FINDING OUR WAY IN A CHANGING WORLD AND CHURCH

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Introduction

In this second segment, I want us to consider some of the changes of the world and Church today; and how these changes affect our understanding of, and participation in, God's mission. I will trace some (but not all by any means) of the global contours and contexts in which we Christians are called to be faithful as we are "Finding Our Way into Global Mission." I want us to consider specifically: 1) the challenges to Western hegemony, 2) dynamics of globalization, and 3) the New Pentecost of a genuinely worldwide Christian body of Christ. I will argue that these changing contexts (the challenges to Western hegemony, the dynamics of Globalization, and the New Pentecost of world Christianity) have radically altered how we perceive and participate in God's mission in the world today. Understanding these dynamics will help us as we are "Finding Our Way into Global Mission."

Western Hegemony on Shaky Ground

I want us first to consider how the challenges to Western political, economic, cultural and philosophical hegemony, in the world and in the Church, inform the way that we in the West, and particularly we Western Christians, perceive and participate in the mission of God, the *missio Dei*.

The early 20th Century Italian writer, politician and Marxist political theorist Antonio Gramsci wrote extensively on the power of hegemony in the political and cultural spheres. For Granmsci hegemony is the process by which ideas, structures, and cultural norms come to be seen by the majority of people as wholly natural, preordained, and working for their own good. Gramsci argued, however, that such ideas and cultural norms are in fact socially constructed and are maintained and transmitted by those in power to protect their own interests and their dominance in the status quo.[1] In other words, hegemony is the way by which the powerful define the world for their own benefit. And, for the last few centuries anyway, we in the West have profited by the combined hegemonic powers of Western colonialism and Enlightenment philosophy and epistemology.

Now I do not have the time, or even the inclination, to lecture extensively on the history and legacy of Western colonialism (especially as a citizen of the United States visiting here in Canada.) Suffice it to say, however, that in the last three centuries, particularly during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, the Western imperial powers, especially Britain and the United States, were deeply involved in the colonial project as a primary means by which the West asserted its hegemony over most of the world. Through military, economic and political power the Western imperial nations were able to define the world, its lands, and its peoples along their own terms, or shall I say our own terms. While technically called subjects, let us not deny the fact that the colonized were seen much more as objects than as subjects. The colonial project necessitated that the colonizer see the colonized as objects of their intentions, objects to be benignly

civilized, or objects to be less benignly utilized for material and or economic game. (And here I would like to note how we in the United States and Canada treated the First Nations peoples of North America.)

As we are trying to be honest here in seeing colonialism as an expression of Western hegemony, let us not deny the fact that the Church both profited by and participated in the spread of the colonial project. Now I do not want to paint a simplistic image of Western missionaries as unknowing agents of the imperial advance of their home sending countries. That would not be fair to the breath, faithfulness, and plurality of the missionary witness around the world. Any serious student of mission history will find that there are as many different kinds of missionaries with different mission strategies and motives for their service as there are kinds of Christians in the world. While some missionaries functioned, unwittingly or not as agents of colonialism, there were as many missionaries who were deeply dedicated to the people amongst whom they served and vigorously challenged the forces of imperial domination. Suffice it to say, however, that for most Western churches, and for the Anglican Communion in particular, the bulk of our history has been closely linked to Western colonialism. If one considers a map of today's Anglican Communion this fact is undeniable. The majority of Anglican churches lie in areas of the world that at one time or another were territories of either England or the United States.

With the advent of political independence for colonies in the Southern Hemisphere beginning in the 1960's, Western missions, and in the Anglican experience in particular, the missions of the Church of England or the Episcopal

Church, USA, and even the Anglican Church of Canada "grew up" into self governing, self extending, and self supporting churches in their own right. These churches were no longer to be considered outposts or provinces of churches in the West.[2] Although many of these countries, where the newly independent churches have come into being still suffer at the hands of economic colonialism (witness the sin of international debt), by in large with political independence has come ecclesial independence. I will say more about this phenomenon, particularly the role of the incultration of the Gospel below. Whether Anglicans in the West are prepared to accept it or not, the Anglican Communion today has begun to move from being a colonial Church to a postcolonial reality. As a result the political and economic structures of power associated with colonial dominance have begun to lose their efficacy as Western hegemony has been serious challenged.

