren quotes Nikondeha as saying,

Over the years, I have come to realize that something is wrong with the way we understand Jesus and the good news. Something is missing in the version of the Christian religion we received from the missionaries, which is the message we now preach ourselves. They told us how to go to heaven. But they left out an important detail. They didn't tell us how the will of God could be done on earth. We need to learn what the message of Jesus says to our situation here in East Africa.<sup>18</sup>

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17. "Amahoro - inside Amahoro," Amahoro, <http://www.amahoro-africa.org/InsideAmahoro.html> (accessed November 20, 2008).

18. McLaren, 20.

Amahoro's website notes that the network has been developed, and continues to grow in order to, "encourage and facilitate a conversation and network of friendships among leaders engaging with the postcolonial African world in the name of Jesus." Their mission is "to motivate and accompany the local church, both in its development as a community of the Kingdom of God and as an agent of transformation in its African context."<sup>19</sup>

They do this through a number of initiatives. There is an annual Amahoro Gathering, which hosts approximately 200 African and non-African leaders, who are involved in Christian disciple-making ministries that emphasize justice and mercy. This is a dynamic environment, in which themes of reconciliation and reformation are shared and experienced. They also create internship service opportunities for people to serve in compassionate communities for several months at a time. They host "Discovery Trips" primarily for Westerners interested in learning about their context and mission. They host theological institutes each summer as well, which are aimed at developing African theology in such a way as to make it a "first-hand" rather than "second-hand" understanding.<sup>20</sup> They have a number of other practical initiatives as well, which are aimed directly at dealing with problems like HIV/AIDS, poverty, and street children.

By taking a more holistic, kingdom-focused approach to faith, they are making a decided break from the formulaic theology handed down to them by Western Christendom. By integrating this into their own local contexts, they are resisting the paternalism that remains after generations of the missionary movements. And by

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19. "Amahoro - inside Amahoro."

20. "Amahoro: Summer Institute," <http://amahoro-africa.org/SummerInstitute.html> (accessed November 20, 2008).

incorporating causes of justice and mercy into their work, they are providing counterweights to the “prosperity gospel” of many Pentecostal groups, and demonstrating a robust concern for the poor that so many liberation theologians preach. As a result, Amahoro shows much promise as a vital network moving forward, and one that certainly can teach Westerners many lessons about reconciliation, gospel embodiment in life and culture, and about glocalizing theology.

### La Red Del Camino, Latin America

A vital network of missional Christian practitioners has also developed over the past decade across the Latin American and Caribbean regions, which goes by the name of La Red Del Camino. Similar to the story of Amahoro, the network initially developed among a small group of Christian leaders in the Dominican Republic who had become frustrated at a one-dimensional gospel being preached. In personal correspondence with the author, Tomas Yaccino, one of the leaders of this network describes how despite Evangelicalism growing in size and influence, there was very minimal “impact of that growth . . . on the rapidly deteriorating social fabric of the country. Traditional church understanding of spirituality divorced it from any social/physical transformation.” Instead, all of their emphasis was on “saving souls.”

According to the network website,

Del Camino Network is a community of local churches who participate as servants in the life of the Kingdom of God in response to Jesus’ radical call to “love one another as He has loved us.” We are connected as friends who are committed to accompanying one another and serving together in what we understand to be our collective mission in Latin America and the Caribbean to work out God’s plan for the

restoration of all things. The network is joined as well by pro-church organizations that identify with and form a part of this same spirit of mission.<sup>21</sup>

They work across denominational lines, and have partner churches from most major Protestant denominations, as well as some Catholic congregations. They currently have church partnerships in Brazil, Chile, Peru, Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica. They are intentional about avoiding institutionalizing their work, but would rather work as a movement of friendships, which can have a far-reaching impact on local communities.

Dealing as they do with denominational churches, they do sometimes encounter some of the paternalism common to churches established out of the West. Tomas Yaccino says, “the most well meaning servants who come out of contexts of power, resources, knowledge, and influence assume they can determine the problem from the outside and configure the necessary solutions to fix it.”<sup>22</sup> However, knowing these tendencies gives the network the ability to

be proactive in moving toward a healthier interdependency to overcome the unhealthy dependencies that are so common in project support and mission. The Red Del Camino network is practical, with a strong theological base and history that is Latin American. This is a strength that is recognized and emphasized in all relationships, as most will agree that the South has a lot to teach in this area of holistic, Kingdom theology. Yet, at the same time [the network] recognizes that the movement is a minority movement that goes against the grain of popular Western theology that emphasizes success (according to the world) . . . The network is all about praxis, theological reflection that comes from the faithful practice of the holistic gospel.<sup>23</sup>

La Red Del Camino works as a network of national relationships. Each country involved has a national coordinating community that relates to the larger network through

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21. "La Red Del Camino - About Us," La Red del Camino, [http://lareddelcamino.net/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=2&Itemid=27](http://lareddelcamino.net/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=2&Itemid=27) (accessed November 19, 2008).

22. Tomas Yaccino, e-mail message to author, November 5, 2008.

23. Ibid.

the service of “national connectors,” who meet together at least once per year. The network consists primarily of supportive friendships in ministry. The national networks become hubs of fellowship, training, and resource sharing.

