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The Missionary as Mediator of Global Theologizing

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To say that we live in a time of rapid change is to state the obvious. Peter Drucker writes:

> Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. We cross what some . . . have called a "divide." Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself: its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts, its key institutions. Fifty years later, there is a new world. And the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born. . . . We are currently living through just such a transformation. (cited in Van Engen 1997, 437)

I grew up at the end of the old missionary era when missionaries went abroad for life, returned on furlough every seven years, retired "at home," or, preferably, died and were buried abroad. Now missions is changing rapidly, and we need a vision of what the new paradigm for missions should be for the twenty-first century. What are the changes taking place, and what implications do these have for Christian missions?

In recent years, scholars have turned their attention to the emergence of world systems, but studies show that most people still live in local

and regional settings, even though they may venture from home from time to time. Out of these discussions have emerged theories of a "glocal" world in which different kinds of globalization interact in complex ways at global, regional, and local levels (Berger and Huntington 2002; Lewellen 2002; Inda and Rosaldo 2002). It is important to remember that the missionary movement was itself one of the earliest forces creating global networks and new media of communication no less powerful than those established by the markets and information technology of the twentieth century. This was true of Catholic missions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and even more so of Protestant missions in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

The glocalization of the world and the church has profound implications for missions in the twenty-first century, implications we have only begun to explore under the topics of truth, dialogue, religious pluralism, relativism, contextualization, ecumenism, partnership, and local and global theologies. How should churches around the world relate to one another when there are great social, cultural, and theological differences but when there is a desperate need to live together in peace? How do we respond to religious differences when we are committed to the truth of the gospel and the priesthood of all believers? What does globalization mean when it comes to evangelism and missions?

Globalization

In the last decades, the world has rapidly become interconnected through travel, trade, communications, immigrations, and political interactions. At a fundamental level, this globalization has led to people meeting others who are different from themselves, raising questions of how they view and relate to others and otherness. Specifically, how should Christians respond to the impact of globalization on the church, and how should they deal with the theological pluralism that is emerging as young churches begin to read and interpret Scripture for themselves?

People have always had stereotypes of their "others." In 1527, Henry Agrippa declared, "In singing also the Italians Bleat, the Spaniards Whine, the Germans Howl, and the French Quaver" (Harris 1968, 399–400). During the High Middle Ages, educated Europeans saw foreigners as monsters or infidels. The invading Muslims were clearly humans, but they had heard the gospel and had rejected it. Therefore, they had to be driven back and killed.

European perceptions of the world changed radically at the end of the fifteenth century. Explorers discovered unknown lands and strange people not found on their maps, raising profound questions. Who were

these others? Were they humans? Did they need salvation? The Western commercial world saw the newly discovered others as a source of goods and labor, of gold and slaves. Some argued that they were like children. Therefore, Europeans were justified in their colonial expansion, in which they acted as parents, educating and managing the natives' wealth for the natives' own good (McGrane 1989). Scientists saw these others as barbarians and savages who could be compared with Europeans and animals. Christians saw them as humans in need of salvation. The result was the birth of the modern mission movement.

The Modern Era

The definition of others in the West changed with the coming of the Enlightenment and an intellectual environment dominated by social Darwinism. All humans were incorporated into one cosmic story of progress from simple to complex, from primitive to civilized, from prelogical to logical. The superiority of Western science and technology was self-evident. These enabled the West to conquer and rule the world. Now others were no longer savages but "unenlightened," and evil was no longer sin but "ignorance." The earlier distinction between refined Christian versus idolatrous savage was replaced by *civilized* European versus superstitious, ignorant *primitive*. Others were also "aboriginals." They represented humans who had not evolved as those who lived in the West. They still lived in the stone age. But if these others were now like European ancestors once were, they helped modern people understand their own story. The people of the world reveal *their* history, and they knew how the story ends; they *were* how the story ends (McGrane 1989).

The Enlightenment deeply influenced Western Christians. Christians led the fight against slavery and human exploitation, and many died to bring the gospel around the world. Many missionaries, such as John Williams, Lorimer Fison, and George Turner in Melanesia (Hitchen 2002) and W. H. and C. V. Wiser in India, played key roles in the development of ethnology, working closely with anthropologists and publishing penetrating studies on non-Western cultures. R. H. Codrington, one of the early great missionaries and ethnographers, wrote, "When a European has been living for two or three years among strangers, he is sure to be fully convinced that he knows all about them; when he has been ten years or so amongst them, if he is an observant man, he finds that he knows very little about them, and so begins to learn" (1891, vii).

