

In what ways are the changes in global culture likely to affect the practice of missions in the twenty-first century?

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In what ways are the changes in global culture likely to affect the practice of missions in the twenty-first century?

The last quarter of the twentieth century experienced the most rapid and most extensive globalization in human history. One consequence of this trend was the emergence of what can, at some level, be understood as a global culture. This essay considers how changes in global culture are affecting the context and practice of Christian mission, and will continue to do so throughout the twenty-first century.

In Section 1 we establish what is meant by global culture and in Section 2 we identify some of its key characteristics, asking what changes make this different from traditional forms of culture. We also comment on how each of these characteristics relates to the kingdom of God. These two sections will prepare us for the main thrust of our discussion, Section 3, where we discuss how these cultural changes affect Christian mission. The position held throughout this paper is that, like any other culture, global culture has both positive and negative features, a duality that is especially clear when we see global culture as involving more than the spread of brands and consumer products. The author finds himself to be, at least in part, situated within this new global culture.

Section 1 – What is Global Culture?

1.1 A Definition

We begin by establishing what is meant by the phrase ‘global culture.’ There is no generally accepted definition of this term – indeed, there is considerable dispute over whether a specifically global form of culture exists. A good starting point, however, is to clarify what we mean by *culture*,¹ and we utilise Professor Ronald Fletcher’s definition in the New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought:

[Culture is] the total body of material artifacts (tools, weapons, houses, places of work, worship, government, recreation, works of art, etc.), of collective mental and spiritual ‘artifacts’ (systems of symbols, ideas, beliefs, aesthetic perceptions, values, etc.), and of distinctive forms of behaviour (institutions, groupings, rituals, modes of organization, etc.) created by a people... in their ongoing activities... (Bullock 1999, 191)

Thus culture can be understood as the sum of cultural expressions, products, beliefs, images and behaviour. Fletcher seems to infer a degree of homogeneity among those (a “people”) who share a culture, but such homogeneity cannot be assumed, especially when we come to speak of a *global* culture. In the specific case of global culture, it may be that its existence is leading to homogeneity, rather than vice versa.

There are two possible ways of understanding ‘global culture.’ Firstly, we could treat all of the world’s population as a single group, and then consider what are its cultural expressions,

¹ We acknowledge Amos Yong’s point (Corrie 2007, 84) that the Bible has no equivalent word to ‘culture’ in either the Old or the New Testament. This, of course, does not mean that the concept cannot be discussed from a biblical perspective.

beliefs, behaviour etc. Or secondly, we could identify 'global culture' as a sub-culture that is simultaneously present in many parts of the world: it is global only in the sense of being multi-national and multi-ethnic, rather than being universally experienced. This definition is often used implicitly by commentators on globalization and global culture. In this essay I will be using this second way of understanding global culture. My own definition, therefore, utilises that of Ronald Fletcher above but adds that, in the case of *global* culture, the "people" are located in many different countries and are therefore situated in different national cultures and other local identities. In Section 3 below we consider some of the implications of sharing multiple cultural identities.²

1.2 The Advent of Global Culture

A global culture has only been possible because of three key developments. Firstly, communications technology (such as television, radio and, especially, the Internet) which effectively compresses time and space, enabling instantaneous sharing of not just information but ideas and symbols. Secondly, faster and cheaper transport (especially air travel) facilitates the distribution of global products, as well as tourism and migration. And thirdly, global culture has been able to develop because of the promotion of a powerful ideology (based on free-market economics) that has sought to lower global barriers to trade and to deregulate and liberalise markets. In the following section we ask what changes have come to define the resulting global culture.

Section 2 – What Changes Define the New Global Culture?

In this section we identify six defining aspects of global culture and briefly consider where each stands in relation to Christian values, that is, in relation to the deepening, broadening and strengthening of God's kingdom on earth. We will see that the overall standing of global culture to God's kingdom is ambiguous, and in Section 3 we will consider how this should affect mission in the twenty-first century.

2.1 Cultural Symbols

When people talk of the spread of global culture, cultural globalization, or "a global cosmopolitan society" (Giddens 1999, 19) they are very often thinking of brands and the images of popular culture: Nike, McDonalds and MTV.³ The general argument made by those who find evidence for such cultural globalization is that local and national identities and cultural symbols are being replaced by those of Western (usually American) culture. Such an imposition of foreign influences and concomitant destruction of local tradition goes a long way towards explaining why globalization is often seen as a negative force. As Tomlinson (2000, 269) says, "the impact of globalization in the cultural sphere has, most generally, been viewed in a pessimistic light. Typically, it has been associated with the destruction of cultural identities, victims of the accelerating encroachment of a homogenized, westernized, consumer culture." Legrain is one of the few commentators to see cultural globalization in a

² As recently as 2004 the United Nations attempted to argue that "Global culture is not about the English language or brand name sneakers – it is about universal ethics based on universal human rights and respect for the freedom, equality and dignity of all individuals" (UNDP 2004, 90). Though undoubtedly well-intentioned, such an ethics-based definition is divorced from conventional understanding of global culture.