### Other Networks, Latin America

In addition to La Red Del Camino, there are other budding networks that seems to be moving in a holistic direction of missional expression as well. Red Del Camino, as a matter of fact, was in some ways born out of a meeting of the Latin American Theological Fellowship (LATF) in Quito, Ecuador, in 2000.<sup>24</sup> From a recent press release, the LATF, “facilitates friendly spaces for dialogue and biblical-theological reflection from Latin America. Today, just like back in the 1970s, we continue yearning for a Latin American church that, transformed by the Word and the Spirit into an agent of the Kingdom of God and God’s justice, ministers in every area of society.”<sup>25</sup> The relationships that develop as a result of the common theological efforts have the ability to spill over into local practicing communities.

Another example of a movement taking place in Latin America is called Tribal Generation.<sup>26</sup> This is a movement intended to start and expand churches aimed at the younger, emerging generation, which this group refers to as “urban tribes.” They seek to

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24. Ibid.

25. Brian D. McLaren, "Latin American Update - Brian McLaren," <http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/blog/latin-american-update.html> (accessed November 20, 2008).

26. "Tribal Generation - New Churches for a New Generation!," Tribal Generation, <http://www.tribalgeneration.org/eng/index.php> (accessed November 23, 2008).

understand and respond to the postmodern cultural conditions, even as they play out in the postcolonial dynamics of Latin America. They train leaders, do research in the culture, and network leaders together for the purpose of learning and exchange of information and experience. They are part of a larger global movement, called Dawn Ministries, which helps fuel saturation church planting movements. Tribal Generations is careful to point out that they are not a denomination or even an organization per se. Rather, they have representatives in various countries, working toward common goals. Their efforts in Latin America have found expression in Chile, Columbia, Mexico, Peru, Paraguay, and Venezuela. They produce local and collective events. Most recently, a festival was staged in Brazil in May 2008, with music and seminars to bring the various people in the movement together.<sup>27</sup>

#### RoH, Malaysia

While most of the work of this project has focused on the African and Latin American contexts, especially in regions dominated by colonialism and Christendom, there are signs of missional renewal movements taking place in Asia as well. The house church movement in China is difficult to track, given the underground nature of it. However, one brief example of an Asian movement taking shape is a group called RoH, or Revolution of Hope, in Malaysia.<sup>28</sup> They are a relatively young group (started in Spring 2007), and

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27. "Tribal Generation 2008," Tribal Generation, <http://www.tribalgeneration.org/global/eng/index.php> (accessed November 20, 2008).

28. The acronym RoH, formed by Revolution of Hope, is a Malay word that means "spirit."

are motivated to be responsive to the world of globalization in a way that creates a counter-cultural movement. According to the group's website, their context,

calls for Christian believers, especially intellectuals (in the sense of critical thinkers with professional and academic qualifications) to band together and think more concertedly within our Malaysian context so that we may imagine more globally while we act more locally. This comes in the light of the Asian understanding of knowledge and the local cultural wisdom of our people in Asia-Malaysia, not to mention the untold sufferings inflicted on the marginal communities in our midst (the many poor of the various religions and cultures).<sup>29</sup>

Their focus is to engage in meaningful theological reflection that is distinctively Malaysian, and to engage in activism at multiple levels. They work alongside social service agencies (governmental and NGOs), raise awareness in Christian churches of the needs in their area, and work toward advocacy within governmental structures for the powerless and marginalized. They consist primarily academics and pastors, from a variety of Protestant and Catholic backgrounds. The network also hosts regular conferences to stimulate conversations and forward thinking.

### **What the Emerging Church Movement Can Learn From the Church of the Global South and East**

We turn now to some of the things that the church of the global South and East has to offer to the emerging church of the West. This is not intended as an exhaustive list, but rather, as a starting point for some themes of exploration. In order to truly benefit from these elements, though, it is important that leaders within the emerging church movement

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29. "R.O.H. Malaysia," R.o.H. Malaysia, <http://www.rohmalaysia.net/about.php> (accessed December 3, 2008).



demonstrate a humble, teachable spirit. Some of what the global South and East have to offer is critical of Western hegemony and paternalism, and it is important that Western Christians not react in a defensive manner, or one that makes a lot of assumptions. Instead, a deep level of listening and understanding will communicate respect, trust, and love.

### Spiritual Dynamics

One of the most explosive areas of growth in the church of the global South and East is in the Pentecostal church movements. Belief in and interaction with the supernatural world is automatically assumed in many places. Supernatural healings, ecstatic utterances, prophetic words of knowledge, and exorcisms are common.<sup>30</sup> This may have to do with contextualization in cultures where indigenous religion experiences and interacts with the spirit world. It may also have to do with the cultural oppression that took place in countries where colonial rule was the norm for multiple generations – the only way for the people to have a sense of personal power and movement is by tapping into supernatural experience.

While belief and doctrine related to the spiritual realm varies widely in Western traditions, the emerging church movement has largely left these themes unexamined. Coming out of responses to modernity and postmodernism, the mainstream forms of

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30. Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, 98-122.

church expression are primarily of an intellectual nature. The Enlightenment movement toward scientific explanation and foundationalism helped steer faith into a highly cerebral experience, and one that looks with great skepticism on spiritual explanations to events in the world. There is still a belief in prayer and the power of God, but to talk of angels and demons, gifts of the Holy Spirit, or specific manifestations of these things is to be met with a cold response.

It would not be difficult to imagine a scenario in which a church leader from the global South could ask whether the Western experience of Christian faith is really Trinitarian at all. There is talk of the love of the Father, and the teachings and work of the Incarnate Son, but a general lack of attention to and/or trust in the Holy Spirit. Western Christians would, of course, insist that they believe fully in the Holy Spirit, but in demonstrated experience, it is not at the forefront of the church of Christendom or post-Christendom.

