

# Shaping a Global Theological Mind

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**ASHGATE**

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## Chapter 1

# Living in a Global World and in a Global *Theological* World

Darren C. Marks

It has become almost too trite to speak of living in a global world. As in many other slogans of the *Zeitgeist*, the meaning is both clear and unclear. It is clear that living in a global world means that persons, things and ideas are now easily mobile and thus one is aware of analogues with, differences from, and so forth in places other than 'here'. For some this means that living in a global world is a phenomenon of a largely disposable, multi-complex, and inter-related historical place of 'now'. For others, it is about finding a buttress or fortress in the sea of changes caused by a 'them' whose consumption, presumption and assumption of power is an inevitable juggernaut. Whatever 'global' means, it rides the coattails of a long sixteenth century of Western modernity and scholars, usually sociologists (for they are the last of the truly grand systematizers/metaphysicians allowed in the *wissenschaftliche* academy), offering competing visions of this new borderless world.

Perhaps the most common definition of 'global' is actually a misconstrual of the term, being 'globalization'. Globalization, given its best articulation by the political theorist Francis Fukuyama,<sup>1</sup> is the economic reality of the free market arising out of the European seventeenth-century and the rise of capitalism.<sup>2</sup> It is the true triumph of the free Cartesian/Kantian West, namely a choice on whether one drinks 'Coca-cola' or 'Pepsi', complete with the moral arguments for why one should or shouldn't. The argument is that the market in its desire to provide choice, and here what is really meant is a 'dis-embedding' of human need from the local, necessarily created a new abstract space from which now local-global actors do business. It is an abstract space in that globalized agents – law, governance bodies – or the 'experts' are everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Take, for example, any trade organization – it clearly has a 'headquarters' but is also enacted in all locations. It may have traders in, and all working under, a common charter but with applications or amendments configured by the local situation. This 'glocalization'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Penguin, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (Beacon, [1944]2001) remains the best analysis of the free market and its dis-embedding of economics from the local to the abstract international.

<sup>3</sup> A term employed by Frank Lechner and John Boli to reflect the constructive and reflexive rather than determinative and merely reactive nature of global culture on local

is a nexus of determination and cooperation between the abstract centre and realized points on the circle. In any event, globalization is understood in the economic sense as the abuse of the new ‘nation-states’ of international corporations. However, there is another dimension to this globalization and abstract space. Just as the older nation-states, as in Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651), treated all subjects (and places) as a uniform Euclidean world regardless of difference (if only for the purposes of taxation), the multinational corporation acts likewise, treating all peoples and places as the same. The global world for the multinational corporation, according to John Law and John Urry,<sup>4</sup> is the largest abstract Euclidean container ever imaginable – it treats everyone the same, at least in terms of the corporate goals, and offers the choice to opt into the program as it were. This choice is ironically called the ‘golden straitjacket’.<sup>5</sup>

Anthony Giddens extends this idea more fully when he argued that globalization is actually the world phenomenon of Western modernity extended to the remainder of the world.<sup>6</sup> Giddens predicted that the response of such a mode of cultural and economic imperialism would be a series of defensive reactions or fundamentalisms. In particular, as in the work of Samuel Huntington and others,<sup>7</sup> those cultures which are especially impervious to Western modern ideas of deliberative, rational and disembodied public spheres as an extension of the self (see, for example, J.J. Rousseau) are going to be hotspots of dissent. ‘Embattled traditions’, ‘fundamentalisms’ are then to be expected in the runaway world of the Western juggernaut. Of course, this includes the usual suspects, rife with Said’s Orientalism, of so-called pre-modern or ‘axial’ societies connected with Islam or those groups bearing general uncertainty or anxiety in and towards the West. Utilizing Jaspers’ motif of modernity as a new axial age – an age in which there is a threat of collapse of the old order<sup>8</sup> – theorists can connect fundamentalisms in the Islamic non-Western world with Western fundamentalists in that both are reacting to change and both harken to a pre-cataclysmic vision of order in their traditions. In an axial age such as ours, the traditional ‘order of things’ is represented by a new theocratic aristocracy of priests and mediators.<sup>9</sup> This ontotheological abuse is the rise of fundamentalisms or religious extremists. Religion, in the Marxist-sense, functions to sooth the rumblings of modernity and market but does so in a naïve, retrograde and repressive manner. Of course, what is operative is the tacit assumption that whatever modernity *is*, it is essentially correct and the equally tacit idea that eventually the rest of the world will come of age and embrace the same movements, including the religiously-inclined. The global world is then a series of dialogues or interactions with a dominant centre and defensive or reactive margins that reject, modify or succumb according to the author.

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bodies. See, their *World Culture: Origins and Consequences* (Blackwell, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> J. Law and J. Urry, ‘Enacting the Social’, *Economy and Society* 2004, 33(3): 399.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (Farrar, 1999), p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the remaking of World Order* (Simon and Schuster, 1996); N. Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance* (Holt, 2003); and R. Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (Sage, 1992) are but a few of this ilk.

<sup>8</sup> K. Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (Yale University Press, 1953).

<sup>9</sup> S. Eisenstadt, *The Origin and Diversity of Axial-Age Civilizations* (SUNY, 1986).

