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**UNDERSTANDING
THE GLOBAL AND
LOCAL CONTEXT
OF THEOLOGICAL
EDUCATION**

By

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The challenge of understanding the context in which God has called us to minister is no easy one. In our life time we have seen incredible change, and the pace of change seems to be increasing. One could be forgiven for pronouncing that the only thing that does not change is the fact that there is change. As Max Wayes said in his article, "The Era of Radical Change",

Change has always been a part of the human condition. What is different now is the pace of change, and the prospect that it will come faster, affecting every part of life, including personal values, morality, and religion, which seem almost remote from technology.... So swift is the acceleration, that trying to 'make sense' of change will become our basic industry. (Wayes 1964)

Tom Sine (1999), a Christian futurist, comments,

It is no accident that families, our young people, pastors, and those leading our missions organisations are feeling so overwhelmed by change. Not only does the rate of change seem to be accelerating, but in the past decade new driving forces have emerged that are altering the direction and character of change We are racing into a future in which everything is changing beneath our feet.

Robert Orr (1998), a Christian leadership specialist, comments,

Change is essential in order to be relevant. This does not mean that Biblical principles are changed or that a different doctrine is taught. The fundamental teachings of Scripture do not and must

not change. Change is necessary in the way we accept, treat, and interact with people and their circumstances.

John Thornton, co-chief operating officer of Goldman Sachs, one of the world's leading investment banks, stated a little over a year ago,

The twentieth century was principally about the scale and size of the balance sheet. In the twenty-first century the important thing will be to be nimble and change form quickly. (*London Times*, 31 January 2000)

Perhaps the question that most confronts us as we attempt to grapple with the context in which we deliver theological education is: Are we going to continue as if the future is simply more of the same? Or, are we willing to grapple with the implications of change as these changes increasingly impact the nations we serve and the students who come to us for training? It is also vitally important that as we grapple with this rapid pace of change that we do not disconnect from our past. Can we be like the sons of Issachar "who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. 12:32)?

As I go through this presentation, of necessity I can only paint broad brush strokes. I do not have the time available to deal in detail with any of the areas I shall highlight. I will merely draw attention to these areas and ask that you give further reflection on the areas which may be impacting your situation already.

Globalisation

Unquestionably the greatest challenges before us are the challenges raised by globalisation. First, let us define globalisation so that we are all on the same page in our thinking together. Thomas Friedman offers this helpful analysis of globalisation. Globalisation is:

- democratisation of technology, finance, and information. "This means that it is now possible for hundreds of millions of people around the world to get connected and exchange information, news, knowledge, money ... financial trades ... in ways and to a degree never witnessed before."

- free-market capitalism as the organising principle of world economics. “The more you let market forces rule and the more you open your [national] economy to free trade and competition, the more efficient and flourishing your economy will be. Globalisation means the spread of free-market capitalism to virtually every country in the world.”
- a specific cultural bias. “... Globalisation has its own dominant culture, which is why it tends to be homogenising... Culturally speaking, globalisation is largely, though not entirely, the spread of Americanisation ... on a global scale.” (Friedman 1999)

Alex Araujo of Brazil has given what I feel is a good overview of this thing called globalisation:

1. It is fuelled primarily by economic considerations.
 2. It is inspired by rapid economic growth and efficiency as the best foundation for solving humanity’s problems.
 3. It has a strongly Western, primarily American cultural imprint.
 4. It is highly dependent on recent developments in communication technology.
 5. It favours those who have a longer tradition in free market capitalism and who lead in communication technology.
- (Araujo 2000)

Jun Vencer, International Director of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF), speaking at WEF’s Consultation on Globalisation in Kuala Lumpur in January 2001 gave this helpful definition of globalisation:

Globalisation is an international system where the driving ideas are: free-market capitalism, free trade and competition, opening, deregulating, and privatising the economy. Its technology is computerisation, miniaturisation, digitisation, fibre optics, and satellite communication, the Internet. Its culture is basically Americanisation or Westernisation... Globalisation offers a utopia for its believers: higher education, increased income, quality lifestyle, longer life span, increasing democratisation of nations, and individual empowerment. The world will be a global village. (Vencer 2001)

Two major events have made globalisation possible. The first was the information technology revolution that has engulfed us in the last part of the twentieth century. According to Dave Adams, in this revolution radio took 38 years to build an audience of 50 million. Television took 13 years to do the same. The Internet achieved 50 million users in just four years (Adams 2000)!