There are certainly some emerging church congregations that have a fully integrated practice related to the Holy Spirit's activity. However, a review of the books, blogs, and podcasts related to the emerging church will reveal a stark absence of material having to do with the spiritual, unknown realm. This is ironic, given the postmodern Christian embrace of mystery. If a more demonstrable invitation was given to the Holy Spirit, it may well be the case that some of the spiritual dynamics that have been missing would begin to flower.

It should be acknowledged that one likely explanation for Western and emerging church skepticism of supernatural spiritual activity is that many "abuses" have taken

place – manipulative faith healers, shady exorcisms, and blaming sinful behavior on demonic influence, for example. The reaction to these things from many, though, has been to swing too far in the opposite direction. Todd Hunter, the former President of the National Association of Vineyard Churches (a Western denomination that has been accused of supernatural spiritual abuses), has wise words in response. He says, “The proper corrective for the abuse of something good (like the Holy Spirit’s involvement in our lives) is not no-use, but correct use.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, don’t overreact and neglect the Holy Spirit simply because some have taken things too far.

### Liberation

In the postcolonial era, the theology of liberation, which was stimulated in the Latin American context, brought much needed attention to the plight of the poor and oppressed. Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the founders and proponents of the Liberation Theology movement has written extensively on continuing financial and political oppression. He infuses his work with the principles of Marxism in response to what he sees as the problematic dominance of capitalism. He describes God as the defender and liberator of the poor.<sup>32</sup> Further, he argues that to be a disciple of Jesus is to be one who practices

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31. Todd Hunter, personal conversation with the author, June, 2003.

32. Gutiérrez and Nickoloff, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*, 105.

love for the poor, condemnation of injustice, sharing of bread, and hope for resurrection.<sup>33</sup> He states that “God’s kingdom and social injustice are incompatible.”<sup>34</sup>

It was noted above that social awareness is one of the themes that emerging churches in the West do spend time and attention on. This has not typically been toward challenging the causes of injustice. The theology of liberation, though, has taken this into account. It serves as a helpful model of how to integrate theological approaches to local systemic cultural issues and conditions.

Obviously, the blending of socialism and theology that takes place in much of Liberation Theology will make Western capitalists very uncomfortable. This is not a cause for immediately dismissing what has been said, though. Even if it is argued that socialism offers the wrong response to the injustice experienced in many parts of the global South, Liberation Theology has offered a very helpful diagnosis of many of the institutionalized problems of capitalism.<sup>35</sup> Emerging church practitioners may have a general awareness of poverty, poor workers’ rights, and corrupt corporate practices in the South and East, but in most cases, they haven’t taken the time to think through how the cultural system of consumption is indicative of the weaker aspects of capitalism.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it is a strong signal that at least a soft allegiance to an empire of greed may still be in place.

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33. Ibid., 106.

34. Ibid., 239.

35. Carroll R., 204.

36. Sine, "Globalization, Creation of Global Culture of Consumption and the Impact on the Church and Its Mission," 361-63.

## Citizenship and Transnationalism

Thinking in terms of the postcolonial era, questions of nationalism abound. In particular, in nations which only gained political independence from colonial powers in the 1950s and 1960s, forming identity around national citizenship has been a difficult process.<sup>37</sup> A number of African nations, for example, continue to have civil wars between factions looking for dominance in the new political climate. Christian identity has also been a part of this, as missionary organizations attempted to employ a “three-self” model for churches planted by missionaries – they desired that these congregations to be self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting.<sup>38</sup> The development of independent churches has begun, and is a growing movement in the global South.

Economic independence has been much harder to come by. This is due in large part to transnational corporations, which, as discussed in chapter four, operate in multiple nations, and have been known to dictate to their host countries their own sets of laws and conditions.<sup>39</sup> This has led to an unstable economic dynamic, which rarely works in favor of the citizens of the local people.

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37. Ayittey, *Africa Unchained: The Blueprint for Africa's Future*.

38. Darrell L. Whiteman, "Anthropological Reflections on Contextualizing Theology in a Globalizing World," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 59. Whiteman also cites the development of the “fourth self,” by missiologists Paul Hiebert. The fourth self suggests that these churches also be “self-theologizing.”

39. Peters, 88.

I would like to suggest here, that the political and economic fluidity created by these situations has the effect of causing Christians to more fully embrace their citizenship in the Kingdom of God. In areas where government corruption is rampant and massive corporations impose difficult working conditions, Christians know that only God can be trusted to have their best interests in mind. Tite Tienou argues that with the shift in world Christian populations, it is now possible that Christianity can be seen as something other than a Western/white man's religion.<sup>40</sup> Instead, they are able to embrace their Kingdom identity more readily than most Western Christians, whose experience of government and economics has been framed by freedom and stability, not to mention that these same governments have either explicitly endorsed, or heavily favored religious practice, most commonly of a Christian nature.

The emerging church movement has a ready opportunity to embrace this Kingdom identity as well. With increasing questions in the Western world arising from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, concerns over possible environmental crisis, and the role of religious practice in politics, the conversation has already been started. It would seem that this is a strategic time for Christians to embrace their Kingdom citizenship as primary. If they do so, they will be increasingly open to listening to the Christian voices in other parts of the world that express concern over continuing Western economic, political, and cultural imperialism. If the emerging church practitioners were to own more fully their Kingdom role, they would be in a better position to speak prophetically to their own cultures on behalf of those who are suffering, and take responsibility for defending, protecting, and potentially liberating people who are suffering, around the world.

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40. Tienou, 41.