In this instance of dominant centre and reactive margins many consider that what is occurring is exactly a rehearsal of old modes replaced by new actors in the network. Instead of abstract and (apparently) uniform intentional actors in nation-states, a globalized world has new and equally abstract and (apparently) uniform actors in corporations, NGOs, and associations or ‘denominations’/networks. This shift occurs in multiple ways, on new ‘landscapes’ (or rather vast vistas) of ethnicity, finance, media, technology and finally ideology.<sup>10</sup> Each of these interpenetrate the others and like the ‘butterfly effect’ of quantum mechanics, a shift in one alters the others so that the old order, birthed in modernity, is by-passed, weakened and altered by the far-away, near and complex.<sup>11</sup> The modern reflective autarkic monadic culture (although it never really existed) is displaced by the reflexive combinard *bricolage* postmodern ‘scapes. The world-machine is less and less sensible, functioning in an imagined community, and expects that this fluid container hold all of the waves of as many voices and ‘scapes as possible. Of course, this means a new and almost by definition ahierarchical authority structure must be the new global agent(s). It is not ‘there’ or even ‘here and now’; nor is it a visible body with representational authority that is the engine in a globalized world. Instead, before a ‘we’ creating a ‘here’ positing a ‘now’ and selecting a ‘there’; what exists in the globalized world is the great *theological* conundrum – an ‘I’ living in isolation from God and thus from humanity and creation.

Thus, in a very real sense, the globalized world is treated as a collection of de-subjectivized, incoherent ‘I’s’ and this reality stumbles into our collective experience while we try to raise the dead in a myriad of ‘Zombie categories’ in order to order the an-archic ‘I’.<sup>12</sup> And so, theory-in-hand, new battlegrounds are envisioned for the global world: ideological in terms of materialism, racism, sexism and nationalism, and ontological or institutionalist in terms of formal representative bodies as the only legitimate actors.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the world-culture is a grand museum from which the local is able to select and organize the various exhibits which is useful to it. However, and centrally, there is again a *theological* problem in such a conception of the world regardless of how optimistic (and most remain pessimistic) this kind of transposition or interaction can be. Connecting the ideological and the institutional, however that latter category is conceived, is the invisible *educational*. Institutions run, as Immanuel Wallenstein correctly hits upon in every one of his texts, on the fuel of ideas, commitments, values, and these are ‘taught’ in the execution of culture. Just as, he points out, one needs a ‘French Revolution’ to centrist Liberalism in order to have a capitalist system, so the market (our great educator) teaches in all its myriad ways that this is the normative vista of human life. This is education, formally and

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<sup>10</sup> A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (University of Minneapolis Press, 1996). Also see Peter Berger’s ‘faces’ in market, faculty-club of liberalism, pop-culture and religious faces in his ‘Four Faces of Global Culture’, *National Interest* 49 (1997): 23–9.

<sup>11</sup> M. Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Blackwell, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> There is no better thinker on this point that Ulrich Beck. See his *Individualization* (Sage, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> See Lechner and Boli’s analysis in *World Culture* pp. 29–60.

informally in the 'scapes of technology, media and even in order to simply exist (cf. Rev 13:17). John Meyer argues in his work<sup>14</sup> that the formal systems, actual educational institutes (in complete concordance with the initial Western desire to educate for good *peaceable/conforming* citizens) are the most important place of enculturation or rejection. In educational structures – a real ontological entity with its own life and rules etc. – occur the attempts for global peaceable citizenship with its assumption of isomorphism while giving lip-service to exomorphism.

So what then is the *theological* problem in the global world? I intimated two in the preceding paragraphs, but there are many more and many of these are themes recurrent in the essays of the theologians and Christian leaders/thinkers that follow. Clearly the two easiest, if I have argued well, are the tacit stresses on the 'I' before a 'We' and the competition of a new idol to God in capitalism and its near cousin of progressive liberalism reinforced informally in the 'scapes of technology/media and formally taught in the educational institutions of the world, underpinned by the desire of the governments to have *peaceable/conforming* citizens. In the case of the former, the Christian Church, transtemporally and translocally, is not an 'I' (or at least that 'I' is Christ) but always a 'We'. In the case of the latter, not only does it mean that much of the global Christian is in a virulent and necessary denouncement of an idol, but also that the global Christian is in a virulent and necessary denouncement of its mouthpiece – literally Balaam's ass for many – of *theological education* which imposed, imposes and silences in favor of the idol. This not only rejects the assumptions and method(s) of largely Western Protestant theology and spirituality, but also church organization, experiences (spirituality) and even to the secular itself. Global Christians, I repeatedly need to point out to my students, are not exactly enamored with their governments and tend to be suspicious of them and often heroic in opposition. Even in the West, for example, Christians ought to be creation-centered, and this 'green' space is clearly against industry and government. Further, Global Christians tend to 'find God' in their mission and often in ways that fit poorly or create anxiety for their Western counterparts whether they be of the 'John Hick' or 'Jerry Falwell' brand. Why, as Philip Jenkins points out so cogently,<sup>15</sup> they even have the audacity to read the Bible differently!