The second major event to facilitate globalisation was the collapse of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. This thrust many more countries into free-market capitalism as the means by which to grow their economies. Please do not fall for the myth that communism is dead. The largest population in the world is still controlled by a communist economy, China. It's next door neighbour, North Korea, still also holds to the communist economic system. Some are now predicting that it will not be long before Mandarin is the major language of the Internet simply because there are so many Chinese.

The economic implications of globalisation are very significant and we cannot afford to overlook or brush them aside. As Jerry Mander has said,

Economic globalisation involves arguably the most fundamental redesign of the planet's political and economic arrangements since at least the industrial revolution. (Goldsmith and Mander, 1996).

It is expected that this will continue at a very rapid pace. As of today, it does not seem possible that any country will be able to exempt itself from the process of globalisation.

In the debate over globalisation there are two scenarios that are being discussed. This is probably an oversimplification of what is really happening, but I have found it helpful to think of these two scenarios. The first is a long-term economic expansion, often referred to as the "long boom." The second is a slow melt down of economies in many countries, particularly the developing world. What implications do these two scenarios have for us in theological education in the Caribbean?

If we are entering, or have entered, a period of long-boom economic growth when we can anticipate 30 years of economic growth and expansion – notwithstanding the recent downturn in economic markets globally – do we need to examine what we have (our resources) and what

we teach? The simple answer is, Yes. If the Caribbean economies are on the verge of extended growth then we must examine the physical facilities in which we house our students. As lifestyles change throughout the Caribbean, poorly designed and built campuses will increasingly become unattractive to students accustomed to a higher standard of living in their own homes.

There are also serious implications for curriculum design. Throughout Church history there are examples of the declining spiritual quality of church life as standards of living improve and Christians move from poverty to economic sufficiency to wealth. Perhaps the most telling indictment along these lines were the words of Jesus Himself to the Church at Laodicea, “You say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17). It is now more than ever absolutely critical that our churches and training institutions develop and embrace models of whole life discipleship that inculcate biblical principles of stewardship as realities in the lifestyles of our leaders and the members of our congregations.

Materialism is already impacting Caribbean countries significantly and there is abundant anecdotal evidence that our Evangelical church people are unquestioningly embracing the materialistic philosophy of the world system of globalisation. How many of our Evangelical churches have already closed their Sunday evening services because they are unable to compete with television and a number of other distractions? How many of our Sunday Schools are in decline because the old methodology of telling stories and using substandard visuals cannot compete with the computer technology our children take for granted? How many of our training institutions are grappling with curriculum design to be relevant in the long boom economy?

Tom Sine, speaking at the World Evangelical Fellowship’s consultation on *Challenges and Strategies for the Third Millennium* in Cyprus (known as Cyprus 2000), stated that leaders must find ways:

1. To educate believers to not only limit their consumption to what they need instead of what they can afford during boom times but to help them biblically redefine the good life;

2. To reawaken our biblical imagination to discover in this imagery of the kingdom alternative aspirations to those that power the ... consumer mall;
3. To challenge believers to become whole life disciples utilising the purposes of the kingdom to define the priorities of our lives instead of those of the modern culture, creating a way of life that is more festive than the rat race in which every believer is involved in active witness and service;
4. To enable Christians to become whole life stewards freeing up much more of our time and resources to invest in prayer, scripture study, mission, and the advancement of God's kingdom throughout God's world. (Sine 2000)

In the same paper, Sine goes on to say:

It will be essential that leaders in the Third church develop scripturally based curriculum that enables Christians in their context:

1. To identify the good and the strong and the beautiful of God's kingdom that is already a part of their traditional culture as expressed in the lives of their families and communities;
2. To decide, in the face of the rapid pace of modernisation, which of those traditional values they want to preserve and augment because they reflect something of God's kingdom;
3. To decide which of the values of the new ... consumer culture they want to embrace that are congruent with the aspirations and values of God's kingdom;
4. To help believers become whole life disciples and stewards choosing the aspirations and values of God's kingdom to determine the priorities of their lives instead of the demands of modern culture. (Sine 2000)

The other scenario of a slow melt down also demands that our Evangelicals throughout the region come to grips with whole life discipleship so that we do not define ourselves in terms of the possessions we have, or do not have, but in terms of what God says about us in His Word. The anecdotal evidence abounds that many of our Evangelical believers have already bought into the materialism of defining self by the car we drive, the house we live in, the television cable company we subscribe to, the travel we make overseas, etc.