### Next Steps

Now that we have explored the presence and workings of missional movements of Christians in the global South, as well as the emerging church movement in the West, it is necessary to understand the possibilities for cross-pollination and the development of relationships of mutual learning and growth. The next chapter will summarize some of the frameworks that make this possible, as well as suggest some potential ways forward toward forming those friendships. It will require energetic, creative, and humble action on the parts of Christians from all places.

## Chapter 7

### Bringing Global Movements Together Through Communities of Communities

As we have considered the realities of globalization, and the various new missional networks and movements of Christianity throughout this project, it would be helpful to attempt to locate these things within a bigger picture, at least from a church historical perspective. Besides noting what took place down through the ages of Christendom, and the past one hundred and fifty years of the modern missionary movement, the present time frame represents very important shifts. Phyllis Tickle makes the argument that what we are currently experiencing is the latest in a cycle of “Great” shifts that take place periodically in the Church. Referencing Anglican bishop Mark Dyer, Tickle notes that, “about every five hundred years the empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at that time, become an intolerable carapace that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur.”<sup>1</sup> What takes place during these disruptive times includes newer expressions of Christianity emerging with vitality; renewed and energized versions of the older, dominant forms of Christianity; and importantly, the geographic and demographic spread of Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

If this is indeed the case, then both the emerging church movement in the Western world and the postcolonial missional movements in the global South are likely key factors in a process of renewal of the Church as a whole. However, it is important to note the significant difference between this re-shaping of the Church and the previous ones,

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1. Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 16.

2. Ibid., 17.



namely, that this is a personally, geographically and denominationally decentralized process. In prior shifts, there have been pivotal individuals involved, whether Martin Luther, John Calvin, or Gregory the Great, and primarily within Europe. However, the present changes are taking place on a global scale, and being driven by a wide diversity of churches and grass roots practitioners. Even the more prominent theologians and pastors who have written influential books have not catalyzed movements driven by their leadership or personality. The *glocal* concept discussed earlier is evident here.

One of the primary aims of this project has been to understand and employ approaches to developing mutual relationships of learning and growth that leverage the realities of a “flat world.” This chapter will explore some of the practical ways of accomplishing this, but will start from a theological and theoretical basis that provides a helpful framing structure. One of the elements that is necessary here is an energetic creativity that gives birth to ideas and initiatives, drawing encouragement from the camaraderie of fellow Kingdom citizens. This goes along with the four traits of “redemptive subversion” discussed in the chapter one: humble, winsome, prophetic, and patient.

### **How Churches and Movements Become Missional**

While it is true that in different parts of the world, there is a great need for contextualized theologies, and culturally appropriate forms of worship, evangelism, and social justice efforts, it is also true that there is one universal Church that transcends language, geography, time, political and social power, and human organizational structures. Further, it is important for local churches and networks of Christians to

increasingly own their missional vocations and push toward embodying the *missio Dei*. The theological distinctives of any particular people group do not change the Kingdom reality, and the importance of living into it.

Chapter one briefly noted the importance of core theological understandings, even while local theologies are being developed and implemented. Darrell Guder poses the question of how church structures ought to be shaped in order to foster greater missional effectiveness – especially when it comes to connecting churches or networks with other churches or networks. He suggests that the historic creeds of the Church be used as general benchmarks for gathering around mission.<sup>3</sup> For example, in the Nicene Creed, the Church is described as “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” Guder recasts our understanding of “apostolic” to refer more to the “sent” nature of the whole Church, rather than just the appeal to and honoring of the apostolic tradition throughout her history.<sup>4</sup> In terms of catholicity, Guder says, “A particular mission community is catholic when its way of serving Christ is appropriate to the gospel while modestly recognizing that it is not the only way to be a Christian community . . . Every particular community points consciously beyond itself to the global church as the full expression of the Spirit’s work in calling and shaping God’s people.”<sup>5</sup> Even the call to being holy in the Church, Guder asserts, is an expression of mission, in the way that the Church offers forgiveness, works through the Holy Spirit to bring healing and reconciliation, serves the poor, and

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3. Guder, ed., 254.

4. Ibid., 255-56.

5. Ibid., 257.

speaks out against injustice.<sup>6</sup> The Church is “one” in the way it brings about unity and bridges the points of disagreement for the sake of mission. Whether the disagreement is racial, doctrinal, political, or cultural, missional practice calls communities to come together in relationships of mutual interdependence.<sup>7</sup>

With these elements as a backdrop, again, any worshipping community, in any context has the ability to form a missional mindset and practices that flow from it. Alan Hirsch argues that there is a latent apostolic energy in all Christians and churches, but that it remains dormant in most. “We have quite simply forgotten how to access and trigger it.”<sup>8</sup> Hirsch refers to a “missional impulse” that is “an outwardly bound movement from one community or individual to another. It is the outward thrust rooted in God’s mission that compels the church to reach a lost world.”<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that while the word missional carries with some evangelistic attitudes and behaviors, it is not limited simply to the verbal witness of faith. In fact, missional activity often takes place without the name of Jesus even being uttered.

For example, the Altos de Sion Community Church in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, which is part of La Red del Camino network, has a robust community presence through its vocational training, dental care, literacy, home repair, and children’s development programs in a very poor area. They do these things as opportunities to serve, but also believe that their holistic ministry approach will draw people closer to God. This church admits to not having had a good reputation in the past, due in part to the

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6. Ibid., 259.