³ Held (1999, 368) is correct to state that the "dominant mode" of cultural globalization has shifted from the level of state and empire, to that of multinational corporations (MNCs).

positive light, controversially arguing that “globalization is bringing profound – and overwhelmingly positive – cultural change” (2002, 313).

I believe that there is considerable evidence that cultural homogenization is taking place around the world, and its occurrence over the last 30 years has been unparalleled in human history, both qualitatively and quantitatively.⁴ Recently several commentators have argued that global cultural trends have resulted in hybridization, rather than homogenisation, and that new local identities are being formed as ‘traditional’ cultures are encountering global culture. Whilst there is some evidence that such cultural innovation is occurring, I find greater evidence for homogenisation amongst cultural symbols and images.

In Moldova, the country where I live and work, I have witnessed relatively few examples of cultural hybridization. I have found that, especially in towns but even in the countryside, Moldovan culture is gradually being replaced by global culture, especially American cultural symbols. To give but a few examples: young people listen to American pop singers such as Britney Spears; they watch (illegally copied and badly dubbed) American films on DVD; they dress in jeans, T-shirts and according to global fashion trends; they are increasingly eating non-traditional foods (although this area has been slower to succumb to global culture); a majority have mobile phones, from which they connect to the Internet and check their emails; they keep in touch with friends and family who are working abroad via popular social networking websites. All these changes serve as a case study in the spread of global culture, which has deeply penetrated Moldova during the last 10-15 years.

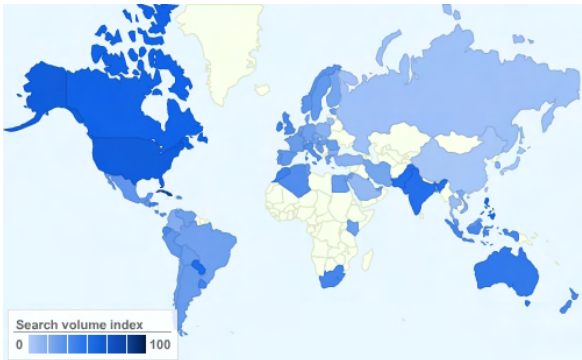
The charts in Figure 1 below demonstrate the dominance of Western cultural symbols around the world.⁵ They show that leading American celebrities have a truly global following (at least, amongst those who have access to the World Wide Web), and that leading multinational corporations have a pervasive global reach. American TV series, such as *Prison Break*, *Lost* and *Heroes* are popular around the world. Yet non-American celebrities and sub-cultures have less impact: English footballer David Beckham, though promoted around the world and having played for teams in the United States and Italy, features at a comparatively low level on Google’s search volume index. Likewise, Bollywood has a relatively low profile outside of the Indian subcontinent. We may conclude that whilst flows of cultural symbols are multi-directional, the strongest flow (tidal wave?) is from the United States to the rest of the world.

⁴ This homogenization is part of what Beckford (2000, 166) describes as “the reality and consciousness of a new and increasingly global order of culture and social relations” since the 1980s.

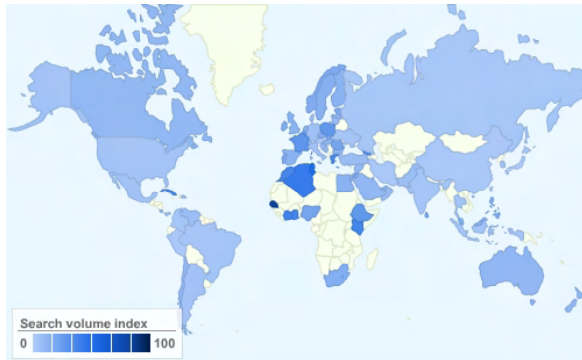
⁵ The charts were generated using Google’s highly innovative Insights for Search facility (www.google.com/insights/search), which allows users to generate graphs showing how frequently any term was searched, for any given period and in any location.