At the same time, while the rich are getting richer there is every indication that the poor are getting poorer. During the past decade we saw an unprecedented explosion of wealth among the top 20% of the world's population. They increased their share of the world's wealth from 70% to 80%. Simultaneously the bottom 20% of the world's population saw their share of the wealth drop from 2.3% to 1.4% (A Global Poverty Trap 1996).

John Charalambakis in an unpublished paper takes a very dim view of the future.

So the IMF and the World Bank have failed. Back in the 1970s, they taught us about basic needs, saying that if those basic needs were met, everybody would be happy. And it failed. And in the 1980s, they taught us about structural adjustments and now they admit, they didn't work. Now the buzzwords coming out of the secular circles are poverty reduction, participation, civil society, and putting the country in the driver's seat. I'm afraid it's just window dressing. (Charalambakis 2000)

If this scenario continues, and this seems very likely in the uneven playing field of globalisation, are we ready to prepare our students for holistic ministry that serves the whole man? Are we as Evangelicals ready to do evangelism *AND* engage in social action without diluting our Evangelical message? Does this mean that we need to further develop curriculum to prepare graduates for the hard realities of a Caribbean that may see widely disparate development with some countries getting rapidly richer while others become poorer? Jim Engel has commented on the "evangelism only" mentality of Evangelicals in the twentieth century. Engel sees Evangelicals as having

... a preoccupation with evangelism as the central all-encompassing mission of the church. Social transformation pushed far back in priorities, a tragic vestigial remain which lingers to this day inspite of a growing consensus beginning at Lausanne I in 1974 that this violates the very essence of Christ's teaching and example. (Engel 2000)

Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Bin Mohamad of Malaysia has a pessimistic view of globalisation. He asks,

Can we be sure that these new ideas, this globalisation will not go the way of the great ideas of the past? Half a century down the road, or maybe a century, will we be still lauding and practising absolute capitalism in a globalised world? Will not capitalism bring about the same misery that will force people to rebel against it and probably overthrow it as violently as the previous great ideas and their proponents were rejected and violently discarded? (Bin Mohamad 2001)

For me, one of the troubling things about globalisation is that it is clearly not values-free. The question must then be asked, whose values are at the heart of globalisation? If we probe a little we will discover that among the values are materialism, greed, and covetousness, all cloaked with secularism.

Technological Revolution

One of the driving forces of globalisation is the technological revolution that has ushered in the "information age." Such is the force of this change that it will radically change our way of life. Indeed it has already begun to do so.

In March 2000, Bill Joy, chief scientist and co-founder of Sun Microsystems, writing in *Fortune* magazine stated:

Over the next three decades computing power will grow astonishingly, by a factor of one million. Computers will become so powerful, so easy to use, and ubiquitous that they will change our lives utterly. In this era of amazing change we will face a huge challenge of design: how to humanise our digital devices in our homes and offices, and our public places; and how we will make them serve our needs; and how we will make the digitally enhanced places beautiful... Consider: a factor of one million shrinks a millennium to nine hours, a lifetime to 40 minutes, a year to 30 seconds. A jet plane is less than 1000 times faster than walking, yet even that drastically reshapes our perception of the world. (Joy 2000)

Are we preparing our Evangelical communities for the changes that have come and will increasingly impact our lifestyles in the next three decades as a result of this continuing technological revolution, assuming Jesus has not returned? Do we continue to do ministry as we have done for the past 30-40 years or are there adaptations that we need to make quickly to remain relevant and on the cutting edge?