### **Overcoming Globalization: A Theological Proposal**

The essays in this book are all, in their own ways, about overcoming globalization in the sense outlined above. What they ask for and engage in are two major critiques and with several developments, although one needs to be careful to equate development with novelty for it may be both a rehearsal of something older in the Christian tradition and a new dialogue with another religion, culture or even need. We must remember

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<sup>14</sup> Like Wallenstein, he is prolific on a central point on the exportation of a Western mode of education writ large as normative in order to promulgate ideology. Among his more important works is *School Knowledge for the Masses: World Models and National Curricula in the Twentieth Century* (Falmer, 1992) with D. Kamens and A. Benavot.

<sup>15</sup> See his *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

that Christianity, despite Jasper's 'axial age model', was born in a dialogue with Judaism, itself in dialogue with ancient near eastern religions, and then spread by engaging the multifaceted Hellenistic and Roman worlds, eventually spreading into the frontiers of Europe and Asia with their unique cultural combinations. In short, there has never been an unambiguous Christian place. Christianity, or Christians living out their theology, has always been a theological Creole from Jesus to the present day. But this engaged nature is not the same as declaring it without a centre or without an origin, for God is the centre and origin of the Church.

The first theological critique is what I identify as a critique of modernity and specifically modernity's twins in market-capitalism and liberalism (or neo-liberalism and liberalism as some like to call them). The global theological account has to address Western modernity's basic categories, categories which treat people as products or consumers, creation as an expendable resource and culture as a battleground of colonial or imperialist ideology. Global theologians ask the question of this *anthropological and creation impoverishment*, or how it is possible to speak of God to a world made scarcely human(e) because of the imposition of an idol in Western Imperialism and all its legacies. This involves a recasting of many of modernity's precious icons – namely the autonomous and reflective self ('I') as the arbitrator of reality and Western culture's preoccupation with the individual as critical, essential and normative. In the multiplex of the global Christian, such decisions and preoccupations are the root of much of what impacts, on a daily level, the lives of countless people, destroys creation and marginalizes culture. The theological question to be asked is not merely how did we get here (and there are a myriad suggestions from scholars) but more importantly to ask how idolatrous, God-forsaken, such assumptions are and what in the Christian theological toolbox can be used in order to recognize 'the other'. One dominant theme in the global theological toolbox is pneumatology. If one aspect, but not the *only* aspect, of pneumatology is the recognition of the Spirit in another or culture or place, then the profound proliferation of pneumatology as a, if not *the*, theological category is to be expected in global theology and so it is in reality. Global theologies are highly interested in the Spirit because in pneumatology there is a promise of finding God's fore-coming for mission and disclosure for critique with its assumption of unity in Spirit. This is nothing short of *contextual theology*, making explicit the Gospel mission for this people here and now. Thus, in the essays that follow we see scholars engaged with essential questions of critique but mainly from the perspective of promise and hope, the fruit of the Spirit, and a confidence that such a hope can indeed be manifest when Christians indeed live in their witness. Of course, it must also be said that Congar's slogan 'no Christology without pneumatology, no pneumatology with Christology' demands pneumatology be rooted in Christological and Trinitarian framing lest it become a kind of process Spirit. Global theologians may name this differently – adaptionism, incarnationalism or translation – but it is a response to the 'Yes' of God for an identity that works God's purposes for that people.

But this leads to another critique found in the essays, and again intimated in the preceding paragraphs, but not unrelated to the proliferation of pneumatology as a theological concern. This is a theological critique of Western theological training and assumptions which, as amply demonstrated, are full of Imperialism, Orientalism

and suffer from a preoccupation on abstract epistemological or existential axes. The history of why theological thought and training has undergone this alteration is well-traveled ground in Western scholarship and the general consensus is that Christian theology and education have suffered a double complex. In the first instance, Christian theology, as famously argued by the ‘Crisis’ theologians, has far too often been more interested in an apologia to the Western *wissenschaftliche* academy and now that the academy itself is revealed to be as biased as that which it claimed to rescue, the crisis theologians seem more correct than ever in their assessment. But, perhaps more insidious is the ‘professionalization’ of clergy and the role theologians have readily taken to assist that performance. As most ably argued by Edward Farley throughout the late twentieth-century, but largely falling on deaf ears, theological education in the Western context is divorced from congregational life.<sup>16</sup> Clergy and faculty largely work in isolation, refusing to connect, except in abstract and culturally-driven manners, to the challenges facing Western Christians. When the practical and theoretical do intersect, often the difference between the surrounding culture and the Church is so negligible that it is hard to think other than that a backwards institution is indeed catching up, maturing or even finally accommodating to the modern world. Clergy look like social workers, speak a pop psychology and more to the point, as raised in the following essays, act as agents of the culture because they, and the Church itself, is not so different after all. However, as the global essays remind us, is the Church the same as its leadership? What is observed in the global theological situation is that the Church is the work of the Spirit and it is the *people* of God who *as a people* are asked by the Spirit to ask some ‘dangerous perhapses’ to their culture – on poverty, justice, equality and so forth. This is not merely that the global situation often has a different starting point from the Western situation, in which it is tacitly assumed that Western culture and Christian life are wholly compatible, that the ‘city of God’ and ‘city of man’ are form and shadow because of the idol of the freedom of religion. No, that is not at all what is observed; instead there is a willingness to do a truly theological account of reality in the global situation. True, more often than not the state and culture are neutral or hostile to Christian perspectives, but it is also that Christian theology is tethered not only to praxis (a misused term if ever there was one) but to the life of the people of God.

