

## Globalisation: A view from Africa

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What on earth does globalisation have to do with Africa? Might we not use our time more wisely by considering issues that are more relevant to Africa like AIDS and lack of clean drinking water?

Should Africans spend their energies on ivory tower concepts like 'globalisation'?

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss this very question. I will suggest that Africans must engage with globalisation because like the other Western experiments that have gone before globalisation is affecting Africa in very real ways.

We first stumbled on our Western cousins conducting an experiment on our shores a long time ago. A fishing community along the River Niger was wakened one humid morning by the blast of a ship's horn. Men women and children stirred from their beds and made their way to the great river Niger where a ship was berthing. It was our Western cousins come to visit!

Although our prophets and seers had warned us that they (our Western cousins) were on their way, their appearance that morning was still a surprise. We love visitors and so after some awkward moments with language they introduced themselves. (They had an interpreter with them. We quickly discovered the visitors had thought of everything!)

'We've come a long way to share a brilliant idea with you.' they said.

'Wonderful!' We replied,

'Let's trade.' They said.

It was just like our seers had prophesied. 'There will come a people as colourful as butterflies seeking to trade. Things will never be the same after that.'

We were hesitant at first but after they showed us what a gun could do, we were impressed.

'So what do you want to buy from us?' We asked, thinking of the gold and ivory that Arab traders had been buying.

'Have you thought of expanding your goods and services in order to meet the emerging demands in the transatlantic trade? You could for example dramatically reduce the cost of running your prisoner of war camps by turning over the detainees to us. In one shrewd move you will have converted your liabilities into assets and – note this – made a significant contribution to the emerging market in the Caribbean islands. As you already know markets look particularly favourably on bold investors!'

It seemed a good idea at the time to join in the experiment but before long we were selling one another to the highest bidder and the land was laid bare. We suspected that we had been short changed but we weren't sure how bad it was until the missionaries arrived with their own experiment - but more of that in a moment.

For us the slave trade experiment spelt big trouble. But we had no sooner seen the back of slavery when along came the next big idea – the colonial experiment. It was sold to us in a very clever way largely by missionaries. They did not have a good word to say for the failed experiment of the butterfly people; we were pleased.

'The Slave trade has brought immense suffering to you but great wealth to our country. We are ashamed of this and we feel it is important that we put the situation right.'

They continued, 'first you must learn to read and write and the best book to read is the Bible.'

Years after the failure of the slave trade Sir Winston Churchill reflecting on the slave trade said this:

*'The West Indies two hundred years ago bulked very largely in the minds of all the people who were making Britain and the British empire. Our possessions of the West Indies, like that of India – the colonial plantations as they were called – gave us the strength, but especially the capital, the wealth at a time when no European nation possessed such reserve, which enabled us, not only to acquire this world wide appendage of possessions which we have, but also to lay the foundations of that commercial and financial leadership, which, when the world was young, when everything outside Europe was underdeveloped, enabled us to make our great position in the world'*

Anyway, amazing things happen when you read the Bible and so many of us became Christians. The missionaries were a lot more credible than the traders before them so when they recommended that we should accept the protection of their governments we went along with the idea. Before we could blink we were firmly inside a scheme they called colonialism and there was no peaceful way out.

This new project was a bitter-sweet fruit. Bitter because of three reasons:

To begin with, too many people died fighting for the rights that the colonialists enjoyed in their own countries of origin – the right to determine one's own political destiny. When I was in primary school in Kenya it was usual to learn that so and so did not have a father because he had died in the Mau Mau freedom war. I mention this fact because whenever I meet former members of Kings African Rifles in the UK, they speak of Mau Mau as if it was no more than an administrative hiccup in what was a voluntary process of handing over Kenya to Kenyans. They tell me Mau Mau was pushing on an open door. We do not see it like that. If putting hundreds of thousands of Agikuyu – women, children and men - into security 'villages', or being attacked with truncheons by policemen, and freedom fighters being shot – if all that is pushing on an open door, God help us if Mau Mau had been pushing on one that was closed! The second reason is that colonialism compounded the sense of inferiority begun by the slave trade. Thirdly, Christianity and Colonialism became linked in the minds of many. This led to many Christians losing their lives because they were seen as traitors.

But it also had a sweet taste.

We have the early missionaries to thank for the gospel and for reducing our languages to the written script. Ironically, it is also to the work of these early men and women of God that we turn when we trace the early beginnings of many of our nations.

