

Hope for the Christian Church Through Global Incarnational Partnerships

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Date: 29.07.2010

Category: Partnership

Editor's Note: This Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper has been written by Martine Audéoud and Rubin Pohor as an overview of the topic to be discussed at the Multiplex session on 'Hope for the Christian Church through Global Incarnational Partnerships.' Responses to this paper through the Lausanne Global Conversation will be fed back to the authors and others to help shape their final presentations at the Congress.

The Executive Director of Christian Direction in Montréal, Glenn Smith, wrote recently (1): 'In the homes on my street, I can hear several different languages, symbolizing a diverse array of cultures. What was once a former European immigration has now shifted to a truly global movement'. If this global movement can be witnessed in our daily lives, especially in urban areas, it is all the more truly experienced in the Christian churches all around the world. After a few decades of experiences in global partnerships throughout the world, it is time to pause and reflect on the lessons learned from challenging or successful global partnerships, or both. The purpose of these reflections is first to go back to the Scriptures and dig out biblical principles that support the development of global partnerships within the Christian church. We will then reflect on refreshing examples of global partnerships. Finally, we will enquire about our new contextual parameters that should stimulate or suggest new creative models of partnerships in our global churches.

Biblical Examples of Global Partnerships

To ground biblically the concept of global partnerships, let us first open the Scriptures where we discover the first global partnership in Eden. God, the Trinity, developed a global partnership with Adam and Eve, providing them with life and the most intimate relationship possible with Himself. Adam and Eve were to protect and take care of the garden, and to bring joy to God's heart within a loving relationship. What was global in this partnership? The whole created garden was to be taken care of, with all its contents. Its resources had to be managed. It became the means of sustaining Adam and Eve. From this first example we see that biblically based partnerships are rooted in a 100% trusting, mutual and intimate relationship that gives adequate security for an exchange of resources and services. This first global partnership aimed at satisfying the desire of God's heart to share His unconditional life-giving love to creatures who would respond meaningfully.

A second global partnership can be found in Genesis 17 when God promises to Abraham descendants that would cover the whole earth in exchange for Abraham's life of complete obedience and consecration to God. Again, we can note how God is expecting an exclusive relationship with Abraham in exchange for a globalized abundance of life. At the heart of this partnership, we see God's deep desire for an most intimate relationship with Abraham, His friend (Is. 41:8).

In Ephesians 3:14-21, we find another biblical example of global partnership. Here the apostle Paul pours out his heart regarding God's Trinitarian partnership with His worldwide Church. The purpose of this partnership is obvious: the Church was to be completely immersed in and filled with God's love and His fullness. To accomplish this, God would empower the Church with the Holy Spirit.

In each of these three examples of partnerships, what went wrong? Trust broke down. Adam and Eve's relationship with God suffered as they heeded the serpent's voice. Abraham's lack of trust resulted in pain for all humanity when he accepted his maid as a second wife instead of trusting in God's promise and waiting for its fulfillment. In the third instance, Christ rebuked the church in Ephesus for abandoning its first love (Rev. 2:4).

In view of the biblical roots of global partnerships for Christ's Church, a major component of these partnerships should be complete, unconditional trust and intimacy in relationships. Global

relationships should not be sought because "we are living in a global world", as is often said today, but because the Church's heart beats with God's heart in yearning to pursue deep, intimate, trusting relationships with other parts of the Church here on earth, thus prefiguring heaven when "God will be all in all" (2 Cor. 15:28). Secondly, the goal of global partnership is not resource management, sharing resources, or the like. This will generally happen in the development of global partnerships, but the primary motivation for global partnerships will be a heart filled with God's Trinitarian love towards another expression of Christ's Body. Consequently, the sharing of resources does not have to be "equal" or even "equitable" in a global partnership. In the biblical models of global partnerships, resource sharing usually draws more heavily from one side of the partnership. One final principle is also obvious: in each of the three biblical examples, the goal of the partnership is that the recipient of the resources (i.e. Adam and Eve, the descendants of Abraham, or the Church) would grow into a mature loving relationship with God. As Cody Lorance wrote (2): "The active pursuit of ever-deepening global partnerships by local bodies of Christians enables those communities to better (and increasingly so) comprehend and know God's love which results in dramatic spiritual transformation and growth". Paul states that the end-goal of all the resource sharing that the Trinitarian God exemplifies with the Church is to enable the Church to enter into the complete fullness of the consequences of Christ's redemption at the Cross (Eph. 1:3-14). Thus, the pursuit of global partnerships that mirror the Trinitarian God should aim to bring the Church to a level of maturity where it will proactively and conscientiously seek to live in the light of the cosmological redemption that Christ has accomplished at the Cross, and thus become a transformational agent in the diverse communities throughout the globe.