What can be observed in the essays that follow is not a form of fideism or naiveté but rather a theological account of reality that starts from more concrete embodied theologies. Be it ‘water-buffalo theology’, ‘shade-tree theology’, ‘*lo cotidiano* theology’ or ‘anti-apartheid theology’, most global theologians have opted to start from a different place than an abstract ‘possibility of talk of God’ or what Eberhardt Jüngel calls the initiation of the ‘unthinkability of God’ (not to be confused with *Nachdenken*). They instead embrace a theology which starts from the concrete and everyday with the expectation of hope therein. Given that the seminary in the West is more concerned with the ‘professionalization’ of clergy – giving them a position analogous (but far worse in training) to glorified social workers or life coaches – and that the theological academy is concerned with justifying itself as *wissenschaftliche*,

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<sup>16</sup> See, Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Fortress, 1983).

it is no wonder that global theologians think seminary and academy as exported both irrelevant. Education, as it stands in the Western academy, is viewed with some suspicion for it severs the people of God from the necessity of Christian life this day. And this, of course, does not even take into account that the actual physical structure/time and academic prerequisites of theological training itself may not be easily transferable.

There is no more powerful example of this than the use of the Bible in global theology. Global theologians use the Bible in an astoundingly, at least for the Western practitioner, simplistic manner. They ‘proof-text’ ideas, ask grandmothers, women and common, usually poor, folk what a text means and are not at all interested in the historical forms that influence so much Western study. As Andrés Guerrero argues in his essay in this volume, there is the assumption of a different kind of intelligence and understanding, one sharpened by the skills of living in *this* place so that to speak of God in *this* place requires, by definition, reading the Bible *as this* person or this community. Likewise, texts become a communal phenomenon or *Wirkungsgeschichte* – evaluated not as *Lebenspraxis* in the Protestant sense as what is important to me and then to others by extension – but rather as ‘wild spaces’ (borrowing from McFague) that grab the community and direct it to its theological life and mission (see, for example, Sugirtharajah’s essay). Those ‘wild spaces’ are not the individualized reading of the Bible and interiority associated with Western Christianity and its analogues in the choosing of a ‘like’ congregation, but instead involve an ecclesiological reading. Engaging in ecclesiological reading is a curious idea for Westerners and, in particular, for Western-trained scholars and clergy in that one basic assumption is that the Church is indeed *permixtum* not in the sense of saint and sinner (although that is indeed true) but in the sense that the Church is trying to sort out its ‘Creolization’ or mission and this indeed will involve error and truth as lived aside ‘traditional religion’ and ‘traditional culture’. This is a communal and ecumenical event. Global theologians read their communities reading the Bible and interacting with Christian traditions given to them in their missionary past ancient and near.

### **The Challenges of Global Theology**

If my sense is correct that global theology has two primary theological tasks in pneumatology and missiology, then it follows that both of these areas are places of challenge. In terms of pneumatology, the above reference to Congar is critical as global theology seeks to ask how the Spirit in its midst is indeed the Spirit of Christ rather than the Spirit of the ‘Age’ (1 Cor 2:6). It is often declared that the West needs the global South, but this is too strong as the global South also needs the West, not to correct or instruct *per se*, but to dialogue with. Karl Barth remarked in his work on (largely) liberal Protestantism which he rejected so strongly: ‘God is the Lord of the Church. He is also the Lord of theology. We cannot anticipate which of our fellow-workers from the past are welcome in our work and which are not . . . . We are *with*

them in the Church.’<sup>17</sup> The future of pneumatology is a future of both ‘faces’ of the Church and thus is to be ‘ecumenical’ in terms of tradition and location.

Related, and subsistent in the above, is a missiology that turns more to an ecclesiology rather than a social scientific account of religious pluralism or identity. Global theologians may, in their haste to leave the epistemological and philosophical behind, pick up another ‘Western’ idol in the social sciences as the means to analyze mission and content. It seems not enough to be ever ‘reforming’ its mission but global theology must also be conscious of developing an ‘ecclesiology’ from that mission so as not to reduce the Church to another manifestation of human ideals. This, I think, introduces two more important challenges. The first is to develop an eschatology or sense of hope in their witness that is clearly different from liberative praxis associated with Marxism or other Western ‘isms’ in that orbit.<sup>18</sup> If Hans Urs von Balthasar is indeed correct that eschatology, Christian hope, is indeed the storm front of theological investigation in that it declares *who* and *what* God is for, then it seems prudent to ask global theologians to develop in this direction.<sup>19</sup> The second challenge in helping move from a missiology to an ecclesiology is to consider, particularly in more Protestant-flavored theologies, exactly a theology of Scripture which is, in fact, a theology itself. This involves, as Gerhard Sauter argues, a ‘faithfulness to Scripture and not a Scripture principle’ and is a truly important theological work to be done.<sup>20</sup> What this can bring to fruition is the avoidance of that which global theologies recognize so clearly in the Western imposition on them – a translation of Scripture merely along cultural norms so that God’s ‘making present’ is actually cultural reinforcement. Of course, for more sacramental traditions, there is work to be done in a like manner. What I am arguing is simple: while mission is the lifeblood of the Church, it is still true that the Church fulfills mission, and thus it falls to global theologians to work towards a theology of the Church in its fullest possible expression as this will prove the fruit of the mission itself.