The second major force shaking the ground of Western hegemony is the increasing loss of the power of Enlightenment thought. Up until very recently, most Christians, and dare I say most Anglicans, relied upon philosophical and theological constructs of the Enlightenment that value either/or propositions, binary constructs, and dualistic thinking. Christians formed in Enlightenment thought pride themselves, pride ourselves, on being able to figure things out, to know limits, to be able to define what is right and what is wrong, who is in and who is out. Modern man (and I use this non-inclusive term deliberately) values clear lines of authority, knowing who is in charge, a hierarchical power structure. Pluralities and multiple ways of seeing the world are an anathema to modernity

and thus to many who have been in control in the churches of the West, and in the Anglican Communion, for most of its history.

But all of this is changing, as the majority of Christians today are located in places where the constructs of Enlightenment thought have less efficacy. Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying here that sister and brother Christians in the South and those who are more free from the constrictions of modern thought are less educated or caught in a world of superstitions, as some might posit (as a certain Episcopal Church bishop is famously quoted as saying at Lambeth 1998!) Rather the majority of Christians in the world today live in multiple realities, both the Western Enlightenment construct as well as their own local contexts. It is important to emphasize here that marginalized people in the West, especially women, people of color, poor people, gay and lesbian individuals, have always lived multiple realities—their own particularities and that of the dominant culture. It is only those in power, historically, white, financially secure, heterosexual, ordained males in the West, who have the privilege of believing and acting as if there is only one reality, ours. The movement within the world Christian witness, including Anglicanism, from being grounded in modernity and secure in the Enlightenment, to a postmodern or extra-modern reality is as tumultuous as the shift from colonialism to a post-colonial reality.

The transition from colonialism to post-colonialism and from modernity to post-modernity is terrifying, especially for those of us who historically have been the most privileged, most in control, most secure in the colonial Enlightenment

world. The radical transition afoot in the world is terrifying for it means that we in the West , especially, dare I say it again, people like me—white, male, heterosexual, overly educated, financially secure, English speaking, US and UK passport holding, deep-pensioned, clerics—will no longer have the power and control that we have so much enjoyed. As a result we are anxious, confused, lost in a sea of change.

The changing world, from being a colonial and modern church to that of a post-colonial and post-modern community in Christ with its concomitant specter of loss, is vigorously countered by those who have been historically the most privilege, particularly those who have historically been the most privileged in the Anglican Communion, namely the Ian Douglases of the Anglican Communion. Various attempts to reassert control, regain power, put Humpty Dumpty back together again, are dominating inter-Anglican conversations at this point in history.

The Dynamics of Globalization

Let us now consider how the contemporary dynamics of globalization are reorienting our participation in God's mission in the world today. Globalization is a term that raises many different images and ideas depending on the context in which the word is used. For many, globalization often means the worldwide spread of a neo-liberal economic system under girded by unbridled access to a single global capitalist market. In such an understanding of globalization, the rich seem to profit at the expense of the poor, and the gulf between those who have

and those who have not continues to grow with no seeming end in sight. Many see economic globalization, the global reach of the free-market system with no checks and balances, as an evil that is fundamentally corrupt and unsustainable.

But globalization need not be framed in such dire circumstances. Globalization can also be considered as a morally neutral term. Simply understood, globalization is the process by which anything, any movement, any phenomenon becomes global. The Harvard economist Richard Parker has argued articulately that globalization as a phenomenon "it is at least half a million years old, and began when our prehistoric ancestors walked out of Africa, into the Middle East, Europe, and Asia – and eventually Australia and the Americas."[3]

Parker believes that the process of the world-wide growth and spread of humanity is an inevitable and not necessary negative phenomenon. He argues, however, that over the last 500 years, what he describes as the era of "Europeanization", there have been incredible abuses of the peoples and lands in what were considered the colonies of European and North American nation states.[4] As noted above, the project of European and North American colonization that subjugated the peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific and indigenous peoples in North America, led to a superimposition of Western economic, cultural, political and, yes, religious, norms on the variety of peoples across the face of the earth. Unfortunately the same forces from the West that undermine the voices and self-determination of the historically colonized peoples continue unchecked in the "post-colonial" era of unbridled free-market economics.

