

God and Globalization Vol. 2: The Spirit and the Modern Authorities

Max L. Stackhouse with Don S. Browning, editors

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Background

This book was given to me last July, just few days before I traveled to Quito, Ecuador and San Jose, Costa Rica, to teach a doctoral program administration and leadership course. I assumed that by reading it away from the United States, I would be able to gain a different perspective on globalization that the essays treat from a western perspective. I could not fulfill my expectation to read the book during the trip, with the exception of the Contents, the short author's biographies, and the introduction by Max L. Stackhouse.

A month previous to the trip, I participated as an observer of the General Assembly of my denomination, in Indianapolis, Indiana.[\[1\]](#) It was a great joy to observe my church at work and advancing the cause of the gospel in more than 130 countries. However, it worried me the unequal participatory proportion in the dialogs and responsibilities as a church and structure should we have in normative areas mentioned in this book: education, law, medicine and technology. Without a question, ours is an international church that very much represents the Western kind of globalization that later I will describe.

As I returned from Central America, the news awaited me. My wife and I were elected to serve as pastors of a bilingual local church in Kansas City. These counties in this large city has grown

—from 1990 through 2000— 60% to 200% in their Spanish populations. With that Hispanic growth, a massive immigration mainly from eastern countries has taken place as well. So much so, that the English as a Second Language program in the church where I was member at the present time has close to seventy students from eleven different language groups. Slowly, but surely, I was advancing in the reading of this book.

My first school year 2001-2002-class day at the seminary where I teach was on September 11. As result of the terrorist attacks to the Trade World Center, New York, and to the Pentagon, in Washington, all I did with the students was to informally dialog and pray. That day—with literally almost the rest of the world—I concentrate myself to watch and listen to the news and the developments of this situation. Even today we do not know for certain what will happen. So far, the Anthrax terror and the beginning of a war in Afghanistan were added to those attacks. The essays in the book suddenly acquired a new meaning. Human history abruptly changed its course; a large McWorld coalition of powerful and not so powerful countries took place to deal with and to respond to tribal terror. It was a very interesting phrase what President Bush expressed during one of his first remarks to the nation: "That who is not with us, it is against us."

During these months of war environment, new developments are taking place. The assassination of Israeli minister of tourism Rechavam Zeevi on October 17, prompted Israel government to send troops to Palestine entering and sealing the towns of Ramallah, Jenin, Bethlehem and Beit Jalla. In the same war spectrum—though apparently untied to the terror attacks of New York and Washington—the two nuclear countries of India and Pakistan added fire to the instability of the world by bringing up the issue of the dispute about the Kashmir territory. All of these events, and other in the making—some planned to be ignited by the terrorists themselves—generated the world an spectrum of crisis that ties religion, refugee human rights, and technology, including the use of nuclear power for destruction.

Dr. Moltmann's essay in this book was greatly enhanced as he lectured at our Seminary—on October 8-10—particularly when in one of his three presentations he addressed the theme "Eschatology, Globalization and Terrorism". The dimension of authorities and regencies gained a new perspective in my thinking.

Content and Observations

Christian theology forms and is formed. The actions of the church, as her indifferences, may well influence others and the world in which she lives. Her lack of actions may keep her from influencing the world for good. In a short or a long range, action or lack of action will show results and consequences. The option for the church is to confront the realities of globalization or—sooner or later—to be confronted. It is more than just to be in favor or against; globalization is a reality, it is here!

Globalization though coined in recent decades, took form in the last four centuries. To agree in a specific time when it was used for the first time does not matter that much. Yes, it matters of how the Christian church deals or not in the context of the components that give form to modern globalization.

Spiritually and morally, the Christian church needs to provide guidance and control for the powers not to abuse authority. Silence—as it was mentioned—gives in and provides freedom to act and interpret. More than once in Christian history, church has been criticized more by its silence than by its participation. Instead of dialog or facing the influential agencies of her time that were shaping society, she was content just by observing, allowing for the spiritual and moral principles from our traditions to be ignored. Without proper theological reflection, the church

will concede to the authorities the privilege to discern and interpret the realities and challenges that globalization brings to this age. The eight outstanding writers of this second volume facilitate our reflection in those areas that coexist within the "great authorities of modernity", as are called by Stackhouse, including the professions of education, law and medicine, beside the regencies of technology, nature, and charismatic personality.

In the introduction, Stackhouse provides a map of the powers—identified as authorities or regencies—that act and interact in our societies and influence the life spheres, forming and transforming human identity and, as a result, culture beyond its immediate context. In this map, the author indicates that it is possible for such authorities not to have the power to obtain total loyalty as a party, family, culture, economy or religion may obtain—which are identified as principalities— "but exercise nearly sovereign control over certain decisions that become indispensable for the common life in complex civilizations" (p. 1).

