

# **THE MISSIONARY AS MEDIATOR OF GLOBAL THEOLOGIZING**

## MISSIONARY AS MEDIATOR OF GLOBAL THEOLOGIZING

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It is to state the obvious that we live in a time of rapid change. Peter Drucker writes,

Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. We cross what . . . 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].

What are the changes taking place, and what implications do these have for Christian missions?

I grew up at the end of the old missionary era when missionaries went abroad for life, returning on furlough every seven years. Now missions is changing rapidly, and we need a vision of what the new paradigm is for the twenty-first century.

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. 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 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 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and even more so of Protestant missions of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The globalization of the world and church has profound implications for missions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, implications we have only begun to explore under the topics of truth, 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 where there is a commitment to the truth of the Gospel, and the priesthood of all believers? What does globalization mean when it comes to confessions of faith, evangelism, missions and particularly the doing of global theology?

### **GLOBALIZATION**

In the last decades the world has rapidly become interconnected through travel, trade, communication and political interactions. At a fundamental level, this globalization has led to with people meeting others very different from themselves, and raises questions of how they view and relate to Others and at Otherness. 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 as ‘infidels’. The invading Muslim armies were clearly humans, but they had heard the Gospel and 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. This raised 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 with 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. This incorporated all humans into one cosmic story of progress from simple to complex, from primitive to civilized, from pre-logical to logical. The superiority of western science and technology were 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 the *civilized*-European versus the 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 are 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 whites. Christians led the fight against slavery and human exploitation, and many died to bring the Gospel around the world. 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 them a universal gospel, and baptizing the converts into the global church, the 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 the responsiveness to the Gospel. This led to a focus on ‘people groups,’ social dynamics and the Church Growth movement. Recently it has led to questions of contextualizing 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 these are 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. Consequently, missionaries were often castigated for changing societies.

Cultural anthropology emerged in North American 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 supporting 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 and learned to know them as real persons, they began to see that these were fully and equally human beings who had their own beliefs and practices. Now it became important for anthropologists to learn how the people 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, dance and other '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 (Harries-Jones 1985, 234).

Early missionaries did not come as scientists, but they often came as outsiders seeking not only to convert the people, but to teach them modern medicine and education in which science was central. As they lived among the people over long periods of time, they, too, began to recognize that people did not live in the same world with different labels attached to it, but in radically different conceptual worlds. They were forced to deal with deep cultural differences, and, therefore, to study culture itself. In their home communities, they did not have to study their

social and cultural realities—these were simply the way things are. Missionaries played a key role in the development of Ethnology, publishing penetrating studies on non-western cultures. R. H. Codrington, one of 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)

Prolonged encounter with people in other cultures led Western missionaries and scholars to increasingly see them as fully human, and their cultures as having much worth. Others were no longer primitive. They were fully rational beings having their own autonomous cultures. They were ‘natives.’ The word ‘civilization’ associated with a hierarchical view of peoples was rejected in favor of ‘culture’ in which all are different but equal. Cultures were seen as unique and autonomous. Each is 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.

In missions this move to understand cultures in their own terms has led to attempts at radical, often uncritical, contextualization of the Gospel and the Church. 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 denied the importance of our common humanity and history, and of a divine cosmic story. It reduces everything to momentary personal experiences which, in the end, are transient and meaningless.

Cultural anthropology, too, has its limitations. It tends to reduce everything to cultural explanations. Moreover, those who used Saussurian semiotics saw 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, 120-138). Consequently, all cultures were seen as relative. None could stand in judgment of another. In this view there is no external objective Truth, and even if there is, it can only be known subjectively. Moreover, secular cultural anthropology had no place for God or spiritual realities. Consequently, it did not take the ontological claims of religions seriously. It claimed a privileged stance, as a science, as an objective, outside assessment of reality.

Cultural anthropology helped missionaries understand the reality and power of cultural systems, including languages, patterns of behavior, rituals, myths, beliefs and worldviews. 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 our understanding of the local belief systems and worldviews of the people we serve.

#### Post-Modern Era:

At the end of the twentieth century anthropologists, such as Peter Harries-Jones (1985:224-248), challenged the very assumptions of the mid-twentieth-century approach to the study of humans, and provided a rationale and pointed to the direction which anthropology 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 different cultures.

