

I. GLOBAL REALITIES AND THE NEW ANTIOCH

SECTION INTRODUCTION

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The “new” Antioch is the whole world, the agenda for which is the whole gospel. As we read in the Gospel of John, this agenda is good news for the entire world (*cosmos*) in all of its manifestations (John 3:16). The first chapters in this volume illustrate the demographic change that has occurred between the Antioch of Acts 11:26 and the present global “Antioch,” bound together by such patterns of globalization as trade, technology, and organization.

In the opening chapter to this section, missiologist Dana Robert finds that “*the Great Commission itself has been an intrinsic part of creating globalization,*” that missions are intertwined with this process through theological understanding, historical connections, demography, organizational structure and technology and through mission personnel. She raises four points that give meaning and continuing validity to “the Great Commission” in the face of contemporary globalization and demography, mission that is Christ-centered and not grounded in economic self-interest, a mission that rediscovers spiritual discipline, mission that is didactic in nature and that re-grounds the church in the simplicities of the New Testament. She reminds us that, “the disciples witnessed across national and ethnic boundaries not because they were powerful, but because they were faithful to the vision of the Kingdom of God they had glimpsed in Jesus Christ.”

A part of this globalization is the fact that Christianity has spread

into nearly every culture in the world. This raises the question of who is promoting the expansion of world Christianity. Research by the Center for Global Christianity¹ under the direction of Todd Johnson, as summarized in the chapter by Johnson and Kim, illustrates that whereas in the early part of the 20th century the Christian faith was easily identifiable as a Western religion – the vast majority of Christians were Europeans or North Americans – by the end of the 20th century the majority of Christians would, as in the first days of the church, be African, Asian, and (now) Latin American. The center of gravity of the church is no longer in the West, but is increasingly centered in the Southern Hemisphere.² Global mission is increasingly a global enterprise.

The implications of this demographic shift for Christian self-understanding and scholarship – and the training of church leadership – are drawn out by historian Andrew Walls. This is a shift that he calls, “inspiring, bringing fresh visions, fresh verve, fresh excitement to academic study.” And Walls acknowledges that just “as Christians explored their faith in engagement with the Hellenistic culture, [and] strengthened and established their faith and in the process saved the Greek academy,” so “Christian interaction with the cultures of Africa and Asia ... may cause us to see something more of the fullness of Christ, and in the process see vocation restored and the salvation of scholarship itself.” As the churches enter their third millennium, they must take stock of their fundamentally different identity and mission from that which was assumed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

This demographic shift reminds us that however significant the modern mission movement, world Christianity is not simply the result of the Western missionary effort, whether we mark this with such Catholic missions as that of Bartolomé de Las Casas, OP (1484-1566) and his advocacy of the rights of Indigenous peoples of the Americas, the Puritan John Eliot and the translation of the Bible into Algonquin in early New England (1661/1663) or with the Royal Danish-Halle (Pietist) Mission of Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Pluetschau to Tranquebar, India (1706). It is both an older phenomenon as well as a more complex modern movement, drawing upon the active missionary work of persons living throughout the world.³

Ever since the formation of the modern ecumenical movement there has been a growing consciousness of the interdependent nature of global Christianity. Following the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910,⁴ an International Missionary Council (IMC) was established at London (1921), meeting again at Jerusalem (1928) and Tambaram (1938), becoming associated with the World Council of Churches (WCC) movement in

1939. Following the founding WCC Assembly (1948), an International Missionary Council met at Whitby, Ontario in 1947 where emphasis was laid on the need to overcome an “older church – younger church” dichotomy, one of patrons and senders – a theme that is taken up in the final chapter of this volume by Margaret Guider, OFM. At the next world meeting at Willingen (1952), emphasis was placed on understanding mission as God’s mission to the world (*missio dei*) whereby the church, wherever it is found, is seen as the “sent” community – a theme that lies behind the work of Darrell Guder (Part III of this volume) with his focus on the “missional” church.⁵ At the International Missionary Assembly held at Achimota near Accra, Ghana (1958) the missiologist Lesslie Newbigin stressed the fact that “the church is the mission,” going on to point out that “the home base is everywhere” since every Christian community is in a missionary situation.⁶

The Assembly at Ghana is also known for the IMC decision to unite formally with the WCC, uninviting to some who feared that such integration of mission and church would be detrimental to mission effort. With the “integration” of the IMC to the WCC, effective in assemblies at New Delhi (1961), dissenting mission bodies participated with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in sponsoring a World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin in 1966. This led to the formation of a Planning Committee (1971) and Lausanne Congress on Evangelism (1974) of continuing impact through the Lausanne Covenant and Continuation Committee with further Conferences on World Evangelization and inspiration for regional networks and mission conferences.⁷

Concurrently, mission councils affiliated to the IMC became affiliated to the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the WCC, eventually the Division on World Mission and Evangelism (DWME) which, after Vatican II (1962-1965), worked increasingly with Roman Catholic observers. With the entry into the WCC at this time of the Orthodox churches of Eastern Europe, prevented from doing so in 1948 because of the Cold War, something of a context for a proxy ideological war between Socialism and Capitalism was provided but also deepened reflection on the nature of mission⁸ as the WCC began to move markedly beyond its earlier largely North Atlantic constituency. CWME meetings in Mexico City (1963), Bangkok (1972/73) and Melbourne (1980) stressed holistic and contextual mission issues. Notable, too, were the efforts at Melbourne to re-center ecumenical mission theology around evangelization without loss to prophetic challenge, recognition of the significance of the Lausanne movement.⁹

The world mission conference of San Antonio (1989) was notable

for its affirmation of salvation through Jesus Christ, but refusal to categorically reject God's saving power wherever it might be discerned. After further WCC reorganization, the work of mission from 1992-1998 became the concern of WCC Unit II – Churches in Mission: Health, Education and Witness. A further WCC conference on mission at Salvador da Bahía (Brazil, 1996) took up the theme of gospel and culture with attention to the effect of cultural and ethnic identity on violent conflict, more visible following the end of global bi-polar conflict (1918-1989). Upon the reinstatement of the CWME following the meeting of the WCC General Assembly in Harare (1998), an assembly in Athens (2005) on the theme "Come, Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile!" raised the question of how the churches can better become agencies of the healing and reconciliation they proclaim – a central challenge of the "Antioch Agenda": "*The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*."¹⁰

End Notes

- ¹ The Center, located at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts, is a research center that serves as a resource for faculty, students, alumni, visiting religion scholars, church leaders, missiologists and journalists seeking empirical information and analysis on the global Christian movement. See their website: <http://www.gcts.edu/ockenga/globalchristianity>.
- ² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2002).
- ³ Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, eds., *The History of the World Christian Movement* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001).
- ⁴ T. V. Philip, *Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century Ecumenical Missiology* (Kashmere Gate, Delhi, India: ISPCK, 1999).
- ⁵ Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, eds., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).
- ⁶ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996): 370.
- ⁷ See Lausanne Occasional Papers, available on the web: www.lausanne.org.
- ⁸ The book by Ion Bria has been quite influential in this respect, *The Liturgy After the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996).
- ⁹ See *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation* (New York: National Council of Churches, 1983).
- ¹⁰ The term is from the title of a book by missiologist Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003); and see C. René Padilla, *Mission between the Times. Essays on the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985):129-41.