7. Ibid., 260-61.

8. Hirsch, 22.

9. Ibid., 129.

expectation that the community should come to them for spiritual need fulfillment. Since developing their outward, service oriented ministries, though, the community has embraced the church, and been impacted in several positive ways. They continue to be evangelistic, but their missional activity is now seen within a broader frame.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of movements of Christians, it should not be assumed that if a movement has been sparked, grown, and spread, it is necessarily missional in nature. Just as there can be large churches that are not missional, there can be large movements that are focused more on a charismatic leader, a health and prosperity message, or a political/social agenda. Movements become missional when they continually produce disciples of Jesus that do not rely on organizations to engage in the mission of God, and serve others in a way that draws them into Kingdom ways of living.<sup>11</sup>

### **Assumptions Regarding Points of Contact**

Before beginning to explore some of the meeting points that exist between the various emerging Christian movements, it will be helpful to provide a theoretical and theological framework as a grounding point. This is not intended as a thorough treatise, but rather an introductory set of assumptions. I have taken these primarily from the work of Darrell Guder and the team of writers that produced *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending*

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10. "I.C.A.S. Case Study: Altos De Sion Community Church," La Red del Camino, [http://lareddelcamino.net/en/images/Cases/icas\\_case\\_study\\_2.pdf](http://lareddelcamino.net/en/images/Cases/icas_case_study_2.pdf) (accessed December 14, 2008).

11. Hirsch, 190-91.

of the Church in North America.<sup>12</sup> Guder writes about the importance of connecting communities of faith in his chapter, “The Community of Communities in Mission.” It is not merely that individual communities of faith have a calling to be missional in their own contexts, but they need larger networks of connectedness in order to more fully participate in the *missio Dei*.

Some dimensions of the church’s calling emerge from the formation of particular mission communities but can only be concretely expressed when these communities are linked as a community of communities. The structures of missional connectedness witness in distinctive ways to the gospel of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup>

Some examples given of the value of community connectedness in the early history of the church include the canonization of scripture, and the formation of doctrines and confessions.<sup>14</sup> It is noted that when forming networks of relationships, it is often quite easy to fall into institutionalization, which is certainly one of the problems raised in both the postmodern and postcolonial church contexts. David Bosch notes in discussing the first century church, how easy it is for a movement to lose its steam by becoming an institution.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, there are dangers in not being connected to others. Lesslie Newbigin argues that Christians of one culture can help bring needed correction to

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12. Guder, ed.

13. Ibid., 250.

14. Ibid., 251.

15. Bosch, 50.

Christians in other cultures.<sup>16</sup> Guder agrees that communities becoming involved outside of their own bodies helps to prevent particularity, which,

can deteriorate into exclusivity: communities begin to assume that their version of the gospel is final and complete . . . translate the gospel into their cultures in such a way that they become captive to their context and serve other masters than their Lord . . . [and] in their isolation, such communities rarely can see their own shortcomings, rarely repent, rarely experience the continuing conversion that is essential to Christian growth and faithfulness.<sup>17</sup>

While Guder's writing is generally directed toward the church in North America, his exhortation is clearly applicable to multiple contexts. Obviously, North America has significant diversity, and this approach could easily be more broadly applied. Guder himself extends these statements by saying,

The movement toward missional connectedness should be centrifugal, starting from particular communities and expanding to the global dimensions of the church, the community of communities. God's Spirit forms particular communities for mission in particular places and multiplies that mission by increasing the number of particular communities . . .<sup>18</sup>

One of the questions that arises in this discussion is what the differences are between existing denominational structures, and a "community of communities." Rather than creating what may be artificial distinctions, Guder turns the language of the discussion back to missional themes – in this way, denominations can be fully participating communities of communities, but only if they are driven by faithfulness to mission. Also,

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16. Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, 152.

17. Guder, ed., 265.

18. Ibid.

communities that are not affiliated with larger denominations have the ability to participate in networks that help them pursue their missional impulse. Ultimately, the missional connectedness arises out of the local body's desire and practice of the *missio Dei*.

Individuals, churches, and movements can come together as they intentionally seek each other out, for the purpose of extending their networks. However, they can also discover each other “accidentally,” as the *missio Dei* is embodied on a larger scale by Christians. Recent research on networks and viral marketing shows how ideas can seemingly take on lives of their own as large groups of people encounter them and spread them rapidly, such that there is an exponential spread, not only of the original ideas, but spin-off implications of them.<sup>19</sup> Sooner or later, people who have been affected by these ideas and movements meet each other, and more formally develop their relationships. Phyllis Tickle reminds us, that this is actually the nature of the Church anyway:

the Church, capital C – is not really a “thing” or entity so much as it is a network in exactly the same way that the Internet or the World Wide Web or, for that matter, gene regulatory and metabolic networks are not “things” or entities . . . the Church is a self-organizing system of relations, symmetrical or otherwise, between innumerable member-parts that themselves form subsets of relations within their smaller networks, etc., etc. in interlacing levels of complexity.<sup>20</sup>

When thinking about these concepts on a global scale, it becomes easy to see the value involved. While there are many denominations with a global presence, not all of them are missional in their vision and practice. A community of communities view of connectedness then, makes sense, in that the particular communities that are missional

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19. Hirsch, 200-12.

20. Tickle, 152.

will have an opportunity to walk with others in their fellowship and efforts. These communities are typically most helpful in localized settings, but as I will discuss below, the potential for global communities of communities is exciting.

### **Points of Contact**

How can missional movements in different parts of the world go about establishing relationships? This is the important question we need to raise in order to bring about mutually helpful relationships. There are a number of creative possibilities, of course, but the following represent a few of the more readily accessible options.