In fact 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 (Harries-Jones 1985, 227).” This was true even in *emic* studies that sought to understand how other people thought. Rarely was there a genuine two-way exchange of information and beliefs to discover reality. Moreover, ethnographic studies carry no commitment of responsibility on the part of the 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. Knowledge is used by the participants in the social, economic and political arenas of life. In the past, anthropologists studied others from the view point of western culture. Today they must also interpret the views of local peoples to those in power. Anthropology can no longer be taught as an objective morally neutral description of culture. Cultural knowledge carries with it responsibilities to facilitate mutually beneficial interaction between different social and racial groups. Anthropologists must help minority communities cope with the impact of majority cultures in a rapidly changing world.

Jacob Loewen notes (1992, 48) that on the whole missionaries have been less guilty than anthropologists of exploiting the societies they studied. They stayed, and sought to serve the people they learned to know. However, some missionaries 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 useful tools for carrying out their own 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, to colonialism, and to 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 anthropologist's 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 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 can people of different communities seek the truth together, and build a world of harmony, justice and love. 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 and 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 encounters in our post-post modern (Smith 1982) or glocal world. 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 are increasingly finding a voice 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 post-modern children, and between them and their post-post-modern children (Smith 1982).

How can we develop global systems? 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 towards 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, it is the latter that we will explore here. The question is how can we

start with the many local and regional churches around the world and build a global fellowship and a doing of theology together without imposing these from above—without silencing the weak but drawing on the wisdom of those who are mature in faith?

### **GLOBAL MEDIATION**

Globalization mediation must begin with how we view others and otherness. In a church made up of people from many different ethnic groups, cultures and classes, there is always the tendency to break up into parties that seek to control the church. So 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 towards the unity of the church which Christ prayed for (John 17:20-21) Christians must show how humans of different kinds can live together in peace and justice, or the Gospel becomes Good News only for a few—the powerful. They must address the sin of divisions in the church--racism, culturalism, genderism, classism and ageism. Too often Christians have been influenced more by the world in which they live than by the Word of God. They must not see others as primitives or irreconcilably other. In a global world they must view others not as Others, but as Us. We must meet one another in the world in our common humanity, and our common sinfulness. In the church we must meet one another as members of one family in Christ.

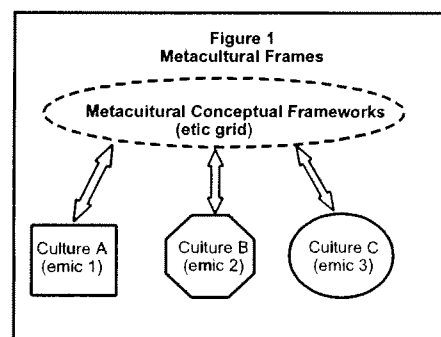
Global mediators must help break down the walls that divide humans, and build bridges of understanding and fellowship. To do so, they themselves must truly be ‘bicultural’ or ‘transcultural’ people, living in different worlds, and not fully at home in any one of them. They need to know both communities well, and speak to each for the other, even when both are

suspicious of them, because the communities do not know what the mediators are doing when they are with the others. Inter-cultural mediators are ‘inbetweeners’ who often feel like 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. But ‘inbetweeners’ are increasingly vital to global missions and the global church. Here we will look at several areas in which this inbetweenness are highlighted in this volume, and then at one of the qualities missionaries serving in this role need to be effective in their ministries.

### Essentials for mediation

One essential for mediation is the development of metacultural mental frameworks. Modernity claimed privileged truth which had to be taught others. No mediation was required—only accurate translation. In the post modern world science has lost its privileged position, and all belief systems are given equal place. But there is only dialogue, no mediation. Nor can we be sure that we truly understand others, so we focus on our own selves. There can be no real concern for others because they are Others and inscrutable.