All the writers in this book, clarifies Stackhouse, deal with globalization as the universalization of the influences of those authorities and regencies that are originated and take form in the western world. In a sense, that universalization provides new opportunities. Distances are shortened, and consequently the capability to help and improve human life. But as that influence may contribute, the need exists to be aware of the serious risks it carries. One of those risks has to do with the development of its own spirit, with its own self-sufficiency, acquiring power and control, turning indifferent toward the ethic, social and religious norms of its context. It is in this sense that the authorities may develop in such a way that, first, compete and, finally, transcend and may obtain larger power and influence than the moral and social base that traditionally has served to mark the human behavior and to distinguish what is good from wrong. These tensions of globalization, then, will require theological and ethical dialog. Otherwise, it will happen in a spiritual and moral vacuum.

Through responsible reflection, that Christian education facilitates —argues Richard Osmer— next generations will be able to provide assistance in recognizing challenges and themes of living in a "common place." Fast transportation, satellite, cable and energy reduced distances and the exchange of ideas, resources and possibilities. The author well indicates: “As we begin a new millennium communities of faith would do well to reflect on the kind of teaching and learning their members will need if they are to make a faithful and effective witness in a rapidly globalizing world” (p. 75). This teaching and reflection of the church need to occur in a global context and not just in a local one. The challenge of the church is to understand that the world — as John Wesley perceived his own influence— is our parish.

John Witte, Jr. discusses the modern law movements originated worldwide as result of the Human Rights Universal Declaration in 1948, producing a global revolution. The church, he states, facilitated as a midwife the birth of the civil rights. However, “the challenge of the twenty-first century will be to transform religious communities from midwives to mothers of human rights –from agents that assist in the birth of rights norms conceived elsewhere to associations that give birth and nurture to their own unique contributions to human rights norms and practices” (p. 87). Without religion, Witte says, there is not base for rights. Without religion, the human rights regime grows without control. Without religion, a system of justice will not have credibility. Without religion, states and rulers will have an exaggerated role as guardian of the human rights. The believer, then, should not look human rights from the distance; for the contrary, needs to participate en its conception, care and nutrition. He arguments “that human rights must have a more prominent place within religions today... [assuming] their traditional patronage and protection of human rights, bringing to this regime their full doctrinal vigor, liturgical healing, and moral suasion” (p. 90).

Many times we listened the phrase: "We are the church, the faith community." With less frequency the phrase "we are a healing community" was also expressed in some congregations. Perhaps the lack of balance in one and the other sentence is because what Allen Verhey—in the chapter on The Church, Globalization, and a Mission of Health Care—we very little associate life in the Spirit with the healing that he produces. The danger to live healing in the hands of medicine is to ignore the very same power of Christ—that was not just healing—and that given by His Spirit to the church. Verhey says: "Guided by the Spirit, and remembering one who made the human cry of lament his own, the church must practice a more ancient compassion, which includes a readiness to 'suffer with' another. It should nurture the readiness to be silently present while a sufferer begins to recover, and the readiness to be supportive while the sufferer begins to construct the next chapter of their own story, even if the last chapter" (p. 132). During His earthly ministry, Jesus did not debate at the beginning of each day: "Should I do compassion or evangelism?" In some instances seem that the church want to totally leave it healing responsibility to the secular medicine and its compassion to church committees or secular organizations. There is a place for medicine and for compassionate organization, but church should not forget that—as Christ was—its nature is compassionate-evangelism and evangelism-compassionate. One does not against the other, all the contrary, each other provide to the church integrity and credibility before the eyes of the world. "To be guided by the Spirit", conclude Verhey, "means to remember, to hope, and to struggle against the evils that threaten our embodied lives and our common life in the global village" (p. 138).

Ronald Cole-Turner arguments that technology is the authority par excellence by producing globalization. Theology, he says, should be allied with technology to guide—besides interpreting it—what is taking place in the world of bioengineering, digital communications, and pharmacology. In undertaking this task, theology will need to be engaged, informed, creative, effective and faithful. His essay opens with a series of challenging questions, including "Dare we

think that theology can shape technology? After an analysis of theology and science and inferring that the general understanding that theology interprets science and ethical theology should guide technology, Cole-Turner proposes a theology that transcend its role of interpretation to be able to generate change in those that make technology. "It is altogether too likely that the church will marginalize itself in a role of chaplaincy, picking up the pieces, caring for the bruised, mopping up the damage, but never engaging the engines of transformation themselves, steering, persuading, and transforming the transformers" (p. 143).

