

THE IMPLICATIONS OF WESLEYAN INTERCULTURAL STUDIES
IN A 'FLAT WORLD'
TOWARD A MISSIOLOGY OF LEARNERS, PARTNERS, AND SERVANTS
David Wesley Induction Address, Nazarene Theological Seminary Feb. 2006

A current and popular understanding of Missiology is that it is a way of *doing* theology. **This understanding takes my cultural perspective of scripture and theology and applies it to context.** The questions that I would like to address in this brief time involve the “*doing* of theology” within the changing and diverse global context in which we live. In addressing intercultural dynamics I hope to find a balance between low context theory and high context pragmatics. Both extremes are dangerous and detrimental to the Kingdom of God. In combining the two you could come to several possible solutions. Our goal for students is that they understand the theoretical background of missiology (scriptural and theological) and how to apply that to a variety of contextual situations.

There are key questions that we, as a denomination must ask ourselves.

- Where does a Nazarene/Wesleyan Church fit in God’s global plan?
- What are the future challenges of mobilizing the church in the West?
- What roles does a Western Church fulfill when we find the Great Commission being undertaken by a worldwide church?
- How can students of theology become learners who contextualize good theological and hermeneutical practices within a global context?

The title of this address, *The implications of Wesleyan Intercultural Studies in a ‘Flat World uses the term “flat world”* in the same sense that Thomas Friedman uses it in his book “The World is Flat”. Friedman’s thesis is that in 1989 a series of events began which that have rapidly moved us toward globalization. Globalization is evidenced through an interdependence and interaction in such a way that the world seems smaller. Although Friedman’s book is written within a geopolitical and financial framework, it has enormous implications for the Christian Church. I have chosen this framework intentionally because it addresses the changing character of Missiology.

My discussion here is not the larger context of the *Miseo Dei*.

Scripture from Genesis to Revelation indicates that God is not a local, tribal, God but the God of all creation. From Genesis 3 onward, scripture points toward God’s “salvage operation” for all the nations- this is the overarching theme of scripture. In Genesis we see God’s plan for salvaging all nations *through* Abraham. Even in Revelation 22, we can see the *Miseo Dei* as God restores fallen creation as “all things are made new”; everything in between shows God’s compassion and redemption. God’s plan of salvation is carried out through missions. Throughout all of scripture, one can see, over and over again, God’s compassion for the Gentiles, and the “foreigners”. Throughout all of church history, beginning with the Christian Church of the first century, the church has sent missionaries to reach “all nations”.

Missiology as an academic discipline, however, has more recent roots. Missiology has been a major part of Catholic Seminaries for some time with emphasis on theology and history.

(Only recently have the humanities, such as anthropology, been included.) A major shift in missiology for the evangelical church came with the formation of the school of world mission at Fuller Seminary (1965). Donald McGavern wanted to “re-train” missionaries with a focus on evangelism that lead to church planting. He wanted Fuller to be a seminary where they could form a school of mission. Peter Wagner, Ralph Winter and others were invited to be a part of the team. Ralph Winter emphasized the need to move missiology toward being an academic discipline. As a result, Fuller formed a school of mission and the American Society of Missiology was also formed. Shortly after the formation of the “School of Mission” at Fuller, other seminaries developed schools of mission with similar objectives. I find it incredible that Paul Orjala, in 1964 (a year before Fuller formed their school of mission) was forming a new school of mission at NTS with a focus on “re-tooling” missionaries for evangelism and church planting that was consistent with our holiness tradition. Today we can be thankful for those such as Paul Orjala who pointed toward the future and played a key role in pioneering the field of Missiology within the Church of the Nazarene.

The particular issue that I would like to address today is that of the implications of Wesleyan Intercultural Studies in a ‘Flat World’. If we define Missiology as a way of *doing* theology we must ask ourselves how we can *do* Wesleyan theology within a changing global context. I would like to present what I perceive to be the major challenges for Wesleyan missiology today

The question of *The role of the Western Church* in world missions is, in my opinion, the greatest ecclesiological and missiological issue that faces the West. The issue becomes increasingly important as the church de-westernizes. What is the role of the “church of the western world” in advancing the Gospel?

After an honest reading of Philip Jenkins’ book, “*The Next Christendom: the Coming of Global Christianity*”, as well as Samuel Escobar’s book, “*The New Global Mission : The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*”, one could conclude that churches north of the equator will, within a very short time, have little or no part in the global, Christian Church.