In the post-post modern (Smith 1982, Laudin 1996) or glocal world, people must relate to one another because they increasingly live one intertwined world, and they must do so recognizing the differences between them. To mediate between different peoples and cultures, we need



metacultural framework. Such a framework is not itself a culture. It is a framework that enables us to understand, translate, compare and evaluate different cultures (figure 1). 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 to prepare such a grid from its inception. The early metacultural frameworks were essentially western cultural grids. As the views of other peoples were taken seriously, those frameworks were rejected, and newer ones developed. Taxonomies of different social, economic, political and cultural systems were created. The current comparative frameworks are not fully accurate, but they are better than the earlier grids, 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. This is particularly true when we talk about global theological mediation. Committed Christian theologians from around the world must be involved not only in examining and comparing local theologies, but also in constructing the meta-theological grid by which these are translated, compared and evaluated.

In developing metacultural 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 real roses. In this view, people in different cultures live in the same world, but give different labels to the same realities. Consequently, translation meant finding the equivalent words, and formulating sentences the way the people did. These 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 (19##) 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 in order to preserve meanings. In this view, however, accurate communication becomes impossible, because there is no external reference points against which two subjective perceptions could be compared. The result was radical post-modern anthropology in which the anthropologist can speak only of what happened to herself or himself 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 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 metacultural framework is its epistemology (Hiebert 1999). Positivism, the epistemological foundation for modernity, assumed that human knowledge, particularly the sciences, had a photographic or one-to-one correspondence 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 correspond to external realities to be useful, but they correspond to reality in specific ways. Road maps must map roads, and weather maps show the weather. In critical realism knowledge is focused, approximate, and complementary.

A third essential in developing a metacultural framework is hermeneutics. We need to examine what this means in inter-cultural settings.

### **MISSIONARIES AS MEDIATORS**

What is the shape of the new mission paradigms emerging in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? A consensus has not yet emerged, but several elements are increasingly clear. One is that missions to new and unreached areas 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 ‘utter most parts’ of the world. Today there are large churches and mission movements in many non-Western countries, and the West is now also seen as a mission field. Increasingly missionaries are bridge persons, culture mediators, who stand between different human worlds.

Missionaries are mediators in a number of different ways. First, they must be mediators between the Gospel and the world. The heart of missions has always been and remains the communication of the Gospel to the world. In the past, the 'world' was defined as the non-west. It was assumed that the West had heard the Gospel, and that it was essential Christian. It was the rest of the world that was pagan and heathen. They needed to hear the Gospel for the first time. Today the church is global, and the most vital churches are found the non-west. 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 local cultures and the messenger and the church in local social systems. Contextualization raises profound questions on the need for and limits to contextualization. The dangers are to under-contextualize and to over-contextualize the Gospel and the Church. The task calls for missionaries and global leaders who understand both the Gospel and human cultures well, and bridge between them. In this missionaries must not only speak to the world from the church, but also to speak for the world to the church.<sup>1</sup> Most churches know little about their own neighborhoods, let alone peoples in other parts of the world. Missionaries must help their sending churches understand, identify with and love people around the world.

Second, missionaries are mediators between Christianity and non-Christian religions. The question of religious pluralism is one of the critical issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the past missionaries faced this question as they encountered other religions abroad. Now churches in the

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<sup>1</sup> Only Christians are appointed to church committees. There is no one to speak for non-Christians. What would happen if every committee had non-Christians who voiced their concerns, or at least persons in each committee designated to speak for the lost? It should not surprise us that churches increasingly become focused on internal matters and lose their sense of mission to their neighbors and to the world.

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 world. Harold Netland in this volume helps us understand the deep issues involved in inter-religious 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 in a way that is seen as belonging to the world, not one part of it. How can cultural differences in multi-cultural teams be worked out so that these enhance, not undermine the work? Missionaries and other transcultural Christian leaders are the mediators between these diverse Christian communities, seeking to build bridges of understanding of the Gospel, and partnership in mission.

Fourth, missionaries are mediators 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 the Scriptures. Most have little or no training in exegeting human societies. Eloise Meneses, Darrell Whiteman and Robert Priest show us in this volume that we need a far deeper understanding of the sociocultural contexts in which we

minister. Too often missions have been afraid of using the human sciences lest they become captive to these, not stopping to reflect on the danger of becoming captive to Greek philosophy and modern history (Frykenberg 1996). In a rapidly changing world, we can no longer minister effectively without knowing and identifying with the people we serve, or settling for stereotypes and second hand

reports of peoples and their cultures. An intimate knowledge of them is needed which 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 mission 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 (Tiéno, 1993). The voices of scholars around the world have been largely ignored, often because western scholars have not taken time to learn other languages deeply. 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 build bridges of understandings and consensus between 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

reflections, then we must begin with a great deal of theological diversity arising, in part, out of the fact that these reflections are done in very 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? Before we look at missionaries as mediators of global theologizing, we need to look at the ministry of mediation itself.

