SOME THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

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While more and more folks in the West acknowledge the globalization of the church and give witness to the shift from the West to the Global South, too many â€œremain theologically provincial.â€
Category: Observations

For a project that I'm involved in, I am re-reading Bryan Myers excellent book Engaging Globalisation. The following few quotes sum up many of the things that I've been trying to convey on Kouyanet over the last few years.

> *The implications of the center of gravity of the church moving to the Global South are considerable. We need to understand that the great majority of our Southern brothers and sisters are poor and persecuted. These majority-world Christians are generally more theologically and morally conservative than Western Christians, with the possible exception of American conservative evangelicals. They are much more comfortable with the supernatural and have a worldview closer to that of the Bible. This often creates confusion in conversations with Christians from the West.*

> *This new situation also has consequences for how we think about mission. The most obvious is that mission is no longer a Western monopoly or privilege. Nor can non-Western churches be thought of as extensions of Western missionary efforts; they are self-acting agents of mission and increasingly are the major contributor to global missions. Again, mission from everywhere to everyone.*

> *This demographic shift raises several important theological issues as well. First, there is the question of whose theology will guide our lives and mission efforts. Until recently, Europe did theology and the rest of the world did contextual theology. This is no longer accepted. All theologies are by definition contextual. But there is more to it than that. While more and more folks in the West acknowledge the globalization of the church and give witness to the shift from the West to the Global South, too many â€œremain theologically provincial.â€*

> *Second, the theological questions are not the same. In the modern and largely secular West, the critical theological issues focus on gender and sexuality, the dangers of consumption and materialism, and the challenges of multiculturalism and pluralism. In the Global South, the pressing theological questions are different: morality and holiness, poverty and justice, political violence, the rule of law, corruption, and coexistence with primal or traditional religion. To make this more complex, the two parts of the Christian world tend to read their Bibles differently. In a heated discussion at a global meeting of Anglicans from around the*

world on the topic of sexuality, an African bishop asked his Episcopalian colleague in exasperation: â€œIf you donâ€™t believe the Scriptures, why did you bring them to us in the first place?â€

Finally, this shift in the center of theological thinking may hold out hope to the Western church and its captivity to the two-tiered, material-spiritual worldview that I have referred to repeatedly in this book. The churches and theologians of the Global South are not as deeply captive to this worldview, even though exposed to it through their experiences with Western education. I suspect that this is one of the reasons that the Pentecostal movement has taken root so quickly and pervasively. Even most Protestant and Catholic churches in Africa are sympathetic to a seamlessly integrated material and spiritual world. Perhaps it will be our brothers and sisters in the Global South who will help us in the West recover the biblical vision of such a world.

This raises important questions for pastors, students, and academics. Whose material are you reading? What voices are you listening to? Are Kwame Bediako, Ogbo Kalu, Lamin Sanneh, Mercy Oduyoye, Emmanuel Katongole, Nimi Wariboko, RenÃ© Padilla, Samuel Escobar, Roberto Goizueta, Justo GonzÃilez, Ruth Padilla DeBorst, Hwa Yung, Vinoth Ramachandra, Melba Maggay, Andrew Sung Park, Martin Luther King Jr., and Howard Thurman on your reading list?