In the words of Samuel Huntington the world is divided into the “West and the rest” (Huntington, p. 183). I ask, once again, how can the Western church best serve God’s global purposes?

In October I attended a meeting of Nazarene Educators in Campinas Brazil. With great admiration for the missionaries who established the Church of the Nazarene in Brazil, a Brazilian leader described the lasting influences they had on the current objectives of the Church in Brazil. He told the Brazilians present that they should not forget the names and the influence of these missionaries. It is interesting to note that The Church of the Nazarene was established in Brazil close to the same time that the Nazarene Church was established in South Korea. It is also fascinating to see the many similarities between the two areas today. The work began in Korea in 1948 and in Brazil in 1958. Both of these areas had developed significantly during the sixties under missionaries who were heavily influenced by Peter Beyerhaus and Henry LeFever’s book, *The Responsible Church and Foreign Mission*. The three-self theory (self-government, self-support, and self-propagation) is developed in this text. Today, the Church of the Nazarene in Brazil, as well as South Korea, is financially strong and has a tendency toward independence. In Jenkins’ work the fourth “self” has been implicitly added to include “self-theologizing”, wherein

theology is developed according to the respective cultural context. This brings up other issues that relate to the contextualization of theology which is beyond the scope of this paper, but is a major issue the church must address.

All of this leaves us with some very difficult questions in respect to an “international church” and how it should function in a “flat world”. The work of Beyerhaus and LeFever has been a great contribution to mission development and has moved us away from paternalistic patterns. Paul Orjala’s 1964 induction address provides remarkable insight at this point. Orjala says that the three-self theory should be seen as a method and not a goal. I would add here that the goal is not independence, but rather **interdependence** in which the church in any world area is not in a paternalistic relationship with the church in the United States, but rather joins as interdependent partners with the rest of the globe. Interdependence, of course, has great implications for the “western church” as well as other areas. A key element in a “flat world” is that of interdependence”, which is not only a geopolitical reality, but it is an *ecclesiological and missiological* reality as well. For the western church this means that the Kingdom of God cannot be painted in nationalistic tones of red, white and blue. The Wesleyan Churches’ commitment to the Kingdom of God and relationship to the greater global church must supersede any national identity or any political agenda.

For the western church an interdependent relationship will mean taking the posture of a servant. For the emerging church of the south, interdependence will mean sacrifice and a vision beyond “self” to “others” in which they are called on to collaborate in the *missio Dei* rather than acting as independent, nationalistic mission agencies.

Being part of God’s global mission in a “flat world” implies many changes. True global partnership means being willing to redefine our roles. Missionary teams will become multi-cultural, international and non-western. Missionaries and local leadership will need to work in collaboration in setting strategies and finding ways to serve those strategies. Financial management will mean balancing the desire for good stewardship against our Western propensity towards paternalism and the non-western temptation towards dependency.

A second challenge which must be addressed as to living in a “flat world” is that of **Religious Pluralism**. For those of us old enough to remember, mission services of the past were often defined by the song “*We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations.*” Despite the obvious imperialistic overtone of the song, it reflects the core conviction that Jesus Christ is unique, and His divinity compels us toward evangelism and outreach.

The spirit of this age does not necessarily accept this belief. The impact of post-modern relativism puts pastors in front of people every Sunday who are asking, “Do we *really* have a story to tell to the nations?” “Is there any thing unique in Christ that constrains us to make such bold claims?”

Pluralism is one of the greatest theological challenges facing the church. Tim Dearborn, writing in “*Christ, the Church, and Other Religions*” states it this way: “Every local church – whether in Kansas City or Kinshasa , in Toledo or Tokyo , in London or in Latvia – will serve in a religiously pluralistic environment” (Stackhouse, p. 139). Pluralism is not a philosophy reserved for the classroom; it’s the worldview of the common person.

The idea that Jesus Christ and Christian faith is unique – a basic motivation for global missions – is far from acceptable in a world that responds “all of the above” to questions of truth. The spirit of our “post everything” age leans away from the proclamation of the deity and uniqueness of Christ. If the implications of scripture about Christ and eternity are true, there are enormous implications for missiology and evangelism.

In the face of global pluralism, the church must proclaim Jesus Christ with theological integrity, critical contextualization and, above all, with an open and transparent spirit.

The challenge of pluralism obligates us to evaluate our training: do the missionaries and leaders of our churches really understand the beliefs and worldviews of other religions? Are they capable of dialoging about these differences?