### **THE MINISTRY OF MEDIATION**

How can missionaries and missiologists 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

#### Transcultural Identities

The first question that emerges in mediating between worlds is that of identity. In a 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 this 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 the 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 *outsides*-insiders.

This inner dividedness creates an identity crisis. One way to resolve this tension of identities is to affirm one as our 'home' cultural identity, and to go to other worlds as outsiders and visitors, but in doing this we will never effectively communicate the Gospel to the people, or speak for them to our home churches. A second answer is to seek to 'go native.' But this is not only impossible in one lifetime, but also destroys our 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 we find ourselves. But then we become cultural schizophrenics, with no true identity of our own.

To be effective mediators between cultures we need a clear identity. This requires developing a meta-cultural mental frame that enable us to live in different worlds while keeping our core identity. This frame emerges as we live in more than world, and seek to understand each of them deeply from its own perspectives, but to do so while comparing and evaluating them. 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 had 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).

Effective cultural mediators are outsider-insiders in any culture in which they find themselves. Those who remain only outsiders are not trusted. Those who seek to identify fully with another community and 'go native' are seen as frauds and rivals (Howard 2004).

Missionaries must seek to understand and empathize deeply with both communities, but be and are known to still be outsiders-insiders. Being insiders they build trust in each community.

Being outsiders enables them to bridge between different groups.

For Christian mediators this does not mean giving up deep biblical commitments. Rather such a perspective is rooted in theology (Cook, 2005, 35-38). We affirm that despite their many differences, *at the deepest level of identity all humans are one*. This oneness of humanity is declared in the creation account (Gen 1:26), and affirmed by the universalism implicit in the Old and New Testaments. In Christ and the early church the implications of this common humanity are worked out more fully. In affirming the oneness of humanity Christians must not deny the great difficulty in understanding people in other cultures. It is easy to say that we love them when we have few deep relationships with them. Far too often we claim to know what others are thinking and feeling, when, in fact, we are totally wrong. The more we study cultural differences, the more we realize how difficult it is to see others as fully humans like ourselves, and to build deep relationships of mutuality and love, but the more we see the necessity to do so.

To truly be transcultural mediators, we must struggle against our natural inertia to remain centered on our own little worlds, and learn to see and love others not as ‘others,’ but as ‘us.’

Good missionaries are ‘inbetweeners’ who increasingly find their identity outside any one culture. Their identity is in a meta-cultural perspective in which they are outsiders-insiders in all cultures in which they live. They are able to shift cultural gears, while keeping a central identity at the core of their being. What keeps outsiders-insiders from cultural schizophrenia? Here a metaphor may help us. Vincenzo Volentiere notes, “Birds in flight . . . are not between places, they carry their places with them. We never wonder where they live; they are at home in the sky, in flight. Flight is their way of being in the world (Iyer 2000, XX).”

### Mediation

Essential to in-between ministries is the process of intercultural mediation. Simply living between cultures does not make one a good mediator. For cultural mediation, D.J. Bachner and U. Zeujtschel note that persons and parties involved must meet three conditions:

1. The development of a transcultural frame of reference and identity whose norms transcend national and monocultural boundaries.
2. Relevant programmatic purposes and formal institutional expectations that exchanges are, in fact, to act as mediators; and
3. Training that will prepare exchanges to assume a mediatory role and also confer legitimacy on formal status, for them to do so (1994, 39).

A number of characteristics mark the effective intercultural person (Corbitt 1998, Hammer, M. R., M. J. Bennett and R. Wiseman 2003, Vulpe, Kealey, 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).



Meta-cultural frameworks are essential not only to the identity of missionaries, but also for their ministries of building relationships between Christians in different societies. One central task of cultural mediators is to help participants in the process to understand each other 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.