Figure 1 – Relative Global Popularity of Cultural Icons (for the period 2004-2008)

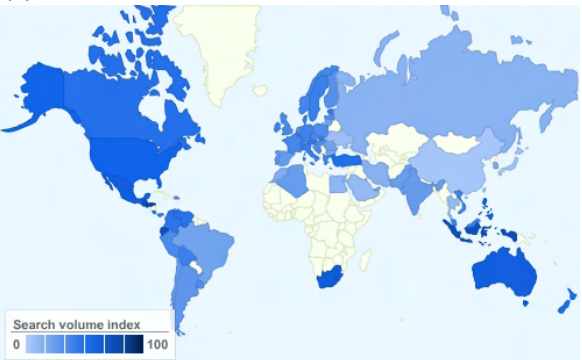
(a) Tom Cruise



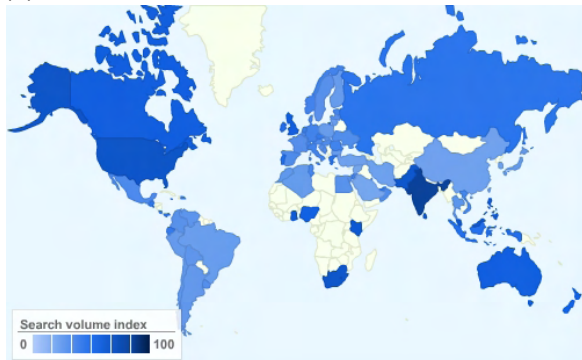
(b) Prison Break



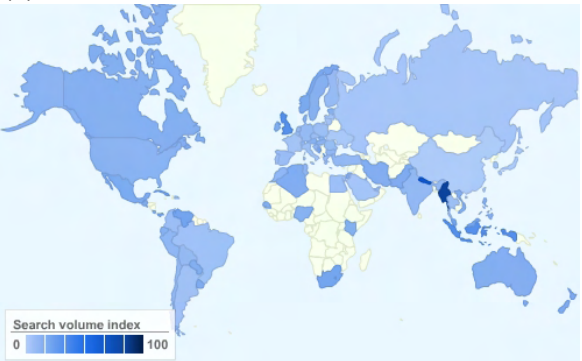
(c) Paris Hilton



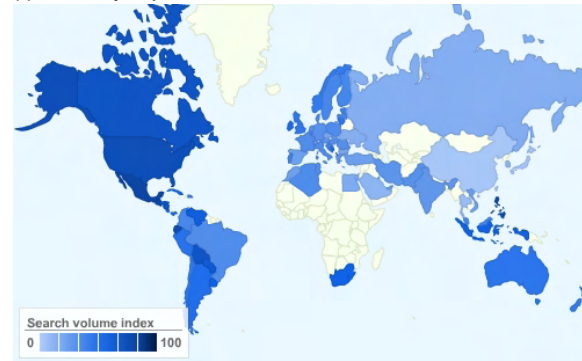
(d) Microsoft



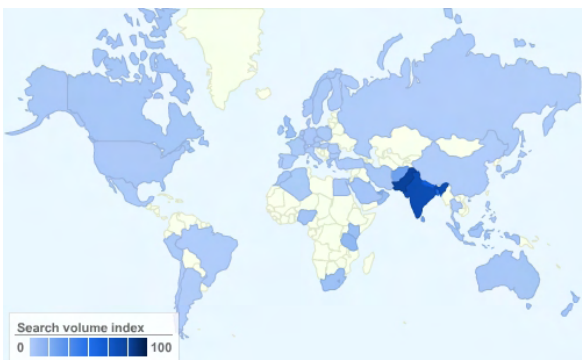
(e) David Beckham



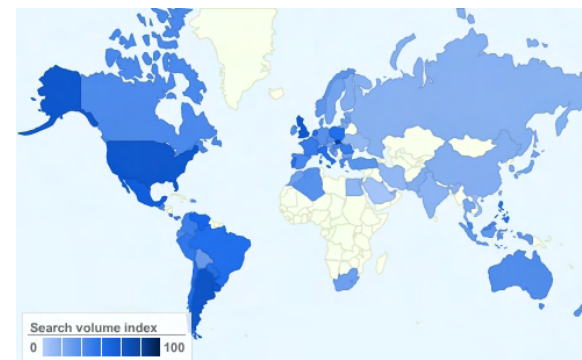
(f) Britney Spears



(g) Bollywood



(h) Nike



Source: www.google.com/insights/search

This aspect of the dissemination of global culture should be considered a negative thing, since the specifics of different cultures are being suppressed by a larger and more powerful culture that spans the world. Traditional symbols which arose over centuries or millennia are being replaced by alien ones, and at a breathtaking pace.⁶ Where cultural symbols are lost, the cultural meaning they convey is often lost too, and we should mourn the passing of traditional aspects of cultures and of the incredible cultural diversity that sprung from God's gift of creativity to mankind.