This stage gave rise to the last undertaking to come to us from the West - Neo colonialism. Neo colonialism is an indirect means by powerful states to impose their will on weaker nations through unequal cultural, economic and political ties. Once again the visitors were astute at selling their ideas to us.

'We can't believe how badly things went the last time, chaps. How about we cooperate as free independent nations for the good of our people?'

'No more slave trade, no more colonialism and no pulling a fast one on us?' We asked.

'You haven't a thing to worry about. It will all be above board and regulated by international agreements. We are desperate to get it right this time!' the visitors said.

And so we began to tie our economies to those in the West and soon we began to feel the pressure of the unequal relationship. For example money was lent to our nations knowing full well that the dictators who were ruling our countries were promptly transferring the loans to their Swiss accounts. Pressure groups all over the continents protested vigorously but the Western banks screamed 'Pay up or else!' We were once again in the middle of another of the visitors' bewildering experiments. We remember that phase as a period marked by loss of national pride but it is also the period when we became weary of Western experiments.

We have now come to accept that the West loves a new experiment so when we started hearing about a new one called globalisation, we were vitally interested to know how it would affect us. We are determined not to be caught napping again! This is why Africa cannot afford to stand aside and wait for the outcome of this new experiment. Indeed we are already seeing the effects of globalisation in villages and towns right across the continent.

In my home town of Nakuru, Kenya there is a remote neighbourhood on the rim of Menengai Crater called Maciaro. Last year I visited a friend who lives there. I arrived in the evening and found the family enjoying Ugali - a kind of corn bread eaten by most East Africans. We fell talking and I discovered that increasingly the maize used to make the Ugali is imported. At 9:00pm my host, as is his habit, tuned the radio to BBC World Service broadcasting in Kiswahili. I noted the radio was made in Japan. We discussed the attacks of September 11 on the World Trade Centre and compared them with Al Qaeda's attack on the American Embassy in Nairobi in 1998 in which 287 Kenyans died and hundreds more were injured. We marvelled at how quickly the BBC had buried the deaths in Nairobi in comparison with the dead in America. I had a quick look around the room and concluded that at least half of us sitting around the room under the blinding light of a Chinese made pressure lamp were dressed in 'Mitumba' - a Kiswahili word for second hand clothes. The clothes are procured from America and the UK. It is not improbable that the clothes you are wearing now will finish up in Africa. Perhaps the word 'finish' is prophetic as second hand clothes are likely to finish off what may be left of the local cotton industry as well. It is in this popular way that I speak of globalisation as our inter connectedness in very practical ways.

Were it not for the reality of globalisation, I would be a lot more hesitant to write on this topic as I am, at the moment, living in the UK; a fair distance from the African realities I have just described. As it is, however, I read African and in particular Kenyan newspapers every day. I listen to Kenyan radio broadcasts and also watch our national TV news clips on the web. I can talk about Africa with some knowledge because of globalisation - although the last time I was in Kenya was early last year.

However this new venture just like the last two will fail to create a better world for mankind in general and for Africa in particular. I am prepared to believe that in the minds of their creators, these projects have been the best bet for a better world. However I also see plenty of evidence to indicate that this new idea has all the characteristics of the other two that have gone before. They failed not only because they were morally repugnant to God, they failed because they were a rejection of the created order. They failed because they were a charter of a rebel planet. They failed because they were ethnocentric. They failed because they reckoned without a God whose covenant promise is to restore to himself not only the originators of these humanist ventures but all the children of Adam and Eve; all of mankind. Likewise globalisation will fail to create the happy city for humankind.

I think it is critical that as Christians we understand this. Just as the other three experiments I have described were not launched in order to serve the gospel, globalisation is not here to benefit the Christian church. You and I must not allow ourselves to be seduced in this debate from our true allegiance to the gospel by globalisation's promise of even more riches for the first world. This wooing happens most easily. If you live in those parts of the world that have bought into this and the previous projects, it is a short step from enjoying the prosperity we see in the West to thinking that God approves of the philosophy that underpins life in the West. The love of riches and the things of this world saturate all aspects of life to the extent that it dopes and deafens us to the cries of the poor.

In the rest of this chapter, I want to suggest that as evangelicals we must not ignore the effects of globalisation in any part of the world and certainly, we can ill afford to ignore its effects on the African church. I want to offer you further reasons why I think so.