An immediate and obvious change is in the way we study the Word of God. While many of us love books – I certainly do – we are already in an age where books are becoming somewhat obsolete. There are incredible resources now available digitally. Hundreds of books can be placed on one CD. This reduces cost significantly and makes access to these resources very easy. Instead of spending 12 hours preparing a sermon that time can be cut in half or less simply by using the research capabilities of the computer and the CD. Are we preparing our students to cope with this change? Are we ready for the reality that there are already people sitting in our congregations with palm pilots checking our Hebrew and Greek references to see if we are preaching correctly?

Will we continue to keep membership records in an user-unfriendly way that renders them fairly useless, or will we embrace modern technology to help us keep records that are easily accessible and improve our ability to deliver pastoral care and service in unique ways to the members of the congregations of the twenty-first century?

How will the computer revolution impact the delivery of theological education? One simple way that is already happening is that the classroom now comes to the student without the student having to go to the classroom. Growing numbers of our Caribbean people (or Caribbeans as I prefer to say) are seeking training through the virtual classroom and distance education. If our Caribbean campuses cannot deliver the ambience the students require and these students cannot afford to travel to North America, they will increasingly turn to the computer and the virtual classroom. I myself am pursuing a Masters degree in this fashion. Will our ability to deliver theological training shift to accommodate this new methodology, or will we continue to pretend that nothing has changed and we can go on as we have done for the past three/four decades?

The technological revolution has happened and is continuing at an incredible pace. The consequences are embracing our people with increasing rapidity. Can we, will we, adjust our methodologies in the

realisation that the twenty-first century is unlike any that have gone before it?

Part of the context of the technological revolution is the rapid advances being made in biotechnology. New techniques in the area of biotechnology are already being touted as ushering in an age when cancer will be defeated, when the average life span will be 90 years or greater, and when the quality of life will be significantly improved (Stipp 2000). The challenges of biotechnology to theology are considerable and certainly beyond the scope of this paper. Already the debate on cloning has been heated. The proponents of cloning point to major medical break-throughs, while the opponents raise troubling questions about the ethics of cloning. However, the biotechnological revolution is part of our context.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

While the technological revolution has been sweeping the world and changing our cultures and way of life, the Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus (HIV) has quietly begun its own revolution globally. Apparently in the age of globalisation we share our diseases as well as our technology. The devastation of this disease is already apparent.

Africa has been impacted harder than any other continent. Already millions have died and millions more are infected. The impact on nations can be quite severe. A recent report in *Time* magazine indicates that the areas of Africa severely impacted by AIDS are the Christianised areas. The Islamic countries of North Africa seem largely unaffected by this scourge (*Time*, 13 Feb. 2001). How does that reality impact the context in which we minister?

AIDS is also sweeping the Caribbean, to such an extent that we are now second only to Africa in the incidence of infection in our population across the region. It will not be long before every person will know someone who has died of this disease. It has already claimed the lives of a personal friend and, additionally, the son of a valued colleague.

There still remains a significant amount of ignorance and superstition about this disease among our people. It is not a curse from Heaven because God is mad at mankind for immoral sexual behaviour, nor is it a consequence of some witchcraft spell. It is a natural disease. It is essentially a behavioural disease. Most persons who are infected played an

active role that resulted in the transfer of body-fluid from an infected person through an "open door," an entry point of that person's own healthy body. Every person can decide on personal behaviour.

The Church has an important role to play when we begin to discuss the changes in behaviour necessary to stem the tide of this disease. Unfortunately the Evangelical community has reacted, like the rest of the community in which we minister, as though persons who are HIV positive are somehow akin to the lepers of biblical times. There is the story of the church in Barbados who asked an HIV+ person not to return to church because of fear that others would contract the disease. We alone have the answer and if we cannot minister in the context of AIDS we are indeed a helpless community unable to offer the generation in which we live a reason for the hope that lies within us.

The society's response so far to HIV infection has been to promote the use of condoms as "safe sex." Yet condoms are not anywhere near 100% effective. The only 100% protection available is the biblical lifestyle choice of faithful monogamy. We have the answer to this disease. Will we package and present it in a form that the world will hear our message?