2.2 Technology

The second fundamental shift that constitutes change in global culture is technological, by which I mean the ubiquity of modern technology (especially communications technology), its power and its ability to reduce barriers of time and space. It is for this reason that Sam George describes the Westernized global culture as 'TechnoCulture' (which prompts a response of 'TerrorCulture').⁷ Belonging to this TechnoCulture means being permanently accessible by phone or email; having access to almost unlimited information via the Internet; and being able to define oneself in terms of online profiles, avatars and group membership. Citizens of countless countries around the world may transcend their national cultural identities and share and develop new cultural identities (including Christian ones). It is this possibility of forming and reforming that makes this second aspect of global culture somewhat ambiguous in how it relates to Kingdom values: it may be harnessed to promote them, or employed to counteract them.

2.3 Connectedness

Closely linked to point 2.2 above is that of (inter-)connectedness, which we regard as the third major change ushered in by global culture. To give some examples: through one website I could contact fellow pupils at the schools I attended as a youth; through another website I could contact millions of people sharing my interest in genealogy, and possibly sharing my roots; through different website forums I can discuss my interests of football, theology, even missiology, with like-minded individuals who could be literally anywhere in the world. I could play chess online with one of the thousands of fellow enthusiasts waiting in cyberspace. The list is endless.

Even though such relationships may appear to be shallow, they do create myriad opportunities for those who are part of the new global culture. Via email or even through VoIP (such as Skype) I can contact and hopefully even encourage my fellow missionaries in dozens of countries, as well as family members in England. I can even submit this essay via email, without needing to produce a physical copy. Such a bringing together of people and sharing of interests must surely be considered a good thing. We may have some reservations about the impact on those who are unable, thus far, to join this global network,

⁶ As Stiglitz (2002, 8) observes, "the pace of change has not allowed time for cultural adaptation," and he is right to identify this as one of the main social problems of globalization.

⁷ Sam George in Tiplady (2003a). George is one of a several writers who consider the world as polarised into (or polarising towards) two cultures. Benjamin Barber characterised this as *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995), with religious fundamentalism pitted against consumerist capitalism. For Tom Sine the world is better understood as *Mustard Seed Versus McWorld* (1999), whereby the values of capitalism stand oppose the values of the kingdom of God.

but the new connectedness brought about by the network itself does not, it seems to me, stand opposed to God's kingdom.⁸

2.4 Mobility

A fourth characteristic of global culture is that of mobility. This is not an obligatory feature of global culture but members are often nationally and internationally mobile, to an extent unprecedented in human history. This has been made possible by low cost air travel in particular. Whilst my parents' generation perhaps travelled to Spain or France for a foreign holiday, many from my own generation have taken a gap year to travel the world, holidayed in exotic, distant lands – or participated in short-term mission trips in Africa or Asia.⁹ In the world of business, it is common to fly transatlantic or across Europe for meetings that may only last a couple of hours.

Such mobility has changed the way that Westerners perceive the world, which becomes a smaller – and more controllable – place. Greater mobility creates the possibility of more encounters with other cultures, and I do not think that we can start from the assumption that this will be a bad thing. It is true that when different cultures meet, they may 'clash' or one may dominate the other but we should not automatically equate mobility itself with potentially negative impacts.¹⁰ After all, greater mobility has facilitated more Christian mission projects – and allowed Christians from a greater number of countries to participate. We must conclude that the mobility of global culture is not necessarily against God's kingdom.

2.5 Youth

The newly emerged global culture is more youth-centred than perhaps any national or regional culture, and Tom Sine (2003, 7) claims that "Young people everywhere we travel often have more in common with American youth culture than with the cultures from which they come." Members of the global culture are seldom tied to – or even informed by – tradition, a fact which has both advantages and disadvantages. Youthfulness is seen as a great virtue, and everyone is encouraged to prolong their youth, hence those in their 30s and 40s wearing the same jeans and T-shirts as those in their late teens and 20s. Access to technology has allowed youths to find, develop and assert their own identities, especially online through social networking sites, and one effect of this is that the global culture allows for – even encourages – a splintering into 'specialist' sub-cultures or, effectively, micro-cultures.