### **Firstly, globalisation is already affecting Africa economically**

It has been said that one of the starkest consequences of globalisation in Africa today in economic terms is the rendering redundant of the African people. This may appear to be a harsh overstatement, but I believe its validity has been demonstrated repeatedly in the past by observers like Peter Henriot whose thoughts have influenced my own.

1. The SAP-driven policies of the IMF in many African countries make no bones about the fact that sustained economic growth is their main goal not provision of employment. As a consequence, formal employment has dropped wherever SAP policies have been implemented in Africa. In recent years employment has dipped as low as 16% in Zambia, 24% in Botswana and 30% in South Africa for example. (Source ILO)

Consider this true story. Carolyn is from Africa. She answered an ad in the press to come to work in Britain as a nurse. Leaving behind a husband and two children, she completed her conversion course in nursing, qualified and took up employment in the Midlands. In the meanwhile her husband back in Africa was made redundant and quickly began to show signs of depression. Believing she was doing her family a favour, she sent for him and for the children to join her in the UK. He showed up alone with a head as sore as a rhino's from feelings of worthlessness. Home in the Midlands a row erupted and he almost took the top of her head off with a knife. A call on the mobile saved her as she cowered in the bathroom. He did not attempt to run. When the police came he owned up to the attempted murder saying he did not care if he lived or died.

2. An acute SAP approach to kick starting African economies only pushes the problems elsewhere. For example cash-strapped governments are unable to prevent encroachment on nature reserves by the poor desperately struggling for survival. In sub-Saharan Africa and several other countries of Africa soil erosion and deforestation through burning of charcoal are serious problems today. My own anecdotal observation is that the felling of trees for charcoal and other purposes has resulted in erratic rainfall patterns and drought in Kenya during my lifetime.
3. The major beneficiary of globalisation in Africa, South Africa, already accounts for over 40% of the sub-Saharan GDP; its own GNP per capita of US\$ 3010 contrasts sharply with Zambia's of US\$ 350, Malawi's of US\$ 145, and Tanzania's and Mozambique's of US\$ 80.

How has Africa responded to these problems? Our most recent reply is through NEPAD (New Partnership for African Development). NEPAD is fronted by Thabo Mbeki, his Nigerian counterpart Olusegun Obasanjo, Senegal's Abdoulaye Wade and Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria.

Early in 2002 they met the G8 leaders hoping to get their support for NEPAD, which hopes to attract Western capital inflow into Africa as African governments submit to the rules of WTO and to democratic rule. I wish NEPAD well and were I in a position to support it I would. However, it is unlikely to succeed in its present state. I offer you three concerns of mine.

Firstly the idea is modelled on trickledown economics. At the moment the only trickle in Kenya's economy (for example) is the leakage of foreign capital. Last year capital inflow into the country (investment) was \$23m. In the same year \$50m fled the country. It seems to me you need growth from the grassroots as well. Secondly, the big four did not seek wide consultation across the continent before NEPAD was launched. Kenya for example seems to blow hot and cold on the idea with President Moi recently saying there was nothing new to NEPAD. Finally, NEPAD is as strong as its weakest link and the presidents are the weakest link. I see little in their public behaviour to suggest they mean business this time – with or without the reinvented African Union.

### **Secondly, globalisation is affecting Africa theologically**

We are living in an age where increasingly African Christianity is becoming representative of the Christian church. This has to do with a shift having occurred in the centre of gravity of Christianity from the North to the Southern hemisphere. We cannot, therefore, afford to ignore what is happening in Africa. Globalisation is all the time increasing the integration of national economies into the global economy through trade and investment rules and privatisation, aided by technological advancement. These trends are affecting the church in Africa in very profound ways and not surprisingly, TV is making its own mark.

The last time I was in Nairobi, I was as always, interested to see what was on the TV 'family channel.' It normally carries Christian programmes. The programmes I saw fell into two groups – Kenyan preachers copying American televangelists and American televangelists. Perhaps there is nothing wrong in that except that as the effects of globalisation bite harder into the African church especially, we are beginning to see more and more African speakers holding entrenched and inflexible positions which reflect the obstinacy and the narrow mindedness of their Western financial and theological backers. If you ask our televangelists why they agree with TD Jakes for example, or Benny Hinn, and why they disagree with John Stott or for that matter the Proclamation Trust stable of Bible teachers, you will find that the conclusions they have reached are not actually their own. They are merely repeating the biases and the prejudices that are common in the West. One such prejudice is the apparent divide between charismatic and non-charismatic churches in the UK. In my experience there is less suspicion between the two church traditions in many parts of Africa. I fear that with the help of globally available TV programmes we are already seeing the early signs of the two camps building a mental caricature of each other in Africa.