The promise of global theology, at least in my reading and understanding, is its hope that God is indeed active in the world and that the Church is invited, in divine freedom and mystery, to participate in witnessing to that event of hope – ‘He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus’ (Rev 22:20).

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<sup>17</sup> Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: New Edition* (trans. B. Cozans) (Eerdmans, 2002) pp. 3 and 10.

<sup>18</sup> This has already been undertaken by Jose Miguez Bonino, *Christians and Marxists: The Mutual Challenge to Revolution* (Eerdmans, 1976) but more work is needed.

<sup>19</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘*Eschatologie*’ in (eds. J. Feiner et al.), *Fragen der Theologie heute* (Benziger, 1957) pp. 403–21.

<sup>20</sup> See Sauter’s *Gateways to Dogmatics: Reasoning Theological for the Life of the Church* (Eerdmans, 2003) pp. 211–28.

## Chapter 4

# The Missionary Enterprise in Cross-Cultural Perspective: With Particular Focus on Madagascar

Carl E. Braaten

### **Introduction: A Personal Odyssey**

My interest in the theme of this book stems from my childhood experience of growing up a son of Lutheran missionaries in Madagascar – an island off the southeast coast of Africa with a totally different culture and one of the poorest and most primitive places in the world. My father and mother, Torstein Folkvard and Clara Agnes Braaten, were called and sent to serve as foreign missionaries by the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. I was a year old when I arrived in Madagascar in 1930 and seventeen when I left for the United States in 1946. Twenty-eight years later I returned to Madagascar, accompanied by my wife LaVonne. I was undertaking a year-long sabbatical project to visit mission fields and to speak at seminaries in various parts of the world – Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, India, Kenya, Tanzania, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. Its purpose was to reflect on the question whether the missionary enterprise carried out by European and American Christianity – Protestant and Catholic – was a success or failure.

Why should that even be a question? It had become commonplace in the academic community to criticize the missionary enterprise as an accompaniment of Western colonial exploitation, cultural supremacy, and imperial expansionism. The missionary movement was held up to ridicule, expressed in an often-quoted pithy statement by an African leader: ‘When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, “Let us pray.” We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.’ Popular movies like *Hawaii* portrayed missionaries in a very negative light. Two other developments contributed to such hyper-critical views of missions. By 1970 African Churches were calling for a missionary moratorium and in response the mainline churches slashed their support for missions in terms of money and personnel. In Europe and North America (e.g., John Hick and Paul Knitter) the pluralistic theory that holds that all religions are more or less equal, pray to the same God, and receive the same salvation was no longer merely an academic proposition but was becoming operational policy of mission boards. Why missions, if they are no longer wanted or needed?

My trip to Madagascar in 1974 confirmed that the deepest roots of my faith and outlook were embedded in the missionary experience of going with the Gospel to

people who have never heard, so that they might believe and be baptized into the body of Christ. The Christian life is a pilgrimage! The missionaries were not on a metaphorical pilgrimage; they experienced literally what it meant to be pilgrims, to be aliens in a foreign land. As a result of growing up in such a missionary milieu I have found it quite natural to identify with the biblical paradigm of exodus and exile, of being a sojourner in a strange land, of feeling that home lies not here but elsewhere. I was returning now to Madagascar with questions about the entire missionary enterprise to which my parents had devoted their lives.

I discovered on this sabbatical project that, if I had any doubts about the missionary endeavor, they were not in fact very deep, but formed only a thin outer layer of my mind that had during the intervening decades become preoccupied with the problematic(s) of Western academic theology – demythologizing, hermeneutics, etc. Somewhat to my surprise, revisiting my boyhood haunts in south Madagascar felt like a homecoming. There was the same old missionary children’s home and schoolhouse. There we learned the four R’s. The fourth was religion. We studied the Bible, no, we memorized it, lots and lots of it. The Bible was treated not so much as the final authority but as the primal source. I later became grateful that this pietistic community of Evangelical Lutherans never laid on me heavy theories about biblical origins, inspiration, inerrancy, and the like. Our pietistic teachers were not biblical scholars; they could not teach us all about the Bible, only what the Bible was all about. Consequently, I was later spared the anguish of many Lutherans in walking through the fires of biblical criticism. Connected with such a narrow parochial base was the inevitable exposure to other cultures, languages, and religions. Growing up amidst Malagasy, French, Métis, Chinese, Indians, Arabs, Norwegians and Americans proved the making of a global multi-cultural perspective without any special effort on our part.