To be clear, it is not necessarily the case that older people are *excluded* from the global culture. Rather, it is expected that they will adopt the practices (and perhaps the attitudes) of

⁸ Drane (2008, 127) rightly sees in this new connectedness opportunities for evangelism and apologetics: "Globalization is opening up new vistas of imagination to all the world's peoples, and inherited religious frameworks are being questioned as never before as the adherents of different faith communities meet face to face."

⁹ For example, statistics show a very significant rise in international tourist trips, which tripled in the space of ten years (from 152.4 million in 1985 to 433 million in 1996). Data are for the 45 "high human development countries" and published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 1999, 53).

¹⁰ Although it should be noted that there has been a generally detrimental environmental impact, a fact which deserves to be taken seriously.

younger people if they are to participate, but the emergence of 'silver surfers' shows that this does happen.¹¹

We may wonder where this facet of global culture lies in relation to the kingdom of God. The simple answer is that youth should not be idolised, yet where it is a genuine expression of people's identity, neither should it be denigrated. There is a large degree of ambiguity over how this aspect of global culture relates to the Christian faith, but suffice to say here that it does not automatically stand in direct opposition to it.

2.6 *Transience*

Our sixth and final characteristic of global culture is that it is always changing; it is restless. Members of the global culture move home frequently, they change job (even profession) more often, they form and reform relationships at a quicker rate. Their tastes in music, fashion and other interests change fairly swiftly. Life is more fluid, less secure but shaped by near-infinite lifestyle choices and a range of possibilities unavailable to previous generations. Global culture means meeting many more people during one's life, without necessarily getting to know many of them very well. These people will be from many different countries but will typically speak English, the language of global culture.

From a Christian perspective, such transience may be largely (but not entirely) negative, in that it seemingly precludes deeper, more meaningful relationships; it militates against contentment; and it prevents people from laying down roots. However, it might be helpful to remember that human relationships exist across a spectrum of contact, and the Gospels show us that, as well as having deep relationships with His followers, Jesus also had many passing meetings during His ministry, where He related to people for just a short time, ministered to their needs, and moved on.

To summarise, we have briefly looked at six of the defining characteristics of the global culture. Together these aspects constitute a culture that is radically different from any other in history, and the nature and implications of this development are only beginning to be understood. From a Christian perspective, we should not be too hasty in judging this global culture, especially since it is the primary identity for many people around the world. Perhaps there has been a tendency to approach the issue of global culture from a primarily economic perspective, with a focus on global products, brand loyalties and so forth. The economics behind global culture should cause Christians grave concern, and the replacement of local *cultural symbols* by 'global' (Western) ones likewise. We may also have reservations about a culture that places such emphasis on *transience*. Yet other aspects of global culture are much more ambiguous, in that they can be either positive and affirming, or negative and destructive. In particular, the *connectedness* of global culture and the possibilities opened up through new *technology* can arguably be seen as positive developments; whilst increased *mobility* and the focus on *youth* are probably best viewed as neutral. In Section 3 we

¹¹ A recent government report claimed that, amongst pensioners who use the Internet, they do so for more hours per week than any other age group: "an average of 42 hours online every month, more than any other age group. Indeed, far from being just a young person's technology, one quarter of all UK Internet users are over 50 and the over-50s account for 30% of total time spent online" (Ofcom 2007).

consider how Christian mission must relate to a world that is increasingly characterised by technology, connectedness, youth, mobility, and transience and is dominated by Western cultural symbols.

Section 3 – Mission and Global Culture

We begin by emphasizing just how important this issue is for Christians as we seek to understand and participate in God's work in the world. As Pocock (2005, 22) says about the broader movement that is globalization, "The dynamics behind [it], its meaning, and its implication for missions need to be understood by everyone involved in living for Christ and making him known in our global context." Globalization and the resulting global culture is the most significant socio-economic and cultural issue of this age; consequently our missiology must come to terms with it. We must heed the warning of Brazilian missiologist Alex Araujo, that "Either we know what it [globalization] is and how to control what it does to us and through us, or we will simply be shaped by it according to its own impersonal forces and agenda" (in Taylor 2000, 58).

3.1 Can Christianity Speak to the Global Culture?

Our first consideration must be whether Christianity can actually speak to the new global culture. That is, does Christianity have sufficient points of contact to be able to communicate with it? The answer must be a firm yes, because as Christians we believe that the Bible is supra-cultural, and that all cultures ultimately come under the higher authority of Scripture. This position can be argued from two points: that, as Creator of the earth, God is above its cultures and calls them into obedience and relationship with Him; and that Scripture, as the revealed Word of God, commands the authority to be heard in all cultures.