Contemporary Examples of Global Partnerships

Having looked at biblical and theological foundations of Christian global partnership, let us consider some creative and refreshing examples of partnerships that have been initiated throughout the globe. First, David Hackett (3) relates an Internet based example of global partnership for global evangelism:

Because of the growing interest in reaching non-English speaking people on the Internet, a new effort is underway to create an international network of Web evangelism pioneers who work in languages other than English. Organizers are calling this anticipated network the "International Internet Evangelism Network," or I IEN.

The purpose of the I IEN is to advance global Internet evangelism by creating a community of Internet evangelism practitioners who share what they learn, thereby avoiding duplication of efforts, and offer encouragement to each other. The forum can help practitioners discover ways to collaborate in similar ministries, with the hope of reducing expenses and increasing Christian unity.

Endorsed by the Internet Evangelism Coalition

The Internet Evangelism Coalition (IEC) has long desired to assist online evangelism initiatives in languages other than English. However, its member organizations operate mostly in English.

At its September 2005 meeting, the IEC executive committee and VisionSynergy (www.visionsynergy.net) partnered to bring into being this international Internet evangelism network. According to Dr. Sterling Huston, chairman of the IEC executive committee, "The rapid growth, broad international reach and economical cost of the Internet offers individuals, churches and ministries an unprecedented opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ worldwide. The IEC is enabling the church in fulfilling its mission by creating and communicating Internet resources for evangelizing our world. It has voted to establish a relationship with VisionSynergy and wants to help facilitate this initiative. The IEC is cooperating with VisionSynergy on this effort".

In this excerpt we see that the purpose of I IEN is to advance the Gospel and to respond to the desire of God's heart by creating a community and fostering unity. This corresponds very clearly to Christ's prayer in John 17 whereby the world was going to know Christ and His love relationship with

His Father, i.e. that the disciples would live in loving community with one another, and thus display to the world (here is the global effect) Christ's love. Therefore, as community, collaboration and mutual encouragement are developed, Christian unity is practiced and demonstrated to the world in the most powerful way.

Let us consider a second example of global partnership. After the most recent earthquake in Haiti and the immense losses experienced by the poorest country in the northern hemisphere, a desire to help sprang up from people, cities, churches and communities all over the world. A creative mission agency in the U.S., New Generation, seeing the need for encouragement, consolation and uplift within the Haitian church and the Haitian communities, devised a plan. Acknowledging their lack of language facility and team preparation, they realized that a better option would be to find Francophone African Christians (in this case Ivorians) trained as counselors and who were willing to go to Haiti to encourage the church there. In that these trained counselors had more experience in dealing with challenging situations due to almost ten years of war and civil unrest in Côte d'Ivoire, the cultural shock would not be as great for them as it would be for American teams. They also spoke French and represented the ancestors of the African slaves deported to Haiti. Having heard of this plan, a small group of Ivorian ladies led by a school administrator decided to go to several schools that they knew, raising money for the counselors preparing to go to Haiti. Churches and several Ivorian Christian agencies are creatively organizing concerts and other events to encourage those who will be leaving for Haiti.

One of the major lessons that can be drawn from this example is that 'global' can also mean 'historically global'. As representatives of those nations whose people were deported into slavery, this group of African Christians is actually remaking history by leaving their own people to serve willingly those that initially went to Haiti as slaves. Thus partnering globally also means rewriting history. Similarly, we now have mission agencies from Nigeria and several other African countries partnering to develop mission teams to go to serve in Europe and the U.S. As Oscar Muriu wrote for Urbana 2006 (4) while urging the churches to aim at maturity in global outreach: 'the purpose of maturity is not independence, but interdependence'. Global partnerships will thus look at a shared vision triggered by divine love, creatively investing local and communal resources in order to serve interdependently each other's communities.

A third example of global partnership can be witnessed in the Gospel for Asia movement (GFA - www.gfa.org). This missionary organization was started by an Indian brother, K.P. Yohannan, who had a burden to reach India and Asia for Christ, not by developing missions teams that were global, but by training local Indian and Asian Christians to become missionaries on their own continent. How is this organization a powerful example of global partnerships? Its administrative offices are based in the United States with other offices in all the other continents. They are creatively using numerous fundraising approaches, including partnerships with a number of lay organizations that give to charities. Their 'Get Involved' page (<http://www.gfa.org/getinvolved/>) has dozens of ideas to raise funds for GFA, and promotes a variety of opportunities to partner with missionaries serving with GFA. The partnerships extend beyond the global church in using a number of secular venues to develop funding. Most impressive is K.P. Yohannan's unrelenting call for a sacrificial life founded on Christ's values, on prayer, and on a life of undisputable integrity.