Tim Dearborn, again writing in “*Christ, the Church, and Other Religions*”, observes that “Without a basic comprehension of other’s beliefs, our encounters will be characterized by prejudice, paternalism, and pride” (p. 139). We must be willing to interact with other faiths believing in the uniqueness of Christ, but willing to listen, to learn, and to dialogue.

Globalization – is the third challenge. What does Christianity look like in a flat world? In *The Next Christendom*, Philip Jenkins points out that, “Over the past century...the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Already today, the largest Christian communities on the planet are to be found in Africa and Latin America. If we want to visualize a ‘typical’ contemporary Christian, we should think of a woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a Brazilian *favela*” (Jenkins, p. 2).

David Barrett states that as of 2000, only 39% of the world’s one and a half billion Christians live in the industrialized West. Barrett further predicts that by 2025, fully 70% of Christians will live in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania. (Cited by Ian Douglas, “Globalization and the Local Church”, in Stackhouse, p. 203).

Some believe that globalization leads to greater cohesiveness and integration. Others view globalization as homogenization in which the “rest of the world” begins to look and act like the western world. I agree more with those, however, who think that globalization more likely will lead to greater fragmentation. Samuel Huntington says:

“The dangerous clashes of the future are likely to arise from the interaction of Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance, and Sinic [Chinese] assertiveness.” (Huntington, p. 183)

We serve a global church with a global commission in a globalized world. What will it mean? Will having North American citizenship hurt or help?

Territorialism is perhaps our greatest anthropological challenge. In recent history there has been a growing resistance to Westernization which has given impetus to a renewed nationalism in many parts of the world. This nationalism, as we have seen is often attached to religion such as Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Sharia Islam in northern Nigeria, or communion tables draped with the American Flag in the USA. Territorialism is a growing trend which poses a great anthropological challenge for missions as we seek ways to relate to others.

In recent history we have seen what happens when ethnic specific religion degenerates into tribalism and racism as we have seen in the deaths of hundreds of thousands in Rwanda and Burundi.

Our global society is **not** a post-religious society. The world is fueled by religion.

If anything Rwanda reminds us, especially as Wesleyans, that that the great commission is to make disciples, not just converts, and that these disciples must grow deep in understanding Jesus' mandate to love and forgive our enemies. The disciple in a territorialized world must not only be taught to look upward to Jesus but also outward in love to those around them whom Jesus loves. If any group has reason to minister in terrorized and war torn sections of our globe, *it is the Church of the Nazarene!* If any doctrine has reason to be clearly seen in such a world, it is the optimistic, radical doctrine of holiness!

Tribalism challenges us to build up holy disciples who know how to break down the barriers, the "dividing walls of hostility" through Christ.

Concluding Observations:

In the context of these global challenges, what are the localized, specific issues that we face in the seminary and the global church where we serve? I've identified five for your consideration.

#1. Short Term Missions and the "amateurization of missiology":

Short term missions are an exploding phenomena which is making an enormous impact on the mission efforts of the church. There is an increasing need for North American Pastoral staff to understand the mission endeavor of the church so that they can exercise wise and informed leadership in this emerging trend. There is also a need to develop courses which will facilitate youth pastors, pastors, and missionaries whose responsibilities involve working with visiting short-term mission groups. Closely related to short term missions is the rapidly increasing number of individuals with resources but little or no intercultural awareness who are taking the task of missions into their own hands. Recent examples of this are Rick Warren's "Purpose Driven Rwanda" and "Prayer of Jabez" author, Bruce Wilkinson's failed effort to establish an orphanage, and Disney type park in Swaziland primarily due to a lack of intercultural awareness. At the present this is an under-studied area of missiology which needs development.

#2. A Global, Wesleyan Missiology

There is a need to "retool" our current missiology in such a manner that missiologist from outside the U.S. can work together with missiologists within the U.S. in developing a global, Wesleyan Missiology and understanding of mission. There are a growing number of centers for Nazarene mission education and training outside of North America, a growing number of Nazarene missiologists who are not North Americans as well as Nazarene missionaries/missiologists who have a wealth of experience and understanding of the mission of the Church of the Nazarene in a Global context. It is my prayer that we can develop an interdependency in which we can learn from one another and work together toward common goals of being transforming agents of God's Grace. My vision is that NTS will be a catalyst in forming a global consortium of Nazarene Missiology.