The Barbados Evangelical Association held an AIDS Awareness and Compassion Seminar in February 2001. As a follow-up to this, BEA is now preparing to do a survey on sexual practices of Evangelical youth in Barbados to determine what we really need to focus on for our own young people. BEA is also preparing a brochure for distribution that deals with AIDS as a behavioural disease which must be countered by a change in behaviour.

There is no question in my mind that new diseases will come to the forefront in the years ahead. Already Ebola is making its presence felt in parts of Africa and will eventually spread much further. Have we articulated our theology in such a way that we empower our graduates to minister effectively in these situations? This is very much a part of the global and local context in which we carry out our theological education programmes.

Post-Modern Philosophy

Post-modern philosophy, simply put, is the view that the only absolute truth is that there are no absolute truths. If you think about this you will realise that it is a nonsensical statement.

This worldview is not only found in far off Europe. Increasingly post-modern philosophy is evident in the pronouncements and policies of our Caribbean educators, thinkers, and politicians. These people shape the way our Caribbean societies are developing. In this context we seek to present the absolute truth of a personal God, His crucified and resurrected Son, and the reality of a changed life connected to God through Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The post-modernist places a heavy emphasis on the validating power of experience. We who preach the Gospel invite people to the reality of a personal experience with the risen Christ. We have the Gospel that meets the need of the post-modernist.

Within the context of globalisation and post-modernism is the reality of pluralism. Increasingly every perceived source of "truth" must be accorded an equal place. In many of our Caribbean countries this means significant paradigm shifts for our Evangelical leaders. We live in societies that have largely had a Judeo-Christian underpinning. It is difficult for our Evangelical leaders to accommodate other religious doctrines. Yet our politicians and sociologists are moving Caribbean societies away from what we see as our Christian heritage to a more pluralistic way of life.

Will we continue to lament these changes or will we proactively move out of our buildings and Evangelical communities – what I prefer to call our Evangelical ghettos – and engage the world with the radical, transforming power of Christ in the market place with all the competing philosophies and theologies as did the Apostle Paul in the first century of Christianity? In globalisation and pluralism the Evangelicals no longer have a protected, restricted market place in the Caribbean where they present theological doctrine and confront only other versions of Christianity.

In the midst of this pluralism there is the interesting phenomenon of the privatisation of God. God has become personal business not for discussion in public. Evangelicals have unwittingly aided in this privatisation process by our strong emphasis on the personal relationship with God. We *must*

bring people into a personal relationship with God. At the same time we should not overlook the realities of God in community. The greatest example of this is the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. When we lose the concept of God in community we lose a critical part of the Christian experience and we make it easy for God to be marginalised in society and ultimately in our own lives.

The media is a prime purveyor of post-modernity. There is hardly a home in the Caribbean that is not impacted by the electronic media, much of which originates in the USA. One survey of TV journalists and news anchors in the USA revealed that 90% are pro-abortion, 75% believe homosexuality to be a morally acceptable lifestyle, and only 8% go to church. Among producers in Hollywood the results were 97% are pro-abortion, 80% are pro-homosexual lifestyles, and only 7% attend church regularly (Vencer 2000). These purveyors of information are a part of the homes and lifestyles of our Caribbeans.

Church Growth

The context in which we work globally is one in which there is incredible growth of the church in the developing world. Various reports indicate that the church in China is growing by 32,000 daily. In Africa the growth is 20,000 a day, while in Latin America it is 10,000 daily. According to Leith Anderson (2000), when other church growth is factored in more than 3,000 people are being added to the Church every hour of every day! That is equivalent to a Pentecost experience every hour worldwide.

At the same time Anderson reports that the church in North America is shrinking. Anderson says that 60 churches are being closed in North America every week. Some of these are re-opened by new congregations, but there is a net loss (Anderson 2000).

The result is that the centre of Evangelical Christianity has already shifted out of the Western world (North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand) and into the developing world. The missionary force from the developing countries is growing at a rapid rate and beginning to outstrip the missionary force from the developed world. The latter is shrinking by all accounts (Pate 1991, 35). CONECAR 2000 addressed this specifically when here in Puerto Rico last May leaders from across the

region joined in declaring that the Caribbean is no longer just a mission field but is now taking its place in the missionary force of the world. My own research leading into CONECAR 2000 indicated that more than 100 Caribbeans had left the region to serve God in another region of the world for at least one year during the decade of the nineties. It was also exciting on the final night of CONECAR 2000 to commission a small number of Caribbeans as missionaries to other regions.