### **Thirdly, globalisation is affecting Africa culturally and sociologically**

Globalisation is really the way we now live. For good or for ill, it affects everyone. It puts more pressure on some cultures than on others and the place that pressure is seen best is within the family unit. For Africa, the social pressure of globalisation is being felt most strongly by children, women and the family. I want to say a word about each. One of the spin offs of globalisation is the birth of

children's parliaments. From 9 -13 May 2001, the Labour Institute of the Trade Union Confederation hosted the spring session of the Children's Parliament. My own country Kenya and other several other African countries have their own children's parliaments. A part of the last session's programme was dedicated to the Global Movement in the Children's Interest in which children and young people should play an important role. During the Referendum 'Say Yes for Children' the junior deputies collected signatures from their mates, teachers, parents, and public authorities. They also drafted an open letter to all those involved in children's development, education, and protection. How will the new African child conduct herself? It is yet too early to tell how this sort of empowerment will affect the development and evangelisation of the African child but it is a trend well worth watching.

Globalisation will speed up the emancipation of the African woman with perceptible results on the African family. For example, in May 2002 in Bulbul, Ngong, Kenya, the first woman chief in Maasailand was appointed. Susan Nampoi, a community leader, said of the appointment, 'This is history being made because from the time of Laibon Olenana it has been an abomination for a woman to seek any position which would put her above men in authority'. Her first official act was to attack 'two crimes - excessive drinking and idleness.' So even the Maasai are not immune to the influences of globalisation. Her decision demonstrated that globalisation had come to Maasailand. Firstly, time has been officially privatised. It has now become a commodity to be sold with all the social repercussions and benefits it brings. Never again will sitting around and chatting or 'chewing the fat' be regarded as an honourable thing. It is now officially time wasting and therefore, ironically, anti social behaviour. Secondly, the centre of political and social power has made a small shift towards the women folk, as Susan Nampoi herself reminded her community.

How will these two new competing centres of power – children's power and women power affect African cultures? I think the jury is out on that one. However, early signs suggest that we are witnessing the beginnings of new power relations within African families. For example we are already seeing women church leaders, preachers and evangelists. It is still too early to tell what will emerge when the situation reaches equilibrium. What sort of woman will emerge out of Africa? How will she handle her greater liberty and independence? It is anyone's guess. What we do know is that the Church will do well to keep its eye on this exciting development.

There is yet a clearer example of how globalisation is affecting the African families. Having signed the UN Convention on Human Rights, African governments are putting the rights of women and children much higher on their agenda. Take Article 2 part 2 of the convention on the rights of the child. By its nature the convention has a globalising agenda. It states 'States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.' It sounds innocent enough does it not? However it presumes that the signatories have a Western mindset. We see this in the notion that parents are free to believe anything they want to believe. Well, that world view is alien to Africa. We still believe there is an absolute truth moreover we generally like to conform to communal values and beliefs. The opinion of the many is more important than my own – and hence the saying 'I am because we are.' If Africa was to implement this aspect of the convention to the letter, we would sooner rather than later become as pluralistic and relativistic as the West. We would have to accept homosexuality too – but then I digress.

## Some suggestions

The African church has a responsibility to the Western church. Some of the things it can offer include passion for evangelism, and modelling community and forgiveness. Likewise, the West has a responsibility to the African church in the age of globalisation. You might see this interdependence as one of the benefits of globalisation but it is more than that. It is a gospel requirement. However, in order to fulfil that prophetic role, the Western church must understand that there is a common trick played on observers of Christianity in Africa. I call it the guilt trip spiel. It goes something like this: 'Africa must be left alone to evolve its own homegrown solutions. After all the African church is booming with over 50 million people coming to the Lord in the 1990s according to Peter Brierley's **Future Church**. It is common to hear Nigeria and Kenya given as examples of countries with the largest evangelical student movements anywhere. Such people loved to give Asian economies as an example of authentic home grown models. Apparently Asia was overtaking the West in efficient manufacture without borrowing the individualism and selfishness of the West but then that was before the bubble bust and the weakness of growth based on speculation was exposed. By implication the suggestion was that all will end well if only outsiders (read anybody who does not live in Africa) would be nice enough to leave the African church alone. The African church is in fine fettle anyway.