Jürgen Moltmann advocates human responsibility in globalization, reminding us that what we do have consequences. With the present attitude of human kind, it will be very difficult to survive beyond the twentieth first century. Probably globalization closed the distance between Western and Eastern, but it is also true that the earth organism and human balance has been broken, creating what Indira Gandhi recognized as the worst of pollution, poverty. "I would add", says Moltmann, "that the worst environmental pollution is not poverty as such; it is corruption that causes poverty. It is a vicious circle leading to death" (p. 168). The author proposes that "for each intervention in nature it must be a compensation" (p. 169). He brings to the reader's attention what scientist James E. Lovelock proposes as the *Gaia* —Greek word for earth— hypothesis, that proposes the understanding of "the planet as a system of interactions and feedback, which strives to create the best possible environmental conditions for life" (p. 181). Moltmann calls is for respect for earth as we are guests of her, to live in her but not be against her, indwell her not to dominate her, no to exploit her but to peacefully inhabit her. More than globalization —the particular becoming universal— we need to think in *ecumene* —that corresponds with the Greek *oikos*—, which is for humans to inhabit, "to live within the sphere of the earth and must not stand against it..." (p. 190).

In the context of an ethics theology and in the last chapter of this second volume of *The Spirit and the Modern Authorities*, Princeton University professor of Christian Social Ethics Peter J. Paris demonstrates in his essay "that a modified virtue theory can contribute significantly to the ethical dimension of contemporary discourse about globalization" (p. 191). With a modified Aristotelian approach to the understanding of the human soul, Paris states:

Contrary to mistaken notions, virtue theory neither implies an individualistic ethic isolated from societal context nor a parochial ethic limited to the moral values of small homogeneous communities. Nor is virtue theory substitute for ethical rules, principles, laws, or rights. Rather, it provides a basic understanding of the four-dimensional unity of the moral life: appropriate appetite, free choice, wise judgment, and good habits. Apart from such an understanding of the moral life, there could be no way of knowing the nature of moral excellence in particular actions, formed characters, or specific communities (p. 192)

Then, Paris, provides a list of some moral recognized exemplars that become international acclaimed and honored Nobel Peace Prize laureates and similar indicating that they "manifest the many and varied ways by which the virtue of peacemaking can be undertaken" (p. 196).

Conclusions

Though born in a country that belong to the "Two-third world", it is my personal observation that most —if not all— of the reflections and challenges presented in the essays of this book are contemporary and valid to the entirety of the Christian church worldwide. Theologically and ethically, we the church need to assume the responsibility of what globally is taking place today in our world. However, there is a more deep reflection to be made by the church. For example, I

need assume responsibility by residing in the United States of America for the alarming consumption of goods produced both here and from abroad. It is well known that in this country 7% of the total world population lives, consuming 30% of the world energy. These figures are similar in Europe and some of the rich Asian countries, and relates to other goods as well. As a church we need to ask ourselves if globalization is unidirectional, from the strongest to the weakest, and if the primary intention of globalization is expansionism or cooperation. We may list all the benefits given away from rich countries to poor nations, but we may forget that we may be taking away from the "Two-third world" much more of what we want to admit. Weak economies today gravitate around decisions made by strong economies, the poor is becoming poorer and the rich, richer. Currencies are devaluated, bank savings —if any— are reduced by corruption and greed. By the thousands, people daily is looking for opportunities in great urban centers abandoning the land that produces food because of exploitation and unfairness toward labor, health care, and basic protection.

Is the church capable of creating a global integrated movement from its own cultural, economic, educational context —in either, the One or Two-third worlds—, loving, involving, training, equipping, delegating, and making possible the balance that Moltmann refers to? Does the church align itself and better represent the authorities that already control the future of impoverished brothers and sisters living in the Two-third world?

Christian theology should not be a spectator of what is taking place with globalization, and actively need to participate in forming and caring for education, law, medicine and technology. To validate the gospel should be the major concern of the Christian church, constantly reminding herself that He said: "I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand, I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to

open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness" (Isaiah 42:6-7).

For the Christian there are two broad dimensions in the issue of the globalization: “In the first instance, globalization connotes a clear commitment to communicate the Good News to all the nations and peoples of the earth. Secondly, globalization involves identification with the peoples of the world.”^[2] For both to happen will require from our part a conscious effort to understand Christ, His Church, and His Great Commission to commit and to immerse ourselves in a better understanding and influence and make possible changes as we face the challenges of the authorities of our times.

^[1] International Church of the Nazarene

^[2] Chuck Gailey unpublished letter “What should globalization mean at Nazarene Theological Seminary?”