After the early nineteenth century and the introduction of secular evolution as the dominant anthropological paradigm, tensions arose between missionaries and anthropologists. But missionaries were also

people of their times, part of the modern *zeitgeist,* which they absorbed in the air they breathed. Charles Taber notes:

> The superiority of Western civilization as the culmination of human development, the attribution of that superiority to the prolonged dominance of Christianity, the duty of Christians to share civilization and the gospel with the benighted heathen—these were the chief intellectual currency of their lives. (1991, 71)

All this must be said, but as Lamin Sanneh (1993) points out, many of the missionaries were concerned with communicating the gospel to other peoples. To do so, they lived with the people, learned their languages, studied their cultures, and often defended them against oppression by governments and business. Moreover, by translating the Bible into native languages, communicating to the people a universal gospel, and baptizing the converts into the global church, missionaries dignified the people and helped them more than other Westerners to preserve their cultural identities.

Two schools of thought emerged in anthropology, which studied humans around the world and their differences. Social anthropology compared social systems around the world, such as families, clans, tribes, and peasant societies, and helped us see that social systems are real and powerful. It showed us that humans organize their societies in radically different ways, and it gave us ways to compare different social systems.

Social theories have had a great impact on Western missions. In the West, we expect individuals to make personal decisions to follow Christ, but in many parts of the world, important decisions are made by the significant groups to which people belong—their families or lineages. In missions, this led to a great deal of discussion of "mass" or "multi-individual" movements to Christ. Early mission strategies were largely based on geography, but missionaries found deep social divisions in the same geographic area, divisions that shaped responsiveness to the gospel. This led to a focus on people groups, social dynamics, and the church growth movement. It led to discussion of the "three selves" and questions of indigenizing the church in local social systems. Traditionally, missionaries exported their ecclesiologies. Anglicans ordained bishops, Presbyterians appointed presbyteries and synods, and free churches held elections, even if these forms of leadership caused confusion in societies where they were foreign.

Social theories also have limitations and distortions. They are often reductionist and use linear causality, explaining most human realities in terms of social dynamics. Religions are seen as important to keep groups

together but not "true" in any ontological sense. There is no place for God and spiritual realities. Initially, social anthropology focused its attention on small societies and examined them as closed systems. Consequently, it had difficulties in understanding larger, complex societies, such as cities, and the global systems emerging today. Social anthropology also saw societies as harmonious organic wholes and change as bad. There was no place for oppression, injustice, and human sinfulness. Missionaries were often castigated for changing societies.

Cultural anthropology emerged in North America, where anthropologists studied the Native Americans who had been overrun by white settlers and placed on reservations. They could not understand the Native Americans without taking history, outside forces, and change into account. Moreover, while the social systems of the Native Americans had been radically altered, the Native Americans maintained a sense of cultural identity, even in the most difficult and oppressive situations. American anthropologists focused their attention on cultural systems, such as languages, beliefs, myths, rituals, and worldviews. They rejected the word *civilization* and replaced it with *culture*. Bernard McGrane writes, "The emergence of the concept 'culture' has made possible the democratization of differences. . . . The twentieth-century concept of 'culture' has rescued the non-European Other from the depths of the past and prehistory and reasserted him in the present: he is, once again, contemporary with us" (1989, 114).

Cultural anthropologists saw cultures as good but did not see change as always evil. Consequently, anthropology was used to study change and to support programs advocating the rights of Native Americans and human development.

Early anthropologists saw themselves as scientists analyzing humans as objects, using scientific categories, methods, and logic. As they studied local peoples for long periods of time, they learned to know them as real persons. They began to see others no longer as primitives. These others were fully rational beings having their own autonomous cultures that made sense to them. They were "natives." Cultures were seen as unique and autonomous. Each was seen as discrete, bounded, and self-contained and functioned to maintain a harmonious society. Cultures were also seen as morally neutral. People in one culture should not judge other cultures. To do so was ethnocentric and imperialistic.

Now it became important for anthropologists to learn how the people they studied saw the world around them. This *emic* approach challenged the idea that human studies are hard sciences. The key methods shifted from observation to participation and from observable empirical "facts" to hermeneutics—to seeking to understand what is in the minds of the people by examining speech, acts, music, and dance as

"texts." Out of this emerged interpretative anthropology championed by Clifford Geertz and others. Geertz (1988) argues that anthropology is the study of humans and that humans cannot be reduced to purely objective scientific observations. Anthropology is more a humanity than a science. This was a move away from positivism and objective materialism to instrumentalism and the communication of lived-through experiences.

Cultural anthropology, too, has its limitations. It tends to reduce everything to cultural explanations. Moreover, those who use Saussurian semiotics see signs, such as words, as referring to subjective images in the mind, not to objective realities, and cultures as essentially arbitrary creations of human societies (Barnard 2000, 120–38). Consequently, all cultures are seen as relative. None can stand in judgment of another. According to this view, there is no external objective truth, and even if there is, it can only be known subjectively. Moreover, secular cultural anthropology has no place for God or spiritual realities. Consequently, it does not take the ontological claims of religions seriously. It claims a privileged stance as a science, as an objective, outside assessment of reality.