To say that the Bible is supra-cultural does not mean that it is not interpreted through cultural lenses (or that it has not been revealed through human culture) but rather that its origin and authority are beyond human culture. Given that Christians bear and hopefully embody God's message of loving salvation, the issue is not whether Christians *can* speak to this global culture, but that they absolutely *must*. In this regard, greater missionary effort could be made in reaching those within global culture (whilst warning against its evils and excesses). The point is made provocatively, and perhaps hyperbolically, by Raschke (2008, 25), who warns that "we all, whether we like it or not, are now going global" and that, in some form, this is "what that obscure first-century sect leader from Palestine truly had in mind."

3.2 How can Christianity Speak to the Global Culture?

Culture itself is a gift from God, a product of the divine gift of creativity. As various missiologists and theologians have noted, the Christian gospel dignifies every culture because each culture is capable of receiving it. The principle here is translatability, not just into a given language but also into any given culture, and the same must be true of global culture. As Escobar (2003, 63) observes, the momentous missionary task "in the coming years will be how to remain first and foremost messengers of Jesus Christ and not just harbingers of the new globalization process."

A number of points are salient here. Just as Christians are instructed to be in the world but not of it (John 17:14-15), it is possible to be operative within the global culture without being defined by it. Indeed, being in some sense 'within' the global culture may give Christians a position from which they can engage its members and share the gospel with them.

On first appearances, the question of how Christianity can speak to the global culture may seem moot, since we have already argued that the gospel is of global translatability and relevance. Its message is universally applicable, since all have sinned and are in need of salvation (Romans 3:23), so the message for the global culture is the same message as for any other. However, even though the message is unchanging, our *form* of communication must be adapted to the specifics of each context. What does this mean in relation to the global culture? To answer this question we pick up on some of the characteristics identified in Section 2 above.

3.2.1 The need for Christians to accept elements of transience

There can be no doubt that long-term relationships provide an excellent platform for sharing the gospel, and it is often reported that most Christian converts have their first contact with the church through the efforts of a friend. Similarly, new Christians need discipling over a long period of time, and this is also a deeply personal process. But it must not be assumed that these are the only avenues through which God will work within a person's life. Rather, God also uses short-term and even fleeting connections. This can be understood through two biblical examples. Philip had a profound encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), in the space of just a few hours – during which time Philip demonstrated how to interpret Scripture; "told him the good news about Jesus" (v.35); and baptised him. The Ethiopian's subsequent discipling and spiritual growth were left in God's hands.

Secondly, the gospels show Jesus as having many short encounters which had life-changing significance for those who met Him, including the centurion in Capernaum (Luke 7), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), the paralytic healed by Jesus (Matthew 9), the sick woman healed by Jesus (Mark 5) and many others. Perhaps the point here is that, today as ever, even brief encounters can witness to God's love and saving grace. Within the global culture, people still have a small number of close friends; the difference from previous generations is the number of low-level or 'transient' relationships that people have: it is not unusual to have several hundred contacts in one's email address book. Global culture provides the possibility of a higher number of short interactions with others, and these are all opportunities to share the gospel. Short needn't always be shallow! We must not be too critical of the transience of global culture, though we should never allow all of our relationships to be this way.

3.2.2 The opportunity for Christians to utilise technology for the sake of the gospel and to increasingly connect with others

The Internet has dramatically reconfigured how people access and share information, in a way that is almost unparalleled in human history. Perhaps the only comparable innovation was that of the printing press, invented by Johannes Gutenberg circa 1455. This made possible the widespread dissemination of knowledge, and it is worth noting that his major

work was the Gutenberg Bible, and that other early books of the second half of the fifteenth century ('incunabula') included prayer books, as well as religious poems and calendars. This demonstrates how Christians can utilise technology not merely to share information but even to reform people's worldview.

Technology such as the Internet (especially in its mobile forms) will be of even greater importance in the future. Already there is a generation of young adults who since their adolescence have known nothing else. Whilst the Internet was initially about retrieving and sharing information, it is increasingly about sharing *experiences*. As processing power and broadband speeds increase and the cost of connectivity falls, webcams and video phones will replace telephones throughout the global culture. Already, millions of teenagers share their thoughts, compositions and experiences on websites such as YouTube, Viddler and Vimeo. There are already 11,000 short videos tagged "mission trip" on YouTube and 130,000 related to "worship."¹² This is the very tip of the iceberg. The church must embrace not just the Internet, email and blogs (all somewhat textual and static) but the multimedia-rich Web 2.0, taking advantage of such innovations as vlogs, VoIP, live video feeds and webinars.¹³ This may well seem alien territory but the principles of contextualisation require our familiarity with such technology if we are to communicate with the global culture.