Others of us from African play the guilt card whenever we remind outsiders of the effects of colonialism and insensitive missionary experiments in the continent. The effect of such comments is to frighten off criticism. Well, this sort of manipulation must stop. *(I readily admit that the early parts of this chapter can be said to be doing the same thing! However, I hope that the argument below demonstrates that this is not my intention at all.)*

Two recent events constitute something of a watershed in the study of African Christianity making it necessary if not inevitable to put a stop to such tactics. I believe the notion that Christians living outside Africa cannot comment with insight into the African church must be challenged for the reasons I describe below. I am indebted to Paul Gifford's **African Christianity** for the historical material that follows.

The first reason is Liberia and the second is Rwanda. Both prided themselves as Christian nations.

### *Liberia*

Founded by freed slaves the country was modelled on American Christian values. The founders aspired for liberty and therefore called the new country Liberia. To mark their gratitude for their ex president in America, they called the capital Morovia (for Monroe). Its early presidents gave one of the main reasons for returning to Africa as 'to convert the heathen.' Before it degenerated into chaos, Liberian politicians were also key figures in the church. Her top three politicians were also top church leaders.

- ❑ William Tolbert was chair of the Baptist Convention,
- ❑ Warner his vice president was the President Bishop of the Methodist church
- ❑ Reginald Townsend, the National Chair of the True Whig Party, was the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church.

Paul Gifford reports that in Liberia one came as close as politically possible to a fusion of church and state with the rhetoric of the latter seemingly fully church-inspired. Not surprisingly, evangelical and Pentecostal churches claimed to be apolitical but they were not. What we saw in Liberia was the church as part of a political system that resulted in the destruction of the country in the ensuing civil war.

## *Rwanda*

Rwanda is the birthplace of the East African Revival, which started in the 1940s. Some observers believe that the more recent spurt of growth in the East African church is still part of the original revival. Before she became a byword for African genocide, Rwanda was the most Christianised country in Africa. It was overwhelmingly a Catholic country. However, the church turned a blind eye to the injustices in society in return for a pole position in the management of education, health and development.

- ❑ The church was linked to the regime, with the Archbishop of Kigali being a member of the ruling party's central committee for fifteen years.
- ❑ When the genocide finally broke out the bishops denied it as a foreign invasion. It comes as no surprise that nuns and bishops (both Protestant and Roman Catholic) have been hauled to The Hague to answer for crimes against humanity.

These examples should demonstrate that it is no longer safe to assume that all that passes for Christianity in Africa is positive. Some of it is positively dangerous.

Those of us from the African church must accept or be persuaded to accept that sometimes we are a part of the rot that has come to be associated with Africa. We must open up the church to the prophetic word of the Bible,

“the time will come when people will not listen to true teaching but will find many more teachers who please them by saying the things they want to hear.” (2 Tim 4:3)

If we fail to open up to the opinion of other Christians we may find ourselves compelled to do so after another crisis hits the church. Moreover to turn a deaf ear to genuine concerns about the church is to play exactly the same game that was perfected by the disgraced strongmen of Africa. The latter even now dismiss all criticism as a foreign plot to discredit them.

As I have said some people tend to dismiss suggestions by anyone who does not live within Africa as irrelevant and out of touch. Well, I believe well meaning caution must be heard. You no longer have to live in Africa to know what is happening inside Africa. The same is true of other parts of the world to a greater or a lesser extent. Just like African governments are learning to live with scrutiny of their economic policies, the leaders of the African church should not be surprised that the church outside Africa has a few questions about the state of evangelicalism inside the continent. The church worldwide would, in my opinion, do well to cast aside any compunction it had to ask these questions in the age of neocolonialism. In the present phase, the period of globalisation, accountability is in fact part of the way we now live for we are all interconnected. There is one more reason why we must be more open to critics from outside. There are political, economic and social effects of a belief or a religious idea. Religious belief especially when it makes economic and social claims is way too big to be left to church leaders alone. What is happening within the African church has an influence that extends beyond the traditional boundaries of religion. Therefore, when the worldwide church seeks to understand more about what is happening in the African church, it is only doing its duty.

## **Conclusion**

Others in the past have proposed a model of church that sees the world wide church as the family of God's people. I want to add my support to that inspiration. If we see ourselves as a world-wide community of justice and peace, if we the church decide to its share our resources as members of

the same world wide family, perhaps we shall convince the world that there is a human-friendly face to globalisation; based on gospel of the first Adam and not on the economics of Adam Smith.

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