Cultural anthropology has helped missionaries understand the reality and power of cultural systems (including languages), patterns of behavior, rituals, myths, beliefs, and worldviews. Missionaries do not come as scientists but often as outsiders seeking not only to convert people but also to teach them modern medicine and education, in which science is central. As they live among people over long periods of time, they too come to recognize that people do not live in the same world with different labels attached to it but in radically different conceptual worlds. Descriptive linguistics helped missionaries to learn and analyze new languages, and the use of Saussurian semiotics led to dynamic equivalence Bible translations that stress the accurate communication of the meanings of the text by allowing changes in the literal referential signs. Symbolic anthropology has helped missionaries and national leaders seeking to contextualize worship and rituals in particular cultures. Cognitive anthropology contributes to an understanding of the local belief systems and worldviews of the people missionaries serve.

In missions, this move to understand cultures in their own terms has led to attempts at radical, often uncritical, contextualization of the gospel. However, without external objective criteria to determine whether accurate communication has taken place, the gospel becomes whatever people believe it to be. Moreover, this view denies the importance of our common humanity and history and of a divine cosmic story. It reduces everything to momentary personal experiences that, in the end, are transient and meaningless.

The Postmodern Era

At the end of the twentieth century, anthropologists, such as Peter Harries-Jones (1985, 224–48), challenged the very assumptions of the mid-twentieth-century approach to the study of humans, provided a rationale for anthropology, and pointed to the direction it should take in the twenty-first century. Harries-Jones noted that anthropological research is based on the assumption of an exchange of communication between human equals of two cultures. In reality, anthropologists saw the local people mainly as informants and objects to be studied, "as a mine whose product was extracted for export to the Western academic community" (1985, 227). This was true even in *emic* studies that sought to understand how other people think. Rarely was there a genuine two-way exchange of information and beliefs to discover reality and truth. Moreover, ethnographic studies carry no commitment of responsibility on the part of an anthropologist to the community in which he or she lived and studied.

Harries-Jones (1985), David Harvey (1990), and others point out that the day of moral neutrality is over. Anthropology can no longer be taught as an objective, morally neutral description of culture. Knowledge is used by participants in the social, economic, and political arenas of life. It carries with it responsibilities to facilitate mutually beneficial interaction among different social and cultural groups. In the past, anthropologists studied others from the viewpoint of Western culture. Now they must also interpret the views of local peoples. Moreover, anthropologists must help minority communities cope with the impact of majority cultures in a rapidly changing world.

Jacob Loewen notes that on the whole missionaries have been less guilty than anthropologists of exploiting the societies they studied (1992, 48). They stayed and sought to serve the people they learned to know, while many anthropologists, often funded by colonial governments, tried to help their colonial governments rule the people more effectively and humanely (Kuper 1973, 123–49). Adam Kuper writes:

> Social anthropology has a bad name through its association with colonialism, and the anthropologist has an even harder time than most of his social science colleagues even getting permission to do fieldwork in the newly-independent states. And once there he is no longer able to rely upon the privileged status of a white man crossing a detested racial barrier; he is now an outsider of a different kind, a foreigner, less secure and perhaps less welcome. (1973, 233–34)

Some missionaries also collaborated with colonial governments—at least in the eyes of the local people—and even now many see ethnographic

knowledge not as a way of building deep mutual relationships but as a useful tool for carrying out missions more efficiently.

A recent school to emerge out of this self-analysis is radical postmodern anthropology. This is a reaction to the arrogance of modern positivism, colonialism, and a concern for the subaltern and oppressed. It critiques the creation by anthropologists of the other (and consequently the definition of the self) as the driving force of all previous theories in the human sciences. It argues that all grand narratives and definitions of others are set up by an elite and are oppressive, not true.

Postmodernity is also based on the principle of reflexivity. When anthropologists returned home, they began to study their own cultures using the theories and methods they used to study others abroad. Radical postmodern anthropologists go further. They claim that no true statement can be made about another culture. There are only the anthropologists' perceptions and interpretations of parts of a culture or, in the extreme case, what anthropologists say happened to themselves when they were in another culture. As Alan Barnard notes, "Radical reflexivists are happy to write more about themselves doing ethnography than about the ethnographees, their subjects" (2000, 174). The result is a radical epistemological relativism that denies any possibility of knowing or making known the truth.

This post-Enlightenment view of others is an important corrective to the arrogance and oppressions of the past, but it leaves others as simply others. There is still an insurmountable wall between us and them. In a global world with all its diversity, the question is how people of different communities can seek the truth together and build a world of harmony, justice, and love. Edward Said asks:

> Can one divide human reality, as human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly? By surviving the consequences humanly, I mean to ask whether there is any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say, of men into "us" . . . and "they." (1995, 45)

The Global Era

Macro-analysis shows the spread of global forces around the world, including languages, intelligentsia, popular culture, and religious movements (Berger and Huntington 2002). People no longer can live in their own little worlds; they increasingly must relate to those of other societies and cultures. To do so, they must develop global systems that enable them to live together.