During the twenty-eight years away from Madagascar I did not spend much time thinking about the worldwide mission of the Church. I was more engaged with the prior question, whether Christianity is true. As a philosophy major in college the question of truth became all-consuming for me. If I could not get over the hump on this question, the relevance of the Christian mission would become moot. At the University of Paris I studied phenomenology (Merleau Ponty) and existentialism (Jean Wahl); at the University of Minnesota I encountered logical positivism in full force (Herbert Feigl); at the University of Heidelberg I wrestled with the issue of demythologizing raised by Rudolf Bultmann; and at the University of Oxford Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Linguistic Analysis were all the rage. What do all these matters of epistemology have to do with my roots of origin on the mission field? Not much! But I could not begin to undertake a theology of the Christian mission until I had first come to terms with what seemed to me the prior matters of theological methodology. As a student of Paul Tillich I was convinced that theology cannot go solo, without dealing with philosophical questions. In fact, I still prefer Tillich’s question and answer way of relating philosophy and theology to its alternatives; philosophy asks the question to which theology provides an answer. What convinced me more than anything else is that this method is best able to pass the praxeological test in the missionary situation.

## Missionary Theology

At the end of my sabbatical travels I wrote my first book on a theology of the Christian mission, which I entitled (1977) *The Flaming Center*. The flaming center of missionary practice is the scriptural witness to Christ. For Lutheran missionaries the hermeneutical principle of biblical interpretation is simply expressed by Luther's phrase 'was Christum treibt.' And for them theology was not a speculative exercise of abstract thought but ongoing reflection at the ground level of missionary praxis. This view of theology was nicely captured in a slogan coined by Martin Kähler: 'Mission is the mother of Christian theology.'<sup>1</sup> This kind of Christocentric theology that the missionaries left behind is now being taught and practiced by native theologians, pastors, evangelists, and catechists.

In this section I will deal with some of the emphases and challenges of the missionary theology typical of the younger churches founded by the missionaries.

Karl Barth and Paul Tillich were my leading theological influences. They placed theology within the context of the Church or the University. Barth put theology at the service of understanding faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*); Tillich gave theology the task of answering the world's questions. The two approaches have proved to be very fruitful in their different ways. But there is a third way, and that is how theology originated in the missionary situation of apostolic Christianity, in the course of spreading the Gospel in obedience to the Great Commission. The New Testament is a book of the missionary writings of the early Christian community. The Church of the apostles was spreading the flame of the Gospel throughout the world, from Jerusalem to the farthest corners of the earth.

For missionary theology the Gospel is the root from which the Church and its theology grow, and without the mission they will bear no fruit. The younger churches in Africa and Madagascar have the missionary idea in their DNA. Just as Western missionaries were sent to them, they are now returning the favor and sending missionaries to the secularized and neo-pagan nations of Western Europe. Philip Jenkins has written about the prospect of churches and Christians in the Global South converting or re-Christianizing the North.<sup>2</sup> It is already happening, but the point is: whereas the older churches of Europe and North America barely pay lip-service to the missionary idea, the younger churches of the Global South have it in their blood, and they got it from the missionaries. For them mission belongs to the essence of Christianity because the Gospel it preaches is a message of salvation rooted in a divine commission. This is a far cry from cultural propaganda or colonial ideology, as the hyper-critics of the missionary enterprise falsely claim. If, as Ernst Troeltsch believed, Christianity in the end is viewed merely as the religion of Europe and America, and not a gospel of divine redemption uniquely and universally valid, there is no good reason why it should enter the battle of the religions, inviting people to place their trust in the Triune God of the Bible and loyalty to the Christian faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Kähler, 'Die Mission - ist sie ein unentbehrlicher Zug am Christentum?' *Schriften zu Christologie und Mission* (Kaiser Verlag, 1971), p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 204-9.

The Bible is the chief and almost the only document used by the Protestant missionaries in Madagascar, and the same could be said for other mission fields in Africa and Asia. The Bible was the first book translated into the Malagasy language by the British missionaries in the nineteenth-century. Soon after there followed a book of worship and hymns in the native language. Lutheran missionaries translated Luther's *Small Catechism* for the instruction of pastors and catechists, and that was about it. Not much of a theological library. The missionaries, of course, brought their own favorite devotional books, biblical commentaries, and dogmatic texts that they had used in seminary, and these supplied the Christian substance of what they transmitted to the Malagasy people. As theology it amounted to second and third generation Lutheran Pietism, which originated in the Awakening Movements that swept across Europe in the late nineteenth-century and from there made its way with the immigrants to America. They brought with them a Bible, a hymn book, and Luther's *Small Catechism*.

After the missionaries left the island, all theological instruction in the Malagasy Lutheran Church, its seminaries, and Bible schools was eventually taken over by indigenous pastors and teachers of Bible and doctrine, some of whom had gone abroad for postgraduate studies in theology. Now that the Malagasy teachers are free to read the Bible with their own eyes, unconstrained by the 'commonsense realism' of the missionaries, a whole new outlook is beginning to emerge. Although the missionaries were Pietists, they received their education in post-Enlightenment institutions of higher learning. This means that willy-nilly they were inoculated to some degree by Western Rationalism with its roots in ancient Greece (Plato and Aristotle). It is difficult to exaggerate the combined impact on the Western mind, no matter what one's ethnic or religious identity, of the seismic movements of Hellenization, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the rise of modern science.

