

God and Globalization Vol. 3: Christ and the Dominions of Civilization

Edited by Max L. Stackhouse with Peter J. Paris

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Reviewed by A. Patrick Thomas

Vice Principal, Nazarene Theological College (South Africa)

Sze-kar Wan writes about globalization:

First awakened by the velvet revolution of 1989 and further bouoyed by the explosion of information technology of the last decade, expectations run high that a global civil society is poised to emerge in which citizens of different nationalities and ethnicities are entering into associations with each other under the democratic conditions of pluralism, tolerance, understanding and respect. Globalization, it is said, is fast erasing all traditional boundaries and weakening power cliques based thereon - even if, in its economic form, it is also creating elites.

The issue of globalization is a major concern to many disciplines because it affects practically every sphere of human life. *God and Globalization Vol. 3: Christ and the Dominions of Civilization* is an attempt to address the impact that this phenomenon has on religion - Christianity in particular.

Max Stackhouse (“Introduction”) introduces the volume well but I would like to point out that he generalises too much by stating that people become devoted to their family members, culture, institutions of government, etc....because these point towards principles and purposes that are

held to be divine or holy. This is not necessarily the case - not everyone does; as it is possible that the 'powers that be' could be regarded as oppressive. People who understand the effects of globalization, but are left behind as a result of poverty or an inability to meet the standards for progress set by the dominant powers may resist or totally reject those who benefit from the process. While it is true that globalization is a natural process, will increase wealth and prosperity for all countries and people, and is allegedly the only possible path to economic growth for the world economy; it is just as true that globalization is increasing the gap between rich and the poor countries, and is increasing the gap between the rich and the poor within countries. Also, it is interesting that Stackhouse should identify Christianity as the foundation of globalization and this thought pattern is obviously at the core of his understanding of the role that all religions play in globalization process. His description of a society without an "inner Lord" could be a description of what is happening in South Africa now.

There appears to be no doubt in Diane Obenchain's mind ("The Study of Religion and the Coming Globalization") as to the fact that Christianity is a "religion" to be reckoned with. She makes a good case for faith over reason, where reason is rapidly becoming more prevalent in the way people view their world today. Rationalism is a global phenomenon and Christians are not alone in this fight. Every "religion" in the world is involved in this. So does that mean that we all should join together? I believe we should remain distinct and separate in our convictions about sin and God's provision for salvation but that, as Obenchain contends, we should remain open and relevant to the demands on global citizens. However, Christianity is largely perceived to be the religion of the West, which, incidentally, is leading the way, or setting the pace in the globalization process. It is simplistic to state that openness to other religions is what is required when it is an indisputable fact that globalization carries with it the real possibility of a homogenous culture, and by implication, religion. Lamin Sanneh ("Mohammed in Islam Tradition and Practice: The Crucible of Faith and the Spheres of Dominion") echoes this view.

Islam will not be intimidated - let alone dominated - by Christianity or any other religion, or disappear in the wake of globalization. It is as he points out; Muslims are too devoted to Mohammed and his teachings for this to happen.

John Mbiti (“When the Bull is in a Strange Country, it Does Not Bellow: Tribal Religions and Globalization”) addresses exactly what is brought about in the process of globalization. A lot of what is held sacred by "smaller" communities and cultures gets swamped by the demands of the process which has its own value system that accords enormous power to capital. If the capital is not there; the voice is lost. At a recent seminar on theology and globalization, one of the speakers made a whole lot out of the concept that the world has become a "global village" and attempted to show that in essence, the world was far from being a "village". "This is a stolen concept" she said, because the word conjures up images of acceptance and inclusion. "Village" is all about life in community that is all-inclusive, and interaction is in the form of sharing with one another, where no harm is done to the other, and where the well-being of each person is of paramount importance. Traditional religions' fear of being drowned or being powerless would not be a reality if the world were indeed a "village" in the true sense of the word. On the other hand, Hinduism as a traditionally both a "bio-piety" and a "geo-piety" (“Hinduism and Globalization: A Christian Theological Approach” - Thangaraj M. Thomas) has been able to meet and overcome the challenges of globalization. In one sense it is positive to know that Hinduism has the potential of becoming a global "religion"; but negatively, there is no guarantee that it will be able to withstand the pressure to remain a truly Indian expression of religion. The essay reflects the same challenges that are faced by South Africans today.

Reading this text brings us an enduring challenge. We may become either fundamentalist in our response to globalization (and reject it) or we can find ways to work with globalization for our

own benefit. The harsh reality is that, all over the world, some people have reached Canaan while many are still in Egypt.