There are many levels of cultural encounter today that are leading to a post-postmodern or glocal world (Smith 1982; Laudin 1996; Hiebert 1999). On the global level, cultures and nations around the world increasingly confront one another as travel, trade, global networks, and transnational organizations emerge. Within nations we are becoming increasingly aware of deep cultural differences as powerless communities increasingly find their voices in the public arena. Immigrant communities find social and cultural assimilation in their adopted lands full of tensions and misunderstandings. Generational differences also engender conflicts and misunderstandings between the older, more modern parents and the younger, often postmodern children, and between them and their post-postmodern children.

In a glocal world full of tensions and conflicts, how can we work toward the unity of the church and theology? One way is to develop global systems from the top down—from centralized institutions built around specialists who define theology and organized missions. Another is to work toward global networks that begin at the local level and develop mid-level and global dialogues, partnerships, and networks of fellowship and ministry. From a free church perspective, the latter is explored here. The questions are: How can we start with the many local and regional churches around the world and build a global fellowship? How do we start with local theologies and work toward a global understanding of theology as universal truth by doing theology together, without silencing the weak but drawing on the wisdom of those who are mature in faith?

Global mediation must begin with how we view others and otherness. In a church made up of people from many ethnic groups, cultures, and classes, there is always the tendency to break up into parties that seek to control the church. As long as there is a division between us and them in the church, worshiping, living, and working together become a contest of power. To move toward the unity of the church, for which Christ prayed (John 17:20–21), Christians must show how humans of different kinds can live together in peace and justice. Otherwise the gospel becomes good news only for a few—the powerful. Christians must address the sin of divisions in the church: racism, culturalism, genderism, classism, and ageism. They must not see others as primitives, backward, or irreconcilably other. In a global world, they must view others not as others but as us. They must meet one another in their common humanity and their common sinfulness. In the church, they must meet one another as members of one family in Christ.

How can we build these bridges between churches and, in particular, theologians? Not everyone can go around the world to learn to know others, nor can global conclaves hear the voices of all. We must build relationships between communities and begin the long and difficult task of developing mutual understandings and affirmations of the unity of the church and the gospel, which transcends social and cultural differences. But this process requires global mediators who break down the walls that divide humans and build bridges of understanding and fellowship.

Missionaries as Mediators

What is the shape of the new mission paradigms emerging in the twenty-first century? A consensus has not yet emerged, but several elements are increasingly clear. One is that missions to new and unreached peoples must continue. The number of people who have not heard the gospel meaningfully enough to make an intelligent response is greater now than when Ziegenbalg and Plütschau left for India in 1706. The task of pioneer missions is not finished. It is greater than ever.

A second fact is that a growing number of missionaries are "inbetweeners," standing between different worlds, seeking to build bridges of understanding, mediating relationships, and negotiating partnerships in ministry. In the past, missionaries went from the "Christian" West to the uttermost parts of the world. Today, there are large churches and mission movements in many non-Western countries, and the West is now also a mission field. Increasingly, missionaries are bridge persons, culture mediators, who stand between different human worlds.

Missionaries are mediators in a number of ways. All Christians are called to be mediators between the gospel and the world in which they live. In the past, the world was defined as the non-West. It was assumed that the West had heard the gospel and was essentially Christian. The rest of the world was pagan and heathen. Today, the church is global. The most vital churches are found in the non-West, and the West is itself a mission field. This has profoundly changed the way we perceive missions. The globalization of the church has made us much more aware of the need to contextualize the message in our local cultures and the messenger and the church in local social systems.

Globalization raises profound questions regarding the need for and limits to contextualization. It is here that missionaries can first add much to the dialogue on the mediation between gospel and human cultures because, through their encounters with other cultures, they are deeply aware of cultures and their differences and of ways to study cultures. The dangers are to undercontextualize and to overcontextualize the gospel and the church. Global discussions on contextualization need missionaries and global leaders who understand both the gospel and human cultures well and who can bridge between them. In this, missionaries

must not speak only to the world from the church but also for the world to the church. Most churches know little about their own neighborhoods, let alone people in other parts of the world. Missionaries must help their sending churches understand, identify with, and love people around them, and around the world. For example, they need to help Western churches understand the great ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity that is increasingly found in their own communities.

Second, missionaries are mediators between Christianity and non-Christian religions. The question of religious pluralism is one of the critical issues in the twenty-first century. In the past, missionaries faced this question as they encountered other religions abroad. Now churches in the West face the same question. Most have given little thought to the deep issues involved and are unprepared to defend the uniqueness of Christ in a multicultural and multireligious world. Missionaries can help Christians in the West understand the issues involved in interreligious dialogue and ways to present the gospel winsomely, speaking the truth in love.