In interreligious witness, mediation means moving beyond simply going to Muslims and Hindus to bear witness to the Gospel. It also means helping Christians understand Muslims and Hindus, many of whom are more deeply committed to their faith than are the Christians. The goal of such dialogue is not simply peaceful co-existence. It is an essential first step towards true and faithful witness to our Christian faith.

One particularly difficult task missionaries face is to mediate disagreements and conflicts, and to bring about reconciliation where there are deeply hatreds and memories of oppression. Often they must help different communities, often divided by long histories of suspicion and hostility, to love one another (Volf, 1996).

At the heart of intercultural 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 we affirm “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 between 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 way the church demonstrates that it is indeed the church. In Ephesians Paul describes the hostilities that divide humans (2:11-12), shows how Christ brought those hostilities to an end (2:13-18), and argues that Christians united in Christ are God’s object lesson to the world (2:19-22). Paul writes, “[Christ] tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. . . . Then he started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everyone” (Eph. 2:14-15, Peterson 1993, 404). William Rader writes, “Ephesians sees the church as the community in which the deepest hostility between men was healed. . . . When the church views herself in the light of Eph. 2:11–22 then it is impossible for her to be conformed to the divisions which exist in society. It is her nature to be the place where divisions are healed” (1978, 253, 255).” 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 [she] belongs to a universal fellowship—the Christian church. By conviction he [she] claims a universal message—the Christian gospel. By commitment he [she] owes his [her] allegiance to a universal king—Jesus Christ. By vocation, he [she] is apart of a universal movement—the Christian mission (1986, 137-138).

### **MEDIATING GLOBAL THEOLOGIZING**

The area of particular importance in the glocal church is mediation between 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 our understanding of the Gospel as universal truth. It raises questions about the relationship of systematic (philosophical), biblical (historical) and missional theologies (Tiénou and Hiebert 2005). And it raises question 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. In this volume, Chuck Van Engen examines the relationship between local theologies and the need to work towards a global understanding of theological truths revealed in Scripture, truths given to humans in their cultural contexts as recorded in the Old and New Testaments, but truths that are universal and apply to all humans in their diverse contexts.

To move from local theologies to an understanding of transcultural truths revealed in Scripture, we need a meta-theology, a theological reflection on how local theologies should be done, and how to mediate the dialogue between them. As evangelicals the first requisite of such a meta-theology is the affirmation that Scripture is divine revelation and our final authority in all matters it addresses. If we affirm the priesthood of all believers, and encourage everyone should study Scriptures for themselves, our common ground is the Bible, and its objective truthfulness.

The second requisite in a meta-theology is to differentiate between God's revelation as recorded in Scripture and human understandings expressed in their theologies. Today, as young churches develop their own theological formulations, they face a theological crisis. Not only must they deal 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 not only the rights and responsibilities 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 contextualized 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? Peircian semiotics and a critical realist epistemology avoid total subjectivism, relativism and solipsism. They help us 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 to constantly 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 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 of understanding between them, and to communicate the Gospel in them in ways that transform them in the light of God's truth, beauty and righteousness.

The third element in meta-theology is the church as a hermeneutical community. This raises difficult questions regarding hermeneutics in a multi-cultural 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, create

categories using different principles (intrinsic and extrinsic, digital and analogical or fuzzy. Zimmerman 1985, Hiebert 1994), and different logics (abstract algorithmic analytical vs. concrete functional, vs. tropological. cf. Wilson 1970) which they bring to the study of the Bible. How do we deal with these fundamental worldview differences? Robert Priest here shows that western theological categories cannot simply be translated into other languages. Theological reflections in different cultures must be done initially in their conceptual categories. Then metacultural frameworks are needed to help theologians from different cultures to understand, compare and evaluate their understandings of Scripture. He notes also that theological reflections must like 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 not only involves churches in different cultures and theological traditions, but also the church today and the history and legacies of the church down 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 upon to be mediators in doing global theologizing. They must help theologians from different cultures understand each other 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 meta-theology 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 between the growing encounters between different cultures and churches in the emergence of a glocal world and a glocal church. No where is this more important than in the doing of theology, for theological reflections lie at the very heart of our beings as Christians.

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