The handmaiden of "Europeanization" and Western colonial reach has been the emergence of instant global communication and the technologies that support such over the last century and a half. While some argue that worldwide immediate communication emerged with the steam printing press and/or Samuel Morse's invention of his "Morse Code" in the 19th century, the advent of digital communication with the internet and the world wide web over the last few decades has exacerbated the process of globalization in recent years.[5] Today, no corner of the world is untouched by digital communication and the spread of information technology. Such technology has linked economic markets together with billions and billions of dollars flowing immediately between time zones leading to one global market never sleeps. The loss of the bipolar word of the Cold War and the demise of socialism as a viable economic and social alternative has meant that an unconstrained capitalist free-market system has emerged as the single unchecked and unfettered global economic system.

A outcome of the new global digital information flow and the single market economy is the emergence of a new world-wide cultural system (a new hegemony if you will) that seeks to assert a normative, singular cultural norm of flavor, taste, and desire around the world. The result has been a growing homogeneity of society that discounts diversity and plurality of voices. The sociologist George Ritzer has described this homogenization process and loss of local cultural expressions as the "McDonaldization" of society.[6] In the McDonaldized world, all people eat the same hamburgers and drink the same milkshakes no matter where they might live. Today the same Starbucks coffee or

Gap jeans can be found in the streets of Baltimore, Buenos Aires, Berlin, Brussels, Beijing, or Bombay.

In the McDonaldized world, those at the margins, those without power, suffer most, particularly indigenous peoples. It is they who must struggle to reassert their own ways of understanding the world; who must fight for their own means of production and sustenance. In the McDonaldized world the local, the vulnerable, the particular, are always vulnerable to the interests and power of the global.

But that is not to say that the local is completely powerless in the face of globalization. Like the forces of globalization themselves, the reassertion of the local, the particular, can be both life affirming, or destructive, depending on the circumstances and the context.

There are then examples of the healthy push back of local voices and peoples against the forces of globalization, such as: the assertion of treaty rights by indigenous Maori peoples in Aotearoa who are laying claim to ancestral lands in New Zealand, or India's hesitation to let Coca Cola into their country in order to protect their national soft drink industry. The positive push back of the local against the global can be seen anywhere individuals refuse to give up their identity and their power and thus defend what is most precious and of value in their own context and cultural ways of making meaning.

But the push back of the local can also be destructive and life denying. Too often the reassertion of the local can lead to a new tyranny of single identity politics where differences and ambiguities of the local/global dynamic are not

tolerated.[7] Young anarchists throwing rocks through storefronts at meetings of the World Trade Organization, or governmental clampdowns of freedom of speech and debate are some of the more egregious examples of a malignant form of local pushback against the global. And of course the rise of extremist religion that says that there is only one way to be faithful and/or the imposition of single identity politics that deny other ways of being and perspectives are some of the most destructive forces of the superimposition of the local.

And so in the globalized world we thus see the twin competing phenomenon of the worldwide reach of a mono-economic, mono-cultural realities and the concomitant push back of local, particular, peoples and their cultures.[8] The challenge of globalization is how can the emergence of a single economic and cultural system driven by the worldwide capitalist market and facilitated by digital communication can co-exist with a myriad of localities such that the voices and cultural realities of any one people are not either lost or destructively reasserted. In other words: how can the global live with the local, and local live with the global, without either one or the other overwhelming the other in destructive and life-denying actions? What are the possibilities for the global and the local, or locals, to co-exist, and even thrive together and complement each other, such that both the global and the local can better inform and add to the life-affirming possibilities of the other?