If the church in the West is declining then the available finance from that source is also declining. Sine has commented,

My greatest concern is the serious decline in the Western church attendance, a greying constituency, and the rapid disappearance of the Christian young will undermine the ability of the Western church to even sustain the present levels of investment in mission. (Sine 2000)

This contextual reality means that the church in the developing world must increasingly stand on its own feet financially. There will be less and less funding coming out of the North American and European churches for programmes and projects. For some years I have experienced the reality that traditional sources of funding outside the region are giving less and less to us. They are increasingly giving what they have to those countries where there are significant numbers of non-Christians. The Caribbean is considered reached and the needs here are not among the priorities of the major funders of global missions.

The context in which we minister is a context in which there is increasing need for training in biblical stewardship. Our people must be taught to utilise their resources for ministry and ministry programmes must be designed within the realities of Caribbean economies. The bottomless well of North American funding does indeed have a bottom and we may not be far from reaching it! This situation will be compounded if Jesus does not return and the United States of America implodes as the Soviet Union did and as every empire has done throughout history.

Religious Persecution

We live also in an age of religious persecution. David Barrett, one of the foremost missiologists in this generation, has repeatedly stated that

there have been more martyrs for Christ in the twentieth century than in the other nineteen centuries put together. The Missions Commission of WEF disputes some of Barrett's figures but it is widely accepted that there have been significant numbers of martyrs for Christ during the past one hundred years.

But Christians have not only been the persecuted. They have also been the persecutors. In Kosovo it was Orthodox Christians who pushed Muslims from their homes, raping and slaughtering in the process. In Rwanda – a country said to be 90% Christian – it was Christians who fell upon their neighbours and murdered in an orgy of ethnic cleansing.

Whether persecuted or persecutor, these things cause us to re-examine our theology and most of all our relationship with God.

Population Growth

We are also living in a time of increasing population growth. According to available demographics the world's population reached one billion in 1804. It took until 1927 to reach two billion. By 1987 it was five billion and it reached six billion by 1999 (Vencer 2000). As the population continues to expand we live in an age of unprecedented opportunity to reach people with the Gospel. There are possibly more people alive in our generation than in the whole of human history put together. This can be an overwhelming statistic or a mobilising, galvanising reality to renewed efforts to mobilise the missionary force of the Caribbean.

The population is exploding in Asia and Africa. These are areas where significant percentages of the Caribbean's population have historical roots. Caribbeans serving as missionaries in Africa are doing exceptionally well by all reports. Caribbeans serving in Europe are seeing success. Caribbeans in Asia are reporting that God is using them.

As the world's population expands will we retool and rethink so that we can release to world ministry the people of the Caribbean supported by the churches in the Caribbean as tools in the hands of an omnipotent God?

Eschatology

Our eschatology is also a significant component within the context in which we Evangelicals do ministry. We have embraced an eschatology

which trumpets forth the soon return of Christ. This theology has been popularised by a plethora of books from North America and by the Left Behind series, which I confess to reading voraciously. You may dismiss me as a heretic, but this has for many years troubled me. Even when I was a Bible School student in the early seventies I found it difficult to pour over maps, compare newspaper reports with the sayings of Jesus, and try to identify the Antichrist.

This fascination with the return of Jesus has, in my opinion, taken away precious time from the task of the Church, the discipling of the nations. It has hampered us in our planning for the future. It has crippled our long-range thinking. It has caused many of our Evangelical brethren to be so caught up in being caught up that they fail to engage the world with the Gospel and prepare adequately for ministry in the future. In the 1960s it was clear that Jesus would be back before 1984. In the past decade we were sure we were not going to see the year 2000. Has it gotten through to us yet that God is not working to our timetable? Have we yet grasped that we could be here for another century or more? If that is so, are we really planning to confront the world with the possibility of redemption? Are we positioning our ministries for significant and growing ministry in the next 30-50 years?