Third, missionaries are mediators in global church-to-church relationships. In the past, mission churches were often supervised by sending churches. Today, they are increasingly mature, independent churches. Moreover, there has been a rapid growth in locally initiated denominations with few official ties to those in other lands. The globalization of the church raises questions of power and control. How can the church in all its diversity show the world that it is indeed one? In much of the world, the dividedness of the church has been one of the great obstacles to its message. How can churches in different parts of the world work in partnership in mission? How can the gospel be presented so that it is seen as belonging to the world, not one part of it? How can cultural differences in multicultural teams be worked out so that they enhance, not undermine, the work? Missionaries and other transcultural Christian leaders should be the mediators among diverse Christian communities, seeking to build bridges of understanding of the gospel and partnership in mission.

Fourth, missionaries are mediators in the academy between theology and human studies. Missions is communicating the gospel to humans. It therefore requires an understanding of both the gospel and humans. The first draws on theologies, the second on human studies. For the most part, missionaries are well trained in exegeting Scripture. Most have little or no training in exegeting human societies. Eloise Meneses, Vinoth Ramachandra, Darrell Whiteman, and Robert Priest, in this volume, show us that we need a far deeper understanding of the sociocultural contexts in which we minister. Too often missionaries have been afraid of using the human sciences lest they become captive to disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, but they have not stopped to reflect on the danger of becoming captive to Greek philosophy and modern history. In a rapidly changing world, we can no longer minister effectively without knowing and identifying with the people we serve. We can no longer settle for stereotypes and secondhand reports of peoples and their cultures. An intimate knowledge of them is needed that includes understanding them as they see themselves and as they see us.

Fifth, missionaries must be mediators between missions as a movement and missiology as an academic discipline. Too often those involved in missions do not take time for deep research and reflection on their ministries, and those in the academy lose touch with the realities of ministries in the field. We need careful research and reflection on the Word and on the world. Missions requires the best research and theoretical reflections to help guide us in an increasingly complex and confusing world. As such, it must draw on the best that the academy can offer.

The missiological academy itself must become global. Too often it has been dominated by the West (Tiénou 1993). The voices of scholars around the world have been largely ignored, often because Western scholars have not taken the time to learn other languages. Here missionaries and national scholars need to counter the hegemony of the Western academy, give voice to the theologies emerging in the young churches, and help to build bridges of understanding and consensus among scholars around the world.

Finally, missionaries as mediators are central to global theologizing. If, as we in the free churches affirm, all Christians and Christian communities should do their own theological reflection, then we must begin with a great deal of theological diversity arising in part out of the fact that these reflections are done in different human contexts. How can we, given such diversity, seek together to understand the deeper truths of the gospel, truths that are learned from different theological traditions?

The Ministry of Mediation

How can missionaries and other global leaders live and minister as mediators? Our model is Jesus, who in his incarnation was fully God and fully human. He was equally at home as King of the universe on the throne in the palaces of heaven and as an infant in a manger in a cattle shed on earth. We can never begin to emulate him, but he provides us with a way of understanding our role in bridging between different worlds.

Essential to developing global understandings and networks between churches and theologians is the process of intercultural mediation. Sim-

ply living between cultures does not make one a good mediator. What are some of the essentials for such a ministry?

Transcultural Identities

D. J. Bachner and U. Zeutschel note that persons and parties involved in intercultural mediation must develop a transcultural frame of reference and identity whose norms transcend national and monocultural boundaries (1994, 39). Modernity claimed privileged truth, which had to be taught to others. No mediation was required—only accurate translation. In the postmodern world, science has lost its privileged position, and all belief systems have equal place. But there is only dialogue, no mediation. We cannot be sure that we truly understand others, so we focus on ourselves. There can be no real concern for others because they are others and inscrutable. In our day, we need people who can mediate between different worlds—whether these differences are based on culture, ethnicity, generation, or theological conviction.

In one sense, missionaries belong to two or more worlds. They begin by leaving their home cultures, where they are insiders. There they are known as missionaries, a role recognized and respected. They enter another culture as outsiders. There they cannot be missionaries because it is not a role in that society. The people fit them into their local inventory of roles as best they can. Often the missionaries are seen as rich landlords, patrons, colonial rulers, or foreign spies.

As missionaries live in the new society, they learn its ways and identify with it more deeply. They learn the language and begin to see the world as the people do, emically. In so doing, they become, to some extent, insiders. But they never fully become one with the people. They are *outsiders*-insiders.

When missionaries return to their home societies, they find that they do not fully fit in. They now begin to see their cultures as outsiders do. Here too they are outsider-insiders. In a sense, they belong to two cultures; in a sense, they do not belong fully to either. Increasingly, wherever they go, they are outsiders-insiders.