These dynamics of globalization lead us to ask the question: how can the inestimable love of God in Christ be available and real to all people while at the same time not perpetrating one, mono-cultural, dominant ecclesial institution? In

the time of globalization, how do we, as the Body of Christ today, move beyond the limitations of a mono-cultural, singularly normative, presentation of "the Global Church" to a genuinely multicultural, plural, and thus "catholic" (in the true sense of universal) witness to truth of God in Christ Jesus? This I believe is the key question, the key issue before the Anglican Communion at this time. Here is where the third changing contour of the world, what some describe as the New Pentecost of World Christianity, can give us hope.

The New Pentecost of World Christianity

The great father of modern missiology, Professor Andrew Walls of Edinburgh University and his Center for the Study of Non-Western Christianity was one of the first scholars to recognize and document the profound demographic changes that have occurred in world Christianity over the last five decades. Walls emphasizes that just as the first Church, the apostolic Church of the Mediterranean gave way to the Second Church – The Church of Europe and the Industrialized world – today the Second Church is on the decline as the Third Church, the Church of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific is on the ascendancy. Just consider for example, what has occurred in African Christianity in the lifetime of most of us in the room today. From 1810 until 1960, 150 years of the missionary era, there were optimistically speaking 50 million Christians of all types in Africa (south of the Sahara). From 1960-1990, one fifth of the time/30 years, Christianity in Africa saw a six-fold increase from 50 million to 300 million. Today that number stands at about 417 million Christians in Africa.

And of those 417 million Christian, about 90 million Christians or roughly one fourth of the Christian witness in Africa would be considered AIC's, variously known as African independent churches, African indigenous churches, African initiated churches.

This numerical explosion of Christianity in Africa is not that dissimilar from the growth of Christianity across the Africa, Asia, and Latin America over the last century. In 1900, of the total 522 Christians in the world, 428 million (81%) lived in Europe or North America. By 1970, of the 1 billion 239 million Christians in the world, 636 million (51%) lived in Europe and North America. Today, of the 2 billion, 196 million Christians in the world, only 757 million (35%) live in Europe and North America, with the vast majority of Christians living in what is the "Southern hemisphere." (Africa - 417 mil or 19%; Asia – 354 mil or 16%, Latin America – 525 mil or 24%, Oceania, 23 mil or 1%) The key factor here is that in one century Christianity has gone from a primarily Western European and North American experience (81% in 1900) to a primarily Africa, Asian, and South American experience (65% today.) Further, by the year 2025, it is predicted that 70% of the 2.5 billion Christians will live in the Global South (1.8 bil).[9]

How are we to understand this radical transition in the demographics of World Christianity? The great South African missiologist David Bosch has argued that from the very beginning the missionary message of the Christian Church incarnated itself in the lives and worlds of those who had embraced it. The miracle of the incarnation is that the universal truth, the inestimable love of God in Jesus for all people, can only be known, experienced, lived into as

individual peoples and cultures come to know and see Jesus as their own, in their own contexts. Contextualization and the emergence of contextual theologies represent for Bosch an epistemological break from the uniform mono-cultural view of the gospel advanced by the Enlightenment. Contextual theology utilizes a hermeneutic that reads the bible first from the perspective of a particular local perspective, culture, or set of experiences rather than from an *a priori* norm or "given." Contextual theologies begin with the particular and move toward the universal, rather than the other way around. For Bosch and other missiologists who embrace contextual theology, inculturation is the way by which the universal truth of the gospel is made real and manifest in the plurality of cultures and contexts of contemporary worldwide Christianity.

Bosch notes that the word inculturation, or "enculturation," came into missiological discussions in the 1960's, at first among Roman Catholic theologians and later in Protestant circles, as mission thinkers began to examine the process of contextualization in historical perspective. Mission in the "wake of the Enlightenment" made sense. It was something that Western missionaries did over there for those different from themselves, from ourselves.

In the Enlightenment mission paradigm, the practices and policies of the Western churches' missions around the world were controlled primarily by mission agencies in London and New York. But with the advent of the post-colonial era and the increasing ownership and direction of churches in Africa, Asia, Latin America and The Pacific by indigenous leaders in their own right, the limits of Western controlled mission strategies began to surface.