#### **Existing Forces of Globalization.**

In a flat world that connects people through business and technology, it is increasingly conceivable that the same tools utilized to drive global markets could be more intentionally leveraged to drive missional connectedness. This could look like emerging missional churches in the West joining efforts with missional churches in the global South and East to form microfinance institutions that benefit poor business owners, or other kinds of social business efforts that would connect people financially, while establishing healthy working relationships among churches. This would demonstrate the



degree to which churches can work together in redemptive ways to bring about helpful change, while doing so around missional purposes.

Another already existing utility of globalization that is currently being leveraged is the internet. One of the primary ways that the emerging church in the West has grown rapidly is through shared stories and information resources on weblogs, church sites, web magazines, discussion boards, podcasts, and webcasts of conferences. There has been significant growth in the global South on this front as well. There is little connective tissue, though, in bringing various missional expressions from around the world together online. To some degree, there is a language issue involved, but increasingly, there are software applications available that can translate websites into a large number of languages. Online learning communities, as well as social networking websites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Orkut can be used to organize learning communities and social action efforts. These technologies are particularly helpful in that they tend to automatically level the playing field by moving around traditional power hierarchies.<sup>21</sup>

Conferences are another potential contact point for people exploring missional connectedness. This is a more difficult proposition, though, in terms of bringing people from the global South and East together with people from the West. While the ease of travel has certainly made this a more feasible possibility for many, the cost involved is prohibitive for others. Currently, most conferences that are marketed to emerging church participants in the West feature very few voices from outside the Western world, and they take place in Western locations. Other conferences, such as the Amahoro gathering in Africa (discussed in chapter six) do take place, but they are not widely attended by people

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21. Whiteman, 62.

in the West. This is due, in part, to a lack of publicity about the events, as well as a perceived lack of relevance to potential attendees. If an effort was made to unite people from various locations for the purpose of cross-pollination, though, it may be seen as a more valuable experience for people in various missional expressions. Also, as noted above, internet technologies make webcasting of conferences widely available, which significantly reduces the cost of “attendance” for those unable to travel great distances. More conferences held in the global South, with publicity in the West, would also help bridge the current gaps.

A final point of contact between the postcolonial missional church of the global South and East, and the emerging missional church of the West would be to start with the networks that currently exist. The process of globalization was expanded in some ways by Christian missionary movements, and there are denominational outposts around the world. Again, some of these may not have a finely tuned missional vision or energy in that direction, but there are many that do. Unfortunately, these networks of Christians often do not communicate with each other very well, and are sometimes even unaware of the existence of fellow-laborers in their context, not to mention the like-minded people around the world.

### Educational Opportunities.

When given the ability to connect and develop relationships of mutual support and growth, there are some important educational implications of these relationships. It is

important to note here, that in terms of education, relationships of equality are to be highly pursued. Generations of Western paternalism in the global South and East have produced a power relationship that will not serve a mutually supportive network well – especially in the area of education.<sup>22</sup> Westerners, while typically having good motives, are very accustomed to having the power, and need to intentionally share that with others. Nowhere is this more true than in the area of education. This is clearly important, in that practitioners from all areas need to be willing to genuinely listen and learn from others, regardless of where they are from.

The postcolonial missional church in the global South has much to teach the emerging missional church of the West. The voices of Liberation Theology have been heard most prominently in the West to date, with mixed results. In one sense, these voices have helped Westerners see the ways in which their governments' economic and political policies have brought about harm to Southern and Eastern countries. The causes of the poor and powerless have been noted by many in the West as a result.<sup>23</sup> However, there are many in the West who dismiss these important issues, simply because Liberation Theology was labeled as a Marxist political agenda with little spiritual or theological value. Interestingly, it is this very reaction that illustrates the importance of listening closely to all voices. While Marxist philosophy may be highly flawed and destructive as an alternative to free market capitalism, the church in the West has failed to see its complicity in some of the very dark sides of capitalism. Western economies, through the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund have gone to great

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22. McKinney Douglas, 270.

23. Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, 99.

lengths to ensure that the West will continue to dominate world markets, and perpetuate the power relationships that presently exist.<sup>24</sup> The more that some Westerners complain about the broken Marxist ideology on display in some liberation theologies, the more they betray their own reliance on a different broken ideology. The missional church in the postcolonial context is well positioned to help Western Christians see the degree to which they participate in an economic empire that is opposed to the Kingdom of God.

On the other hand, the emerging missional church of the West does still have important lessons for the postcolonial church of the South and East to learn. Even as globalization brings about some dangerous work environments and unfair economic realities for many in the global South and East, it also brings prosperity to many in major urban centers. The more that people in these cities gain access to wealth, the more important it is for the church in the West to warn them of the dangers of consumerism and greed.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, this is one of the great sins of the West, but it is one that the emerging missional church has begun to address. Several of the most widely read authors have written and spoken quite boldly about the evils of consumerism in a world where extreme poverty continues to be a reality for untold millions.<sup>26</sup> The message is only beginning to get through to those in the West, but if a warning could be offered to those in the South and East, perhaps they could avoid many of the same pitfalls. Additionally, because of the long history of educational resources, the West continues to have much to

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24. Walsh and Keesmaat, 59.

25. Sine, *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time*, 69.

26. See McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*.

offer the rest of the world, as long as it is given with humility, grace, and respect for the recipients.

In both of the above cases, the education that may well be the most profitable, is simply the sharing of stories. God is at work in the Church, renewing and revitalizing it. The Holy Spirit continues to make inroads into the hearts of people. Stories of God's faithfulness, community renewal, and church planting movements are widely available in every context. Having connected relationships of missional encouragement will provide a forum for the sharing of those stories, which often becomes a source of helpful education. The insights that people gain while going through times of trial and victory are life-giving to the hearers.

#### Ecumenical Movements.

If the missional church of the postcolonial global South and East is to develop missionally connected relationships with the emerging church of the Western world, it will be helpful to look at the history of ecumenical movements in the past. The various communities involved in these relationships will likely come from a wide variety of doctrinal beliefs and practices, and learning how to work together in the spirit of unity will be important. This kind of relational dynamic across diverse denominations, of course, is not new. However, many lessons have been learned in the history of the ecumenical movement – many of which can be directly applied to the development of new communities of communities.

The 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh is widely recognized as the launching point of the modern ecumenical movement. Many Protestant denominations came together for the purpose of unity in spreading the gospel throughout the world. Newbigin notes that already at that time, there was a growing awareness of the “evil elements” of Western power in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific.<sup>27</sup> In the years that followed, though, younger churches in these areas were increasingly acknowledged. The World Council of Churches was established out of this effort, but ultimately, the ecumenical movement became largely secularized, as an effort primarily concerned with social justice, rather than expanding the Church.<sup>28</sup> Some course corrections were called for, and made along the way to make mission and social justice a more holistic effort, but there is a remaining sense that renewal is needed. In fact, a presentation given at the 2007 Global Christian Forum in Nairobi, Kenya began with the *assumption* that, “the old mainstream ecumenical paradigm is dying.”<sup>29</sup>

Some of the charges against the ecumenical movement are that, in an effort to be inclusive on some points of doctrine,

We have been guilty of holding to the great confessions without the power those confessions represent. We have been guilty of substituting critical thought and personal autonomy for authentic life giving faith. We have made highly refined dialectical engagement an idol. As a result, we have turned the Great Festival of

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27. Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, 8.

28. Ibid.

29. Cheryl Bridges Johns, "When East Meets West and North Meets South: The Reconciling Mission of Global Christianity," <http://www.globalchristianforum.org/documents/doc3.php> (accessed April 20, 2008).

Pentecost into a lukewarm, inclusive soup rather than understanding it to be the fire that burns and purifies, dividing as well as uniting.<sup>30</sup>

While less broadly based than the World Council of Churches, a significant ecumenical group which came to be known as the Lausanne Movement brought together a large number of evangelicals at the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. The document which resulted from that gathering, The Lausanne Covenant, has become a very widely used template for mission and unity. It makes confessions of failure, as well as visions for growth, development, and partnership, including an emphasis on "Christian Social Responsibility."<sup>31</sup>

In celebration of the 100 year anniversary of the 1910 Edinburgh conference, both the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance are planning gatherings – the former, in Edinburgh,<sup>32</sup> and the latter in Cape Town.<sup>33</sup> Both groups recognize the significance of the missionary movement in the past one hundred years, but also know that the current global context calls for new vision and efforts. How they interact with the realities of postmodernism and postcolonialism will be interesting to watch.

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30. Ibid.

31. *The Lausanne Covenant*, (Lausanne: International Congress on World Evangelization, 1974).

32. "Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ Today," <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/> (accessed April 20, 2008).

33. "The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization - Cape Town 2010," <http://www.lausanne.org/cape-town-2010/cape-town-2010.html> (accessed April 20, 2008).

Meanwhile, there are less-organized, organic movements taking place that address local, contextual issues already. They represent efforts to be missionally connected communities, but in regional efforts.<sup>34</sup> They are young movements, and are difficult to define, but they are growing and seem to be moving in exciting directions. These networks are not connected to one another in a global way, but there is a potential for these kinds of connections, given their contexts, vision, and organizing stories. Some examples of these from the global South include La Red Del Camino, Amahoro, Revolution of Hope, and Tribal Generation, all discussed in the previous chapter.

In the Western world, of course, the emerging church movement is widespread and continuing to grow. In North America, an organization called Emergent Village<sup>35</sup> is a hub of conversation and missional connectedness, as is TheOooze,<sup>36</sup> Allelon,<sup>37</sup> and The Gospel and Our Culture Network.<sup>38</sup> Each of these networks has distinctive goals, relationally and theologically. In Europe, multiple networks exist, including Emergent-UK,<sup>39</sup> the Alternative Worship network,<sup>40</sup> Fresh Expressions,<sup>41</sup> Emergent Germany,<sup>42</sup> and

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34. Sine, *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time*, 39.

35. "Emergent Village," Emergent Village, <http://www.emergentvillage.com/> (accessed April 20, 2008).

36. "Theooze - Conversation for the Journey," THEOOZE, <http://www.theooze.com/main.cfm> (accessed April 20, 2008).

37. "Allelon - a Movement of Missional Leaders," Allelon, <http://www.allelon.org/main.cfm> (accessed April 20, 2008).

38. "The Gospel and Our Culture Network - Homepage," The Gospel and Our Culture Network, <http://www.gocn.org/main.cfm> (accessed April 20, 2008).

39. "Emergent-Uk - Home," Emergent UK, <http://www.emergent-uk.org/index.php> (accessed April 20, 2008).



Emergingchurch.info.<sup>43</sup> In New Zealand, a network called Future Church is an expression of emerging church ideas and connections.<sup>44</sup> Australia's Forge Mission Training Network<sup>45</sup> is another missional community of communities that has gained notoriety in the Western world, primarily through the writings of Michael Frost<sup>46</sup> and Alan Hirsch.