This inner dividedness creates an identity crisis. One way to resolve this tension of identities is to affirm one "home" cultural identity and to go to other worlds as outsiders and visitors, but in doing this, they will never effectively communicate the gospel to the people or speak for them to their home churches. A second answer is to seek to "go native." This is impossible in one lifetime, and those who seek to identify fully with another community are seen as frauds and rivals (Howard 2004). Moreover, this destroys their ability to be bridges between different cultures. A third answer is to be cultural chameleons, to take on the

trappings of the culture in which they find themselves. But then they become cultural schizophrenics with no true identity of their own. A fourth answer is to develop transcultural identities. P. S. Adler notes that such a person is

> a person whose essential identity is inclusive of life patterns different from his own and who has psychologically and socially come to grips with a multiplicity of realities. Multicultural man is the person who is intellectually and emotionally committed to the fundamental unity of all human beings while at the same time he recognizes, legitimatizes, accepts, and appreciates the fundamental differences that lie between people of different cultures. This new kind of man cannot be defined by the languages he speaks, the countries he has visited, or the number of international contacts he has made. Nor is he defined by his profession, his place of residence, or his cognitive sophistication. Instead, multicultural man is recognized by the configuration of his outlooks and worldview, by the way he incorporates the universe as a dynamically moving process, by the way he reflects on the interconnectedness of life in his thoughts and his actions, and by the way he remains open to the imminence of experience. (1977, 25)

Global mediators must be bicultural or transcultural people who are able to live in different worlds and are not fully at home in any one of them. Transcultural mediators need to know both communities well and speak to each for the other. Being insiders, they build trust in each community. Being outsiders enables them to bridge the groups. They must also live with the fact that both communities are sometimes suspicious of them because the communities do not know what they are doing when they are with the others.

Good mediators are inbetweeners who often feel they have no home or identity because they live in two or more worlds and must constantly change their identities as they move from one to another. What keeps them from being schizophrenic? Here a metaphor may help. Eagles are not going from one place to another. Their home is in the sky, in flight. Perhaps flight is their way of being in the world, in an era of globalization.

Transcultural Analytical Frameworks

Transcultural people need to develop transcultural analytical frameworks that enable them to live in different cultures and translate, compare, and evaluate them by means of a metacultural grid that is outside any one of them. This frame emerges as they live in more than one world and seek to understand each of them deeply from its own perspective while also comparing and evaluating them. Such a framework is not

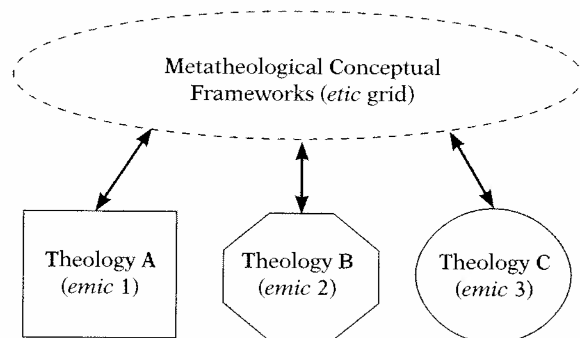
itself a culture. It is a framework that enables people to understand, translate, compare, and evaluate different cultures. In a sense, it is like a computer program that takes documents written in one format and translates them into another format.

There is no single metacultural framework. Anthropology has been working on such a grid from its inception. The early metacultural frameworks were essentially Western cultural grids. Taxonomies of different social, economic, political, and cultural systems were created using modern scientific categories. As the views of other peoples were taken seriously, those frameworks were rejected, and newer ones developed. The current comparative frameworks are not fully accurate, but they are better than the earlier classifications and theories, just as modern translation theories are better than the old ones based on literal or Saussurian semiotics. It is important that all parties involved in mediation participate in the formation of such a grid.

In doing global theologizing, it is important for committed Christian theologians from around the world to develop a metatheological framework that enables them to understand, compare, and evaluate local theologies, the questions each is seeking to answer, and the sociocultural contexts in which each must define the gospel (see fig. 1).

Figure 1

Metatheological Frames



Once such understandings are formed, the hard process of developing a global theology that is true for everyone can begin. Theologies must not only seek to communicate the gospel in local contexts but also affirm the oneness of the gospel for all humans, because at the deepest level, they and the gospel are one. Dialogue regarding a global theology will continue as the world and we change, but for those committed to the authority

of Scripture as divine revelation, not simply human reflections, there is a common basis from which to begin. Moreover, theology is more than affirming a set of propositions about truth; it involves living that truth by being committed followers of Jesus Christ as Lord. Globally, we need to discuss what that means in each of our local contexts.

In developing a metatheological framework, we must deal with the question of semiotics. Modernity was built on the view that signs referred directly to objective realities. The word *tree* referred to a real tree, the word *rose* to a real rose. According to this view, people in different cultures live in the same world but give different labels to the same realities. Consequently, translation meant finding equivalent words and formulating sentences the way others did. This produced literal translations.

As anthropologists began to see the world through the eyes of other peoples, they discovered that people in different cultures do not see the same world with different labels attached to it; they live in conceptually different worlds. They organize their world using different categories, logics, and worldview assumptions. Ferdinand de Saussure argued that signs do not refer to external realities. They refer to categories and images in the mind. They are mentally constructed, culturally shaped, and subjective. Translation, therefore, involved communicating mental meanings, not literal forms, because the latter often have radically different meanings in different cultures. The result was dynamic equivalence translations in which forms were changed to preserve meanings. According to this view, however, accurate communication becomes impossible, because there are no external reference points against which two subjective perceptions can be compared. The result was postmodern anthropology in which an anthropologist can speak only of what happened to himself or herself in a cross-cultural setting.

Charles Peirce (1940) argued that signs are triadic. They have (1) a form—the symbol, word (such as *tree*), or other sign that can be communicated to others, (2) the realities to which the sign refers—real trees, and (3) the mental images they create in the minds of people. Forms and meanings are linked to realities, and meaning lies in our understandings of these realities. Communication, therefore, is possible and is not measured merely by what the sender means or the receptor comprehends but by the correspondence between what the sender and the receptor experience and understand about reality. This correspondence can be tested by the use of realities external to the minds of those involved in communication.

A second essential in developing a metatheological framework is its epistemology (Laudin 1996; Hiebert 1999). Positivism, the epistemological foundation for modernity, assumed that human knowledge, particularly the sciences, had a photographic or one-to-one correspon-

dence view of reality. Therefore, it was objective truth—true for everyone everywhere and unaffected by the scientist, who was outside the picture. Instrumentalism holds that knowledge is created in the mind, and we cannot show that it corresponds to reality. We use it because it is useful. Critical realism holds that knowledge is like maps of reality. Maps must be true to reality. They must correspond to reality in the areas in which they claim truth. Road maps must map roads accurately, and weather maps show the weather. In critical realism, knowledge is focused, approximate, and complementary.

Transcultural Mediation Skills

A number of characteristics mark the effective transcultural person (Corbitt 1998; Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003; Vulpe, Protheroe, and MacDonald 2001). At minimum, a transcultural person should be able "to communicate interpersonally; to adjust to various cultures; to develop interpersonal relationships; to deal with diverse societal systems; to understand another; and to manage psychological (intercultural) stress" (Cook 2005, 22).

One central task of cultural mediators is to help participants in the process understand one another deeply—to see others as they see themselves and to see themselves as others see them. Mediators cannot side fully with either party, and they must honestly and positively represent each side to the other, helping each to see the other's perspective. For example, missionaries must not only present Christ to Hindus and Muslims but also help churches see how Muslims and Hindus see themselves and Christians and Christ. In doing so, they must not deny or hide their commitment to him as the only way to salvation, but they and other Christians must understand how others see Christ if they want to present him to them in love.

One particularly difficult task missionaries face is to mediate disagreements and conflicts and to bring about reconciliation where there are deep hatreds and memories of oppression. Often they must help members of communities divided by long histories of suspicion and hostility to love one another (Volf 1996). At the heart of mediation is love. Missionaries must truly love the people and identify with them in their common humanity. Only then can they bear bold witness to the gospel without arrogance and control.

Transcultural Community

Global mediation also requires a transcultural forum. Mediators themselves need a community in which they can learn from one another. Theologically, they affirm the "universal cosmopolitan composition of the Church" (Kane 1986, 141; Acts 17:24–28; Eph. 3:15).

Where do missionaries find such communities? In one sense, they find fellowship with members of the various communities in which they participate and mediate among these churches. They realize that in the church believers are members of one new people (*ethnos*). For Paul, unity and living as fellow citizens in the new kingdom are the ways the church demonstrates that it is indeed the church. John Stott writes, "For the sake of the glory of God and the evangelization of the world, nothing is more important than that the church should be, and should be seen to be, God's new society" (1979, 10). Missionaries as global mediators begin to understand that this world is indeed not their home—that home for Christians is heaven and that in this world they are resident aliens.

But missionaries who no longer belong fully to any one local church need others who understand them and can help them understand themselves and their ministries. They often find their closest relationships with other missionaries and other transcultural people who understand the outside-inside nature of their identity. They belong to a global fellowship with friends around the world. They become models for other Christians. Herbert Kane writes:

> As a child of the kingdom the believer then becomes a World Christian. By calling he belongs to a universal fellowship—the Christian church. By conviction he claims a universal message—the Christian gospel. By commitment he owes his allegiance to a universal king—Jesus Christ. By vocation, he is a part of a universal movement—the Christian mission. (1986, 137–38)

Mediating Global Theologizing

One area of great importance in the glocal church is mediation among churches doing local theologies and theology as truth for everyone. Young churches around the world are now doing their own theologizing. This raises difficult questions about the relationship between these theologies as habitus, dynamic, and context sensitive (Tiénou 1993, 247) and theology as an understanding of the gospel as universal truth. It raises questions about the relationship of systematic (philosophical), biblical (historical), and missional theologies (Hiebert and Tiénou 2002a). And it raises questions about the use of different categories and logics in the formulation of systematic theologies. These are difficult questions to address because they deal with the very heart of missions, bearing witness to the gospel in all human cultures, and the building of a new family

that transcends all societies. The answer we give to this question of the relationship between theologies and theology depends in large measure on our semiotic, epistemological, and hermeneutical frameworks.

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 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.

The second requisite in a metatheology is to differentiate between God's revelation as recorded in Scripture and human understandings expressed in theologies. Today, as young churches develop their own theological formulations, they face a theological crisis. They must deal not only with new theological issues but also with the theological fact itself—with African, Latin American, Indian, Chinese, and other theologies. If theological unity is based on specific theological formulations, how are they to deal with this diversity?

Many evangelicals answered this question by requiring churches abroad to hold the doctrinal systems of the older church in the West, but already in the eighteenth century, there was a growing awareness that young churches have the rights and responsibilities not only for self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation but also for self-theologizing. If they are to make the gospel relevant to their own people, they must contextualize it within their cultural settings.

If churches do local theologies, where are theological absolutes? How can we preserve universal truth and avoid relativism if we allow all believers to read and interpret Scripture in their own cultural settings? Peircean semiotics and a critical realist epistemology help us to avoid total subjectivism, relativism, and solipsism. They help us to affirm that there are universal, objective realities and truths but that these must be subjectively understood by humans in their contexts. This does not give priority to subjective perceptions. Rather, it calls for us constantly to test our understandings against reality. The authority of Scripture means that we must constantly go to the Bible to test our beliefs and behavior. To the extent that our 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.

To recognize that theologies are done by humans in their contexts means that we must study human contexts deeply to know how they

shape our thinking and to seek the biblical message not through the eyes of our culture but as it was understood by those who recorded it. We need to study human cultures to build understanding among them and to communicate the gospel in them in ways that transform them in the light of God's truth, beauty, and righteousness.

Yet another essential element in metatheology is the church as a hermeneutical community. This raises difficult questions regarding hermeneutics in a multicultural community. Different cultures raise different theological questions that need to be answered through the study of Scripture. But the questions go deeper. Different cultures use different categories and create categories using different principles (intrinsic and extrinsic, digital and analogical, or fuzzy) (Zimmerman 1985; Hiebert 1994b) and different logics (abstract algorithmic analytical versus concrete functional versus tropological) (cf. Wilson 1970), which they bring to the study of the Bible. How do we deal with these fundamental worldview differences? Robert Priest shows that Western theological categories cannot simply be translated into other languages (2000, 59–75; see also his chapter in this volume). Theological reflection in different cultures must be done initially in their conceptual categories. Then metatheological frameworks are needed to help theologians from different theologies understand, compare, and evaluate their understandings of Scripture. Priest notes also that theological reflections must link abstract, experience-distant concepts, which are often reductionist, with concrete, experience-near manifestations in everyday life, which are rich and intertwined.

Andrew Walls points out in this volume that the hermeneutical community involves not only churches in different cultures and theological traditions but also the church today and the history and legacies of the church through history. He laments the fact that Western Christian scholars are often little aware of or concerned with what is going on in the church and Christian scholarship around the world and take little time to learn other languages.

Missionaries and transnational church leaders from around the world are called on to be mediators in doing global theologizing. They must help theologians from different cultures understand one another deeply and become more self-aware of their own cultural perspectives. They are also called to mediate between formal theologies and the lives of ordinary Christians in the churches.

The final requisite for an evangelical metatheology is the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Too often we depend primarily on human reason to discern the truth. As Christians, we must be humble about the limitations of our knowledge and learn to discern the understanding that comes through the Spirit.

Missionaries and transnational church leaders are critical in mediating the growing encounters between cultures and churches in the emergence of a glocal world and a glocal church. Nowhere is this more important than in doing theology, for theological reflections lie at the very heart of our being as Christians.

Conclusion

Globalizing Theology

Craig Ott

> Christianity is not a garment made to specifications of a bygone golden age, nor is it an add-on whimsical patchwork rigged up without regard to the overall design. Rather, Christianity is a multicoloured fabric where each new thread, chosen and refined at the Designer's hand, adds luster and strength to the whole. In this pattern of faith affirmation we should stress the importance of interwoven solidarity with fellow believers, past, present, and future.
>
> Lamin Sanneh (2003, 56)

We are living in a day when realization of the vision of Revelation 7:9–10—a church composed of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language worshiping the Lamb of God—appears not far off. Not only has the church of Jesus Christ become a truly global church, but that global church reflects theologically and expresses itself in fresh and creative ways. In our age of global communication and travel, theological exchange and dialogue among members of the global church are possible in ways never dreamt of previously.

This development holds both promise and peril. Western Christianity could attempt to utilize such developments to further its ecclesial and theological dominance. Various forms of civil religion, nationalism, and ethnocentrism—in both Western and non-Western settings—might increase as a backlash to the seemingly irresistible forces of globalization. The negative effects of economic globalization could threaten the unity,