BOOKS I HAVE READ: ENGAGING GLOBALISATION

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There is no single strategy or approach for a Christian engagement with globalization. Globalization is too complex, and the church is, too.

Category: Reviews

As you may have gathered from posts earlier this week, I have been reading and thoroughly enjoying Â Engaging Globalization: The Poor, Christian Mission, And Our Hyperconnected World (Mission In Global Community)Â by Bryant L. Myers.

I read the book on my Kindle, which always makes it difficult to judge the format of the book. From what I read online, it is a medium format book of 304 pages with a generous sprinkling of footnotes and an excellent bibliography. This isn't a popular book which you can read in one sitting, nor is it a specialist book that will baffle all but the most devoted of readers. It is a well researched, well thought through, but accessible book that deserves to be widely read by anyone interested in mission, whether that be on a global or on a local scale.

Myers worked in relief and development for over 30 years with World Vision and no serves asÂ professor of transformational development in the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, so he knows the field both as a practitioner and as an academic. The book consists of fourteen chapters divided into six sections

- Setting the Stage
- Introducing Globalization
- Two Eras of Globalization
- The Impact of Globalization
- Globalization and the Poor
- Globalization of the Church

Globalization is not an easy topic to define:

> *a definition. It would be helpful to have a simple and clear definition of globalization. Sadly, this is not possible; we are faced instead with complexity and ambiguity. An Amazon search for books on globalization returns over 41,000 listings. Googling the phrase â€œdefinitions of globalizationâ€ is overwhelming with nearly 300,000 results. One academic research effort to summarize definitions of globalization from historians, sociologists, economists, political scientists, and other scholars identified 114 different definitions. (33)*
>
> *...Globalization is on everyoneâ€™s lips, a fad word fast turning into a shibboleth, a magic incantation, a passkey meant to unlock the gates to all mysteries. â€œFor some, â€˜globalizationâ€™ is what we are bound to do if we wish to be happy. For others, â€˜globalizationâ€™ is the cause of our unhappiness. For everybody, though, â€˜globalizationâ€™ is the intractable fate of the world, an irreversible process.â€ (35)*

Myers eventually resorts to stories and metaphors, rather than academic discussions to explain what the term actually means. However, it is clear that he sees some serious problems with globalization, however it is defined:

> *I will argue that the values and processes of globalization fail in three critical areas. First, their understanding of who human beings are and why we are here is reductionist and thin. The result is a crisis of meaning. With no theology of sin, the secular humanist lacks an adequate account for greed, poverty, and injustice, and hence suffers from a major diagnostic blind spot. Second, globalizationâ€™s assumptions about the role and purpose of power are flawed, and this is the main reason for the dark side of globalization. Third, globalization fails to provide a compelling spiritual and ethical architecture that enables human beings to understand who they are, why they are here, and how they should live. We are back to a crisis of meaning. (8)*

Having introduced the topic, Myers goes into an interesting historical diversion which traces the roots of globalization back to the industrial revolution and the Enlightenment and traces its development up to the present day.

Myers then has a fair bit to say about the development of globalization and the growth of Christian mission. I put a number of quotes from this section in a blog post here.

The book ends with an excellent chapter on ways that the church could respond to Globalisation. I think the following quotes track Myers argument and speak for themselves.

> *There is no single strategy or approach for a Christian engagement with globalization. Globalization is too complex, and the church is, too. The bottom line is that we are to seek the welfare of the society and culture in which God has placed us in this globalizing world. (241)*

> *As Christians kept their eyes narrowly focused on going to the ends of the earth with their message, they lost sight of the fact that the world was getting smaller and more tightly connected; the ends of the earth were coming to us. This change means that the missiological challenge of globalization is more complex than just finding new ways to use the techniques of globalization to carry out traditional mission. We must not overlook or ignore the fact that globalization is really something quite new in Godâ€™s world. Today there is a competing global offer of â€œgood news.â€ Globalization and its values have also gone to the ends of the earth. Globalizationâ€™s message, media, and promises are attractive, accessible, and seductive. In a sense, the promises and seductions of the globalisms of modernity and neoliberal capitalism are evangelizing us. (245)*

> *Todayâ€™s disciples need to have a deep understanding of why the â€œgood newsâ€ of globalization is not as good as it sounds. Once you have enough, you need something more. People need to know who they are, why they are here, and how they should live. We are meaning-making, moral, believing creatures, after all. God made us this way. These*

> *fundamental human needs cannot be satisfied by more wealth or power or by better technology. But thinking critically and conceptually is not enough. Todayâ€™s disciples need more. (248)*

> *Until we overcome our captivity to the secular faith claim that Christianity has nothing to offer regarding politics, economics, and social issues, we will find it all too easy to operate within a Christian subculture and leave the world to the faith option of secular humanism. (254)*

> *This leads to my first piece of good news. We were never commanded to be successful. We were commanded to love God and our neighbors and to be faithful witnesses to this within the context of our fallen world. Our mission is to be faithful, not successful. (255)*

Who should read this book? Any Christian who has an interest in politics, geography or the challenge of discipleship in a changing world will benefit from reading it. Certainly anyone who has a leadership role in international mission *must* read it. Myers demonstrates that globalization is a development of Enlightenment thinking and prioritises the physical over the spiritual. He also points out that churches and mission agencies have bought into the same underlying philosophy without recognising that they have done so. Any attempt to define the future shape of mission and mission agencies needs to get to grips with this basic philosophical conundrum.

> *I believe that a great deal more effort needs to be given to linking the new demands of twenty-first-century mission to revitalizing and enriching worship and spiritual formation. The traditional tools of missionâ€"communication theory, cross-cultural skills, and an understanding of contextualizationâ€"alone do not seem up to the challenge. (251)*