Clearly, the emerging church movement in the Western world has already grown greatly, while some of the missional networks in the global South and East are becoming better known. What we have not yet seen, though, is a significant meta-connection of these networks. On some of the organizational websites, links to the various global networks can be found, but with few exceptions, each of these groups operates independently. Amahoro has built some bridge relationships with La Red del Camino, and some of the Western networks.

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40. "Alternativeworship.Org Intro," <http://www.alternativeworship.org/> (accessed April 20, 2008).

41. "Fresh Expressions - Home," <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/index.asp?id=1> (accessed April 20, 2008).

42. "Emergent Deutschland," Emergent Deutschland, <http://emergent-deutschland.de/> (accessed April 20, 2008).

43. "Emergingchurch.Info: A Touching Place for the Emerging Church," <http://www.emergingchurch.info/> (accessed April 20, 2008).

44. "Futurechurch New Zealand Contemporary Spirituality Postmodern Questioning Progressive Christianity," <http://www.futurechurch.org.nz/home.htm> (accessed April 20, 2008).

45. "Forge Mission Training Network (Australia) Inc - Home," <http://www.forge.org.au/> (accessed April 20, 2008).

46. Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church.*; and Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture.*

In one sense, autonomy of networks is a good thing. It indicates that the groups have indeed risen up organically, and exist to address the specific missional challenges of their own local context.<sup>47</sup> However, in a world where globalization has brought people in every location closer to one another, it would be wise to develop more intentional connectedness between these various groups. This does not mean that strong organizational ties need to be developed, but mutually encouraging relationships will bring valuable insight to all groups. To bring this concept full circle, in Guder's terminology, this could be seen as a "community of communities of communities." Each of these networks is a community of communities, but the leaders of these networks could certainly learn from one another and bring encouragement to their respective communities through the kinds of activities described earlier.

#### Long-Distance Friendships.

As discussed in chapter five, Claudio Oliver, from La Red del Camino suggests that the concept of "mission trips" be replaced by "friendship trips," in which there are real relationships of listening and learning and encouragement developed between people from the West, and the people they are traveling to be with in the global South. Applied more broadly, this approach to developing communities of communities could produce many benefits.

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47. Tienou, 38.

For example, given the relative ease of transportation, it is possible to take not only a group of Westerners to visit and serve communities in the global South, but also to bring people from those contexts to the West. In Western churches, not everyone who hears the stories of people who have traveled overseas will be drawn in by them in a way that will help engage them in patterns of personal involvement. However, if someone from the global South came to visit the church, whether before or after a “friendship trip” had taken place, they could tell their own stories in a personal way that would give more people an opportunity to see and participate in them.

### **Closing Thoughts**

With the number of opportunities that are available to make missional connections between the various communities of communities in both the Western world and the global South and East, the prospect of supportive, mutually helpful relationships is exciting. But once these relationships are established, how are they to proceed toward health and vitality? In my opinion, it would be unwise for the leaders of the various movements to simply meet, shake hands, and ask how to make practical partnerships happen. There is a need, first, for some time of listening, discernment, repentance, and reconciliation.

Listening is necessary in these relationships, in order for each group’s story to be communicated. It is often far too easy for leaders to make assumptions about what needs to be said, and not wait to listen at a deep enough level. This is a particularly important

process for the leaders of communities in the West.<sup>48</sup> People from the global South and East have been doing the listening and working according to Western standards for many years now, and it is important for their voices to be heard.<sup>49</sup>

Discernment is necessary for all participants in the conversations as well. One of the enduring legacies of missiologist Lesslie Newbigin's work is in helping us see that there is no such thing as a culture-free gospel. Whether theologians and church leaders come from Latin America, Asia, Europe, or North America, all have cultural perspectives that shape the way they understand the gospel. As we listen to one another, it will be important to carefully attune to which information is helpful and which is not in our own contexts, as well as listening for ways in which we can sharpen each others' perspectives by pointing out areas where our cultures of origin may be overshadowing the work of God.<sup>50</sup>

Inevitably, as people from various parts of the world tell their stories, and listen to one another, there will come times of conviction of sin. This may include personal or collective sin that is currently taking place (i.e. participation in economic systems that are harmful to people in impoverished conditions already), or it may include taking a confessional stance on behalf of others who have represented broken ways of relating to

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48. Ibid., 48.

49. Luis G. Pedraja, "Doing Theology in Spanish: Hispanic Theological Methodology, Dialogue, and Rationality," in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo L. Gonzalez*, ed. Justo L. González et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 168.

50. Paul G. Hiebert, *The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 50.

mission (i.e. confessing long-standing theological paternalism, even when the sin was committed by previous generations). Repentance is an important act of humility and service that illustrates a willingness to learn and improve. The search for unity in Christian service is a matter of repentance more than organization.<sup>51</sup>

All of these elements are part of a process of reconciliation. If we are to effectively join forces with other followers of Jesus for the sake of the *missio Dei*, we must be reconciled to God and to our sisters and brothers. No amount of common vision, passion for those who have yet to experience the freedom of the gospel, or humble service to the causes of injustice in our world will be able to substitute for deep levels of relationship brought about by reconciliation. As the world continues to change and face challenges, we have a unique time in history to bring healing within the Church universal, and the people for whom Christ came to seek and save. This is a theological and ecclesiological calling.<sup>52</sup>

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51. Lesslie Newbigin, *Is Christ Divided? A Plea for Christian Unity in a Revolutionary Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1961), 25.

52. Jurgens Hendriks, *The Gospel of Reconciliation Vs. The Gospel of Church Growth* (Lecture, Amahoro Gathering, Uganda, May 6-19, 2007).

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