#3 Managerial Missiology:

One of the recent criticisms of current western missiology from Latin American Missiologist, Samuel Escobar is that missiology from “the west” has become too managerial. His primary argument is that missiology from “the west” relies on secular managerial techniques of strategic planning more than spiritual/theological models of mission. Escobar, in my opinion, overstates his case, but he does have a valid point in that our strategy should be primarily driven by our theology and our understanding of scripture, not by the pragmatic. Our theological understanding of God, of humankind, and of faith should form every practical aspect and every strategy of mission. If missionaries are driven by the pragmatic, we will have no filter to evaluate trends of church expansion which have enormous theological implications. If our practice is driven, however, by our Wesleyan Theology in the Church of the Nazarene, I truly believe that the practical results will be the transformation of thousands of lives as we partner with God in His mission to “break the power of cancelled sin, to set the prisoners free”.

In a time when many mission organizations are focusing strictly on mission training, we must seek a balance in which our theology is missiological and our missiology is theological. The implications of this for NTS is that students who are preparing to serve in intercultural settings must have a solid theological as well as biblical perspective which will focus their missiological understanding of mission as “doing theology”.

#4. Intercultural Studies

One of the outcomes of a “flat world” and the interconnectedness of the world is that the definitions for missiology have become somewhat vague. In the past, we have relied on what has been termed “salt water missiology” in which a missionary is not a missionary unless they cross over saltwater. The result is that an increasing number of people will go on short term “mission trips” to a Spanish speaking country to do missions, and return to the U.S. where there are 41 million Latinos (that is a higher number than the number of Canadians living in Canada) and not see the need to minister to them since they are next door. New terminology should, perhaps be developed to identify those who are called to specialize in ministry which we have historically called “overseas” missionaries. NTS must also be a leader in preparing the growing number of those who will minister outside of their passport culture. NTS cannot, however, assume that those ministering within the U.S. can avoid issues of intercultural ministry and religious pluralism. Intercultural studies must be an integrated part of a theological education which prepares people to minister in a flat world. A person who does not understand the intercultural nature of our context, does not understand our global society. I propose that our “missions” program not be strictly “Mission studies” but rather intercultural studies for several reasons:

1. The increasingly used term “intercultural studies” is more relevant to Nazarene Theological Seminary’s commitment to understanding and practicing mission and evangelism ‘in context’.
2. The term “missiology” is not widely understood in the academic community and connotes, for some, an academic provincialism.
3. There is an international political agenda behind the increasing reference to “Intercultural Studies.” The unfortunate legacy of colonialism means that some governments reject visa

applicants with degrees in “Mission” or “Missiology,” while being much more favorably toward applicants with degrees in “intercultural studies”.

#5. Toward a model of learners, partners and servants.

The Western Church must commit itself to being global learners. “Western arrogance” will nullify its’ Christian effectiveness; therefore, the Western Church needs to reaffirm its’ commitment to humility. The Western Church needs to listen and learn.

- From Christians in Cuba or China who can teach us much about carrying the cross daily.
- From Christians of the third world, who can teach about finding ones identity in Christ, not things.
- From Christians in the Middle East and North Africa, who know about staying faithful under the pressure of dominating Islam.

Besides being global learners, we must also commit ourselves to being global partners. I have already mentioned the implications of an interdependent global church. I would add here, that as a seminary with a mission to be a global theological resource we must continue to find ways to partner with the global church in learning and in offering resources.

The globalization of missions will mean a deeper commitment than ever before to mission efforts that are multi-cultural in composition. This will mean that, as Patrick Johnstone observes, “Much greater sensitivity to multiple missionary cultures as well as target cultures will be an essential component of training and orientation on the field (Gree nlee, p. 189).

Finally as learners and partners we must also be **global servants**. This was the heart of Paul Orjala’s 1964 induction address, in which we see the dramatic shift away from the missionary being over the national church to serving alongside the national church. Even with the best strategies and techniques, we will not change the most difficult parts of our world if people cannot see Jesus in our methods and our message.

Conclusion:

I thank the Lord for great people such as Francis Xavier, William Carry, Paul Orjala, and others. They have made a great impact on the global church. Today, however, is *our* day. This is *our* generation to boldly join Christ Himself in praying “*Thy Kingdom Come*”. My prayer for all of is that we will passionately teach, preach and live in such a manner that our world will be transformed by Jesus Christ.

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