Missionaries were not exempt from these various influences as to how they read and interpreted the Bible. Although the Bible is rife with stories about dreams and visions, prophecies and speaking in tongues, exorcisms and miracles, demons and evil spirits, sacrifices and offerings, the missionaries at that time were not into any of those things.<sup>3</sup> They did not drive out demons, they did not perform miracles of healing, and they did not speak in tongues. They spoke many languages but not in tongues; they practiced the arts of healing but according to the methods of modern medicine. But the Malagasy people are culturally disposed to believing and practicing the very things the missionaries neglected. After all, even the witch doctors were exorcists and healers. Malagasy Christians feel like they are virtual contemporaries of the biblical personalities and don't ask for a lot of fancy hermeneutics to take the biblical accounts literally. They love the Old Testament in particular, because there are many points of convergence between the ancient Hebrew culture and traditional Malagasy culture. The worldview is felt to be similar, and the social, agricultural, and ritual symbols are readily translatable.

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<sup>3</sup> After World War II a number of younger Lutheran missionaries, influenced by the charismatic movement in the United States, arrived in Madagascar predisposed to such phenomena as demon exorcism, speaking in tongues, healing miracles, and the like.

## How to Deal with Syncretism

When the Christian Church is planted in a new culture, the question arises as to whether syncretism is inevitable or how to deal with it. Two observations will help to highlight the problem.<sup>4</sup> The Malagasy Lutheran Church is experiencing a religious revival, due to the evangelistic activity of a lay woman prophetess, whose name is *Nenilava* (Tall Mother). She was born in 1918 of non-Christian parents. Her father was a tribal chief, a famous healer and diviner. At age 10 she began to see visions and hear voices. She married a Lutheran catechist who taught her Luther's *Small Catechism*, and baptized her. She came to believe that Jesus was the voice calling her name. She claimed that Jesus called her to preach the gospel of repentance and forgiveness, to drive out demons from people possessed, and to heal through prayer and the laying on of hands in the name of Jesus. All this without ever having seen how they do it on TV! *Nenilava's* method was to train volunteer lay persons, whom she called shepherds (*Mpiandry*), to accompany her on her travels throughout Madagascar. The response was tremendous. The revival continues after her death, with the shepherds going in pairs from village to village, preaching the biblical story of salvation. She carried on her work within the Lutheran Church, eliciting a mixed reaction from the missionaries. Many were quite baffled by her success in accomplishing what they were less able to do. Driving out demons and speaking in tongues and performing miracles like the apostles of old, those were things experientially strange to the missionaries.

A second observation has to do with the attitudes of Malagasy Christians to a traditional ancestral ceremony of 'turning the dead' (*famadihana*). The Malagasy people venerate their ancestors. They believe the ancestors have the power to affect the welfare of the living for good or bad. Ancestors are believed to be bilingual, with the ability to intermediate between the Supreme Being (*Zanahary*) and the living. The ceremony consists of exhuming the corpses, wrapping them in new shrouds, and replacing them in ancestral tombs. The ceremony lasts two or three days and is conducted at great expense, because the family is required to serve a huge meal for as many as one hundred invited guests. Animals are sacrificed to show respect for the ancestors and to gain their support for better living conditions.

At first all the churches condemned the ceremony and eradicated all traces of ancestral veneration from their worship practices. However, after the Second Vatican Council the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church changed its policy and, in the name of inculturation, incorporated the pagan ceremony into its liturgy, eliminating only those elements clearly in conflict with Catholic dogma. The aim of this shift in policy was to make the Christian faith more relevant to the daily lives of the Malagasy people. In continuity with the missionaries' opposition to syncretism the Malagasy Lutheran Church has not changed its policy and thus has to provide a theological answer to

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<sup>4</sup> For information about *Nenilava's* revival movement and the ancestral ceremony of 'turning the dead,' I am indebted to a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of South Africa by Georges Andrianoelina Razafindrakoto, *Old Testament Texts in Malagasy Contexts: An Analysis of the Use of the Old Testament in Three Religious Contexts in Madagascar* (June 2006).

questions people are asking: If Catholics can do it, why can't we? Don't we have the same Bible? Don't we have the same faith?

The issue raised by such a divergent response to a pagan ritual is: Can a foreign faith be inculcated or contextualized apart from falling into syncretism? Missionaries were allergic to every hint of syncretism. But was not the Christianity they transmitted itself a product of a two-thousand-year process of synthesizing the biblical message with a series of cultural forms – Greek, Roman, Teutonic, Slavic, Nordic, and so forth? Is there any such thing as a pure Gospel without being wrapped in the swaddling clothes of some culture? The Western churches have inculcated or contextualized the Gospel in their way, the African and Asian churches will inevitably do so in their way. The history of Christianity is a laboratory of creative experiments and endless debates on how to relate Christianity and culture, surveyed by H.R. Niebuhr in his classic, *Christ and Culture*.