GFA's example of global partnership demonstrates that, like the Israelites leaving Egypt with Egypt's jewelry and goods, one can become extremely creative in using today's available technology and the opportunities of some of our states and governments to work and serve globally, while focusing on outreach in specific local communities. K.P. Yohannan's passion is still the saving of souls. Even though his organization has grown very large, his initial vision has not changed, perhaps, amongst other reasons, because numerous missionaries from his organization still suffer today and are martyred for the name of Christ. Sacrifice and martyrdom seem to keep the Church and GFA dependent and focused on Christ alone.

Assets and Challenges for the Development of Global Partnerships

Let us now reflect on the specific characteristics of our twenty-first century world ? its assets and challenges for the development of global partnerships to extend Christ?s kingdom on earth.

Some of our century?s assets undeniably reside in the development of cyberspace and how it can be used effectively to communicate, support, develop and create an incredible variety of partnerships. Never in the world?s history has there been a capability to communicate efficiently worldwide as we see today. Since communication is one of the key components of effective partnerships, we are blessed if we can access these resources. However, statistics show that only 26.6% of the world has Internet access.(5) Since most of the global partnerships are based on Internet access, can we really talk about ?global? partnership if three quarters of the world do not have access to that kind of communication? Does ?global? mean ?worldwide geographically? or ?access to global resources? for the whole Church? The areas where the Church is exploding are those that have the least access to cyberspace, i.e. Latin America, Asia and Africa. Therefore, how can we, in an honest and fair way, talk about global partnerships when the areas where Christianity is exploding are those that are the least covered by cyberspace access? How can and will the global church deal with this divide?

Secondly, global partnerships will need to take into account the increase in urban immigration.(6) For example, ?between 2000 and 2030, the urban population in Africa and Asia is set to double. Asia?s urban population will grow from 1.4 billion to 2.6 billion. Africa?s will surge to more than twice its size, from 294 million to 742 million. Latin America and the Caribbean will see its urban population rise from 394 million to 609 million. By 2030, 79 percent of the world?s urban dwellers will live in the developing world?s towns and cities. And Africa and Asia will account for almost seven in every ten urban inhabitants globally?(7). What will that mean for the development of global partnerships when reaching out for Christ to the whole world? Is the church equipped to think globally and ?urbanly? enough to develop ?glurban? partnerships that will address the challenges and the potential of the urban immigration movements in the coming years? How can the global church influence effectively the development of these global cities that are mainly situated in the economically more needy areas of the world?

Finally, we need to address an issue that Ralph D. Winter called ?the largest stumbling block to leadership development in the global church (8)?. In his paper, Winter noted the church?s traditional perspective on formal leadership training and appealed for a rethinking of church leadership training, by broadening the access to theological education for church leaders without disconnecting them from their social communities and responsibilities. As Winter insisted, the global church needs to rethink its ways of approaching biblical and/or theological education. What global partnerships, for instance, would actually support the theological education of the African Initiated Churches? Would the global church be ready to disconnect from the world?s most recognized patterns of accreditation of theological education that are modeled after the secular? Is the global church willing to partner and take the time to create non-discriminatory opportunities for all church leaders, especially in the developing nations, to have access to theological education without removing them from their communities and sources of income? What kind of global partnerships could creatively address this concern?

There are many more assets and challenges that could be cited regarding the development of global Christian partnerships. One major fear in developing global Christian partnerships is that the movement may become another subtle way of ?colonializing? church movements in the developing world such that the power remains on the side of those who have the financial resources. Are church leaders from developed countries willing to give up their power and view the intellectual and spiritual assets of their developing countries counterparts as more important than the material resources that are available? Are church leaders from the developed countries willing to LISTEN to what the global leaders from the south are communicating? As we creatively assess our contributions to global partnerships worldwide, let us not forget that the measure of excellence in these partnerships is found in Philippians 4:8: ?Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable ? if anything is excellent or praiseworthy ?think about such things? and ultimately in Christ?s sacrifice at the Cross to draw ALL men (humanity, i.e. all people groups and nations) to Himself (John 12:32).

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