3.2.3 *The need for Christians to confront and moderate the excesses of consumerism*

Whilst this paper has found certain positive or neutral aspects of global culture, in Section 2 above we expressed deep concern about the imposition of the values and symbols of Western consumerism upon the rest of the world. Christians must demonstrate that it is possible to remain, in some sense, within global culture – accepting the opportunities presented by technology, connectedness, mobility and transience – without developing an infatuation with money, products, brands or status symbols. Choosing and purchasing products from around the globe can be based on principles of fair trade and social justice, and not merely on price or popularity.

In addition to traditional church teaching on the dangers of the love of money,¹⁴ the missional church must carry two specific messages to this aspect of the global culture. Firstly, that of *authenticity*, in that God is the ultimate reality, whereas brands are artificial and temporary constructs, of no intrinsic value: their worth actually depends on man's favour and man's interest. And secondly, that of *allegiance*. It needs to be explained that having loyalty to a brand is an empty notion, since a brand cannot have loyalty in return. Allegiances are truly meaningful only when they express a relationship. Hence to be a Christian is to enter into an identity (in these terms, 'wear a brand') much more profound because it is with a person, Jesus, and it is mutual and reciprocal.

¹² As of 24 January 2009, phrases searched at <http://www.youtube.com>.

¹³ Web 2.0 describes the evolved World Wide Web that is more interconnected and interactive. Vlogs are video blogs where users share their thoughts and comments on a wide range of topics. VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) refers to phone calls made over the Internet, via programmes such as Skype or Google Talk. Webinars are seminars conducted over the Internet and hence are a form of video conferencing. Examples of Christian websites beginning to utilise multimedia for missionary purposes include www.allelon.org and www.sgmlifewords.com.

¹⁴ See, for example, 1 Timothy 6:3-10 and James 5:1-6.

3.2.4 *The opportunity for Christians to embrace mobility and explore more liquid identities*

Christians of many generations have quite rightly understood themselves as rooted in Christ, the eternally dependable One. A song written twenty years expresses this sentiment beautifully:

Faithful One, so unchanging,
Ageless One, You're my Rock of peace.
Lord of all, I depend on You,
I call out to You again and again.
I call out to You again and again.
You are my rock in times of trouble.
You lift me up when I fall down.
All through the storm Your love is the anchor,
My hope is in You alone.
(Brian Doerksen, ©1989 Mercy/Vineyard)

But perhaps there is a sense in which we have confused our rootedness in Christ with a *physical*, even *geographical*, rootedness. Yet the God who led the Israelites into their promised land was also with them on their wanderings. After all, God “does not live in houses made by men” (Acts 7:48) but is ruler of the whole world and present in all of it.

For the new global culture we need to reinvigorate the symbols and images with which we speak of God and our relationship with Him. Just as liberation theologians have described God as the Liberator (from oppression, injustice and sin), we must speak about God to the global culture. And how shall we speak of our relationship with Him? For a mobile global culture, perhaps we are, like the disciples, journeying to Jerusalem with Jesus. Perhaps we are the sheep of the good shepherd, being led to pastures new. Or perhaps we are following the star to find Jesus, travelling to new lands and not really knowing what to expect there. There must be an effort of imagination as well as theology.

3.3 *What Shall be the Place of Local Culture?*

As has always been the case, individuals will remain situated in a local culture, and for the majority of people around the world this will continue to be their primary source of identity. What is increasingly evident, however, is that people are simultaneously located on a spectrum of proximity to global culture: some (including Christians) participate deeply in this parallel culture; others have little relation to it. This concept of parallel or dual cultural identities is the logical result of globalization, and sometimes these two forms of identity fuse together to create a hybrid, *glocalised* identity.¹⁵

This demonstrates that there are different possibilities when cultures (or cultural identities) meet: new, hybrid cultural forms may develop; cultures may co-exist and share mutually; or, more worryingly, one may dominate the other.¹⁶ One of the key responsibilities of 21st century missionaries (and, indeed, all Christians) will be to help mediate the interaction between local cultures and the arrival of global culture. This must involve recognition that cultures are dynamic rather than fixed entities, and that helping to preserve the distinctives of

¹⁵ One missiologist who finds evidence of glocalization is Richard Tiplady, who defines the process as “the way in which ideas and structures that circulate globally are adapted and changed by local realities” (2003a, 21).