There is no single model on how to incarnate Christian identity in a particular culture, not in the North, East, West, or South. The churches in Europe and North America are suffering profound internal divisions, some of them dying away, others on the brink of schism. The looming splits have to do with the authority and interpretation of the Bible as well as the role of traditional canons, creeds, confessions, and codes that norm Christian beliefs and practices. Christianity in the Global South will not be spared the trials and troubles that their parent churches in the North are experiencing at the present time, and that the Church has always faced, starting with the early Church councils that had to deal with conflicts arising from its relation to Judaism, Gnosticism, and Mystery Cults. I believe that what the missionaries did was basically right; they provided the new Christians and churches with the elements of the classical Christian faith – the Bible, Creeds, Catechisms, Prayer Books, Sacraments, Liturgies, and Hymnals. These are the reliable resources that have served the churches through the centuries and across the cultures and are available for use by what Philip Jenkins calls 'The Next Christendom,' arising in the Global South. Their reception in Africa and Asia are certainly undergoing transformation under the impact of taking root in cultures other than those from which they arose. Theologians and church leaders are unavoidably involved, as were all their preceding fathers and mothers in the faith, in the struggles for Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy over against rival heresies and heterodoxies. The final test as to whether a belief is Christian is not whether it is African or American, Asian or European, traditional or contemporary, but whether it preaches the Gospel of Christ according to the Scriptures.

### **A Postscript on Theological Education**

The title of this volume, 'Shaping a Global Theological Mind,' can be read as an *indictment* and as an *invitation*, as an *indictment* of the provincial way of teaching theology common in the West and as an *invitation* to structure a curriculum and methodology that promote a universal perspective for a mission-oriented Gospel and Church.

The scientific study of world religions and cultures has become the specialization of university Departments of Religious Studies, whereas church seminaries and divinity schools have traditionally specialized in the various disciplines of Christian theology – biblical studies, church history, dogmatics, and practical theology. The study of other religions and cultures came into play as a subspeciality of missiology, preparing candidates for overseas Christian missionary activity. I think this whole approach is wrong-headed.

When the first Christians conceptualized the faith, they inevitably contrasted it to the religions from which they were converted. Once they were Jews, now they are Christians; once they were believers in Hellenistic mysteries, now they are baptized into the body of Christ. They knew from whence they came and they could not understand their newfound faith except in terms of their former bondage from which Christ delivered them. They understood Christianity by contrast. Their previous religious experience was like living under the burden of the law, from which the Gospel of Christ set them free. The experience of the first Christians – whether Jews, Greeks, or Romans – has been replicated ever since millions of times over, whenever persons of other religions transfer their loyalty from other gods to the God of the Bible. The only ones who believe that all gods point to the same ultimate reality are a handful of post-Christians who teach that all religions are alike and that the evangelistic mission to convert people to Christ is pointless or worse.

The study of non-Christian religions and cultures should become part of the prolegomena of Christian theology, as foundational for the study of the Bible and Christian self-understanding. All religions in some way lay claim to truth and salvation, and such claims should be taken seriously. The Christian belief system should not be elaborated in isolation from competing religious claims and experiences. Apologetic theology is essential in the missionary situation, in order to answer the question whether or to what degree other religions experience the truth and power of the God whom the Bible declares to be the one and only God – Creator and Sustainer of all things. The Bible cannot be understood apart from the knowledge of the other religions existing in ancient times. Furthermore, we cannot understand the history of Christianity without knowing how it assimilated elements of truth (e.g., the idea of *Logos*) that appeared first in other religious traditions. When the missionaries in Madagascar translated the Bible, they used the Malagasy word for the Supreme Being, *Zanahary*, for the Lord God who created all things. They did not bring God to the island; God was already there and the Malagasy already knew some important things about him that the missionaries could and did baptize.

We are calling for an end to a monochromatic teaching of Christianity with reference only to itself. Karl Barth's method of writing church dogmatics that starts and ends with its own interior symbol system does not work in the missionary situation. As a theological method it works well in a situation of apostasy and amnesia, characteristic of much of Western Christianity. That is its great attraction. But once the brackets of Christendom are removed and Christianity finds itself anew in a globalized missionary situation, the factor of competition with other religious claims returns to the fore. The element of competition belongs to the very nature of the First Commandment's 'No Other God' as well as the Great Commission's 'No Other Gospel.' If these exclusive

claims are not explained and defended in dialogue with the competing claims of other religions, the study of Christianity becomes a monologue.

The study of world religions is imperative for Christian theology because it is practically necessary to search for common ground in the missionary situation. The mainstream of classical Christianity, building on what the apostle Paul asserts in *Romans 1*, has always affirmed that there is divine revelation in other religions and that there is truth, goodness, and beauty to be ascertained through dialogue with people of other religions. This was most certainly true of the encounter of the Church Fathers in the ancient Church with the philosophies and religions of Greece and Rome. Call it general revelation or natural theology, the point is that there is knowledge of God through the way things are made ('orders of creation'). The missionaries in Madagascar discovered that the Malagasy people believe in a Super Being who created the world, whom they regard as father, protector, and provider of all things, and who is therefore to be worshipped and revered. He is the almighty judge who punishes evildoers and rewards those who do good. However, not for a moment did any of the missionaries draw the conclusion that such knowledge of God leads to the salvation that Christ achieved through his life, death, and resurrection. As Lutherans they were trained to observe a distinction between 'general revelation' through creation and law and 'special revelation' through Christ and the Gospel.

The proposal I am suggesting for a revision of method in theological education is a *conditio sine qua non* for shaping a global theological mind, one that I believe is essential for the sake of the worldwide Christian mission.