To me, this fascination with the coming of Jesus has caused us to bury our heads in the sand like ostriches. Every development around us is characterised as “a sign of the times.” Can’t we instead see events around us as opportunities for ministry? We are so busy looking for Jesus to come that we are missing important opportunities to confront the world with the Gospel and to serve our own generation. At the same time I’m disconcerted to find that our fascination with the return of Christ has not caused us to live at a higher level in terms of morality, ethics, and purity of lifestyle.

If I have assaulted your favourite area, please forgive me. It has been fascinating to me to discover that there are many countries, especially in Europe, where there is not this preoccupation with the return of Jesus. As my pastor taught me many years ago, we should live as if Jesus is coming today and plan as if He is not coming for a hundred years.

Family Life

Another important part of our context in the Caribbean is the changing patterns of family. We have always had high rates of childbirth outside of marriage. That is a direct result of chattel slavery and its legacy that we have not yet adequately dealt with. However, it was the grandmother throughout the Caribbean that provided childcare for the younger generations.

The grandmother provided the day-to-day supervision of the children in the family. The grandmother laid the foundation of moral and spiritual growth. The grandmother taught respect for authority. The community was an extended family and anyone could discipline a child from the same community – black or white – or call the parents to have the child disciplined.

As grandmothers' roles have changed we have switched the care of our children to the nursery, pre-school, and school. We are reaping the fruits of our change all across the region.

The Church has a vested interest in strengthening family life – even the families of single parents. The individual is the unit of a democracy, but the family is the building block of society. Can we move beyond the “God is going to bring you through” sermons, which I hear so often, to the declaration of the whole counsel of God so that our people can be well-rounded disciples of Christ?

Legacy of Slavery

We live in a region where chattel slavery impacted lifestyles for 300 years. This is an integral part of our context. Having sat on the Committee for National Reconciliation in Barbados since July 1999, I have had a crash course in the legacy of slavery. In Barbados we have found it hard to discuss these things. Yet our society has been engaging in much needed dialogue, some of it acrimonious but much of it profitable.

Among the things I have become aware of as part of the legacy of slavery, to name a few, are:

- The structure of family life with large numbers of children born outside of marriage;

- Structures within the society deliberately established to help some while hindering others;
- Serious problems with self-images;
- Confusion about our own culture.

If the Gospel brings radical change, then how can we minister the Gospel in such a way that these inherent concerns within our society are changed? Can we minister the Gospel so that the structures within society change, so that behaviours throughout Caribbean societies change? Do we have something relevant to offer emerging nations which are examining their past histories with a view to determining their futures?

National Transformation

Recently we have seen from Latin America the principles now being called Prayer Evangelism. These principles encourage Christians to bless their nations through prayer so that the nations will be transformed. Youth With A Mission has also been developing principles for national transformation particularly through what they call the “seven mind-moulding areas of society.” WEF has also been developing principles for transforming nations and these are being taught in Discipling the Nations (DNA) Seminars.

Together these three areas are creating increasing interest in the possibility of seeing nations transformed by the radical power of the Gospel. Since we have very tiny island nations in our region, there is increasing interest in these principles. It will be interesting in the next few years to see if the structures within a nation can be so transformed as to change the quality of life for the majority of citizens.

An area that these ideas are challenging is the division of the sacred and the secular and the division of the clergy and the laity. These are seen as remnants of Roman Catholicism and not part of biblical principle. These ideas are beginning to be discussed fairly widely throughout the Caribbean. Do we have a definitive word on these matters?

Some Implications

Briefly, some implications of the things we have touched on so far are:

1. We need to re-examine discipleship and stewardship as they are practised in the Caribbean Church. There seems to be a great divide between the profession of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the practice of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
2. We need to re-examine our ecclesiology in the context of how we practice it in our churches. Are we supposed to “come out and be separate” or are we supposed to “make disciples of all the nations”? Are these two concepts mutually exclusive, as we sometimes seem to indicate by our practice? Is not the world the source of the raw material from which we are building the Church and the kingdom of God? What does it really mean for us in the twenty-first century Caribbean to be “in the world but not of the world”? