

Prayer for New Paradigms

Author: Shelley Taylor

Date: 17.08.2010

Category: Globalization, Partnership, Ethnicity

We find ourselves today in need of new paradigms for responding to globalisation. From time to time I glimpse something of God's big picture, see the grand view, catch the vision of the multi-ethnic worship in Revelation 7, but mostly I don't think that I'm operating from this paradigm. [There are some great discussions about seeking new global paradigms in: 'The Changing Paradigm of Missions?', by Eldon Porter, 08.07.2010 and in 'GLOBAL GOSPEL, GLOBAL ERA: Christian discipleship and mission in the age of Globalization' by Os Guinness and David Wells, 13.07.2010.]

The challenges are huge - how can we stretch our small brains to hold this huge moving picture of countries and cultures influencing each other, the fully interconnected nature of our environment and the rapid pace of change the world is experiencing? How can we have an awareness and understanding of all cultures, languages, their respective histories and philosophies and comprehend the dynamics of their interactions and interplay with each other?

Yet God is in this and wants us to participate in it too. He has given us this grand story leading to the fullness of God being revealed and experienced, the healing and sanctification of the nations and of the diverse nations worshipping God in unity. God has been consistently leading His people towards this expansive picture, dropping hints right through the Bible. Christopher J. H. Wright discusses how the nations are a significant and an integral part of God's mission in the world - as seen in: the call of Abraham (in Genesis 12:3, that 'all nations will be blessed through you') the emphasis on the ingathering of the nations in the Old Testament the continued attention to the nations in New Testament mission the early church's inclusion of the Gentiles Paul's emphasis on the faith of Abraham, as in Galatians 3:6-9; the affirmation of the nations as part of God's diversity of creation (Deuteronomy 32:8; Acts 17:26) the glorious depiction of the diversity of the nations coming into God's presence (Revelation 7:9; 21:24-26) [i]

Furthermore God chooses to use culture, as Charles H. Kraff's argues:

"God is not bound by culture. On the contrary God is absolute and infinite. Yet he has freely chosen to employ human culture and at major points to limit himself to the capacities of culture in his interactions with people. On occasion he freely chooses to transcend cultural, spatial, and temporal limitations in events that we term 'miracles'. But frequently even in miracles he operates largely in terms of cultural factors rather than counter to them. Any limitation of God is only that which he imposes upon himself - he chooses to use culture; he is not bound by it in the same way human beings are." [ii]

In addition, God chooses to work with humans in mission, and have humans work together in community for mission. He leads us to be vitally interactive and relational in our approach to furthering the Kingdom.

So it seems it is time for us all to take a step up, to not just glimpse God's big picture occasionally, but to truly grasp it and take hold of it, bringing it deep into the core of our thinking and integrating it across the spectrum of our words and actions. We need new paradigms, new ways of understanding and responding to our complex world, we need new updated globalised brains. We should not be discouraged and we should not be fearful. It is an exciting time with opportunities for enormous learning. With God's help we can rise to the challenge.

Some practical ways of thinking occur to me?

1. We might consider culture in a similar way to how we consider people - remembering that each person and each culture have godly aspects and ungodly aspects, and (in Jesus) all are on a journey

towards sanctification. Each is unique and special, with purpose and gifting from God that will bless the church.

2. We need a paradigm of equal partnerships between cultures ? while some cultures are robust in some areas, they are weak in others, and while some cultures may not have much to offer in some areas, they are strong in other spheres. Each and every culture has great value and richness to offer, while each is also flawed and in need of purification.

3. While it is likely to be impossible to have an excellent knowledge and grasp of all cultures, languages and their respective histories, we could go at least some way towards it. Even the smallest steps in reaching out beyond our culture will enrich us enormously. The more we can work with and exchange ideas with Christians from other cultures the better - whether we are primarily missionaries, pastors or theologians. Some predict that it is likely to be the informal, personal connections among Christians throughout the world that will most advance global exchange.[iii] Therefore, we might ask ourselves: In what ways can we personally (and in our churches and mission activities) develop greater cultural awareness? (For example through relationships, exchange and dialogue with others) What opportunities do we have for relationships with Christians from different cultures? (For example via: people we already know, travel, mission, internet, forums, conferences?) Are there ways that we can start to build intercultural relationships that will support our work and help us to reflect on and develop our thinking in the future?

4. We need a paradigm of being vitally active learners and to humbly accept our situation of not having the full and complete picture relevant to our task of operating in a global context. Given our limitations we need to seek assistance and partner with others to enable us to develop a broader perspective and understanding.

5. We need interaction, exchange, cooperation and coordination on a scale we haven't previously imagined. The scale and concept of this Lausanne Congress begins to move in this direction. Yet the need is greater than cooperation among evangelical Christians. We need to become advocates for effective global interaction, exchange, cooperation and coordination across governments and all social, economic, and environmental sectors if we are to reduce the impact of global warming and its associated spin offs of natural disasters, human suffering, poverty and the likelihood of increased conflict among nations.

Lord, expand our minds, strengthen our resolve not to be daunted by globalisation, but rather to be energized and motivated by new vision and new paradigms. Shepherd us through the complex challenges of this time in history. Remind us of 1 Corinthians 13:7 - that love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful and endures through every circumstance. Help us to be good stewards of the earth and draw us towards the goal of redeemed diverse nations worshipping together in a redeemed creation.

[i] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006) 193-4, 215, 456.

[ii] Charles H. Kraft with Marguerite G. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologising in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (rev.ed.; New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 90.

[iii] As suggested in relation to theology in *Globalising Theology?* by Craig Ott, the final chapter in *Globalising Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity?*, eds. Craig Ott and Harold Netland, Baker Books, 2006.