Bible translation, together with its parallel offshoot in liturgical translation, initiated by missionaries but primarily advanced through indigenous agents in the post-colonial era, contributed significantly to the inculturation processes in contemporary worldwide Christianity. In his theory of the translatability of the gospel, Professor Lamin Sanneh emphasizes that the Gospel must always be translated into the local vernacular if it is to have any meaning. Translation into the local vernacular, for Sanneh, is much more than the simple direct exchange of one word for another. Translatability presupposes that indigenous agents inhabit and own the gospel from within their own linguistic, symbolic, and cosmological ways of making meaning. Sanneh emphasizes that from Pentecost onward, all people in all cultures of the world, have been about living into the universal good news of Christ as each has come to see Jesus through their own cultural lenses. "No culture is so advanced and superior," Sanneh, writes, "that it can claim exclusive access or advantage to the truth of God, and none so marginal or inferior that it can be excluded."[10] The priority on the translatability of the gospel into the vernacular, particularly in the post-colonial era has resulted in worshipping Christian communities in almost every culture of the world. Sanneh thus concludes that cultural uniformity is not essential to Christianity, and that Christian pluralism is something more positive than doctrinal and institutional disparity—it is a diversity that the world character of Christianity has enhanced in each tradition. Far from being evidence of failure, this pluralism represents the "triumph of translatability," and there is much to be gained by it.

There is indeed much to be gained by embracing the New Pentecost of world Christianity brought about by the translatability of the Gospel into the many and diverse cultures of the world today in inculturation processes. In light of the new Pentecost, Christians in general, and Anglicans, in particular, are beginning to ask ourselves: How much does the translatability of the Gospel and the missiological imperative of inculturation inform our worship and common life as Christians today? What gifts are there within Anglicanism that call it beyond the confines of a primarily "English" or even American church to a deeper engagement in the plurality of cultures in which Anglicanism has taken root? How is the New Pentecost of world Christianity challenging us to see and participate in God's mission in a different way, or ways?

Concluding Remarks

So here we are, faithful Episcopalian Christians called to participate in God's mission of restoration and reconciliation who are considering a life in missionary service. Yet the contexts for God's mission we thought we knew, (we thought we might even have controlled) have all been radically rearranged in our lifetime. The challenges to Western hegemony, the dynamics of globalization, and the New Pentecost of world Christianity have radically altered the terrain of how we as the Body of Christ are to respond to the *missio Dei*? What does it mean for those of us who have historically been the most privileged to come to the new table set by God? How do we Anglicans, given the changes afoot in the world and in the Church, make sense of, and faithfully serve, what God is up to

today. We need to seriously address these questions if we are to "find our way into Global Mission" (which, of course, is the point of this conference.) Thank you.

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[1] Antonio Gramsci, *Antoni Gramsci: Selections from Political Writings, 1910-1920*, ed Quintin Hoare (New York: International Publishers, 1977).

[2] The fact that many of these newly autonomous Anglican Churches still maintain the word "province" in their names, such as The Church of the Province of Uganda or the Church of the Province of South East Asia reflects the colonial legacy of seeing these churches as outposts of historic Western churches.

[3] Richard Parker, "Globalization, The Social Gospel and Christian leadership Today." In: Douglas, ed., *Waging Reconciliation*, (New York: Church Publishing, 2002) p. 79.

[4] Ibid, p.82.

[5] Parker, p. 81.

[6] George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society: An Investigation Into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life* (Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 1993).

[7] The classic study of this tension between the local and the global is: Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs McWorld* (New York: Ballantine, 2001.)

[8] Christopher Duraisingh describes these twin phenomena as the centripetal and centrifugal forces of globalization. Christopher Duraisingh, "Encountering Difference in a Plural World: A Pentecost Paradigm for Mission." In Douglas, ed. *Waging Reconciliation*, pp. 174-175.

[9] David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, "Christian World Communions: Five Overviews of World Christianity, AD 1800-2025," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33 (No. 1, January 2009): 25-32.

[10]Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003) 60.