¹⁶ Held (1999, 330) characterises different types of cultural encounter as homogenization, contestation, hybridization and indifference.

a culture is more than a process of mummification or petrification. Another pitfall to be avoided is that of Westerners taking the dominant role in determining precisely which distinctives define a culture and should be protected, which is effectively paternalism in new clothes.

With regard to local forms of Christianity within cultures, there is a similar requirement: outright Westernization or Americanization of local churches must be intensely resisted. Instead, we must encourage fruitful forms of hybridization, mutual learning and co-existence between local and global church cultures.¹⁷ There is no contradiction between being a member of a local church and being part of God's global church, described by Paul as the body of Christ (Colossians 1:24).

Globalization is a flawed economic process that is leading to profound inequalities around the world, yet sometimes it leads to (albeit unintended) positive outcomes. One such effect has been to open the possibility of drawing together countless local and national churches around the world. As an Englishman living in Moldova I attended a church service where the congregation prayed for the persecuted church in Eritrea, India, Uzbekistan and elsewhere, and there is a growing sense that different parts of the 'body of Christ' are becoming attuned to each other, and becoming more aware of God's work on a planetary level.

To this author, the dual situation of identity within local culture and global culture seems to be a step closer towards God's ideal of humanity worshipping Him together, drawn from every tribe and nation (Revelation 7:9-10).¹⁸

3.4 What then of our Missiology? Some Future Directions

The implication of all of the above is that new forms of missiology are required, enabling Christians to speak to those within the new global culture, as well as those adversely affected by it. In part this will be a process of theological reflection; in part it will be developed on the mission field; always it must be attuned to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As described in section 3.2.4 above, one result of this reflection should be (re)new(ed) images of our relationship with God, as well as new language. Tom Sine (2003, 3) challenges Christian leaders to "take the future more seriously" and it is worth asking whether missiologists are thinking with an adequate time horizon.¹⁹ We conclude this section by posing some questions intended to stimulate missiological thought about the new global era stretching out before us.

With more than half the world's population living in cities, is the church offering either an urban theology, or indeed a theology for global culture? Are mission training institutions prepared to offer cross-cultural training into the global culture? – which is, after all, part of

¹⁷ Johnson and Chung (2004, 177) note that "global Christianity today is a phenomenon, not of uniformity, but of ever-increasing diversity." Much of this diversity will come not just from there being multiple centres of Christianity, but multiple interactions between them.

¹⁸ In a precursor to that great day, did not those worshipping together at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41) "from every nation under heaven" (v.5) return home to their local cultures also bearing a new, globalised identity?

¹⁹ Even amongst those inclined to think missiologically about the future, their cultural framework acts as an inhibitor: Jenkins (2002, 5) says that, especially in America, "most visions of the coming century are based firmly on extrapolating familiar domestic conditions. The imagined future looks a lot like the American present."

God's harvest field into which workers must be sent (Matthew 9:35-38). Are missiologists capable of developing new models of mission which recognise the greater mobility – yet greater connectedness – of those in the global culture? How will Christianity remain a 'religion of the book' in a world increasingly defined by interactivity and experience? Can Christians offer solutions to the philosophical as well as the social problems considered significant by the new global culture? And, in an age seemingly characterised by cultural homogenisation, can the world church demonstrate the possibility of cultural diversity and plurality within one united body?

Conclusion

This essay has been written more from a perspective *within* global culture than without, and more focus has been placed on how mission should be conducted to those similarly situated. We have seen that global culture is an imperfect – fallen – thing but it is not entirely evil. In Pocock's words, "Globalization is not the antichrist" (2005, 44). Globalization has made possible the sharing of the gospel in more ways, to more people. By disaggregating global culture into six key aspects, we saw that it consists of much more than the global spread of consumerism, and that some of these aspects are either positive or at least neutral in relation to the kingdom of God.

As Christians we must not surrender our hearts and souls to any culture, and global culture is no exception. Our call is to live lives for Christ in whatever context we are located, and many Christians today find themselves working from within the global culture. This is a position from which they may be considered well placed to reach out to other 'global citizens', and from which they have new opportunities to share the gospel. This may well involve the shedding of old certainties, models and symbols but a gospel contextualised into the global culture will find new ones. Christians – and especially missionaries – with identities in both global and local cultures are ideally placed to help mediate between the two, aware as they are that our God is both cosmic and personal, with plans for each locality as well as for the whole world.

Christopher Ducker

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