

*The Local Church in a Global Era: Reflections for a New Century*

Edited by Max L. Stackhouse, Tim Dearborn & Scott Paeth

Eerdmans, 2000

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A must book for the realization of the mission of the church in our world today and going into the future. It centers its concern on two indispensable elements of the contemporary mission of the Christian faith: the local church and globalization, two realities of the present world that cannot be theorized away but need to be related redemptively one to another. That is exactly what this book attempts to do.

The production of this book itself provides a different model for the realization of a literary project, which in turn reflects the globalization perspective. It is the result of a joint effort between three organizations interested in the mission of the church today. World Vision and Princeton Theological Seminary co-hosted a conference to “help redefine missions for the next century,” (p. 1) and the Pew Charitable Trusts provided a grant to cover some of the costs. The content of this book is the product of that conference held in the fall of 1998, which convened close to one hundred representatives from a wide variety of fields within the ranks of religious and non-religious organizations and concerns, with the purpose of publishing materials with this focus.

The fifteen articles of this insightful manual for the mission of the local church in a global era are divided in five topics which include three articles each. These general sections are: 1) Stewardship, Prosperity, and Justice, 2) Faith, Learning, and Family, 3) The Spirit, Wholeness, and Health, 4) Christ, the Church, and Other Religions, and 5) Conflict, Violence, and Mission.

The book ends with the conclusion as an integrative piece around the theme: A Global Future for Local Churches. Scott Paeth, one of the co-editors of this books, in the introduction states that “what bonds these groups and the chapters of this book together is a commitment to carry out a faithful and useful ministry and mission under the new conditions of ‘globalization’” (p. 2).

Globalization, in almost all the articles, is presented with caution and critically, helping us become aware of and thus avoid the dangers it entails, such a fragmentation and domination. On the other hand, accepting globalization as a prevailing worldview which is unavoidable and stresses interconnectedness, interdependence, and the view of the big picture of things, it should be seen as providing new opportunities, avenues, and challenges for the mission of the local church.

This well organized book helps us realize that there are many important and relevant issues, which are direct products of the phenomenon of globalization, that need to be considered and to be in dialog with the local church, so it can carry out its mission more conscientiously and contextually in our “new” world. Among the issues presented to us by the “global culture” that the local church should consider in light of her mission are issues related to the pervasive influence the changing face of world economy, multicultural teaching-learning, family composition, gender roles, science, technology, ecology, medicine, especially genetics, religious pluralism, have upon us. All of these issues have imposed themselves as part of our emerging theological agenda to make our practice in the world as local churches more relevant and effective.

It is interesting to note that in the face of all of these processes, forces and changes, or paradigm shifts, before which the local church might feel helpless and un-influential, it is precisely the local church that is called to be a theological, pedagogical, therapeutic, and missional community

in the midst of our global world. “We no longer have the luxury (if indeed we ever had it) of viewing the needs and wants of our own local community apart from the requirements of the entire world”. In another article it is stated that “the task is more urgent today than ever before in the history of the church. Our mission is not merely in and to the world, but in and to all the forces which impinge upon it and which make it what it will be”(p. 103).

In the conclusion, we as members of the local church are warned: “Rather than being marginalized by the forces of globalization, sidelined in the sweep of massive change, local congregations face an unprecedented opportunity. God calls the church to ride the wave of global change, responding to the deep crises of human societies and human spirits created by that very globalization, with a breath and creativity not found anywhere else. The twenty-first century will indeed be the century of the church--not the Church Militant or the Church Triumphant, but the Church Redeemed as a transnational, transcultural community of creative compassion” (p. 210).

The book ends with the fitting prophetic statement about the future mission of the local church:

Congregations of the twenty-first century will indeed be ones whose members are global citizens, with a loyalty and identity transcending ethnicity and nationality. These congregations will be the moral and relational glue binding our fractured globe. In this way, they will flood our troubled world with hope, as “the God of hope fills you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”(Rom. 15:13) (p. 216).

I can assure you that reading this book will open your eyes and widen your scope concerning the challenges and opportunities the local church faces and will confront in the future as it endeavors to faithfully carry out its local and global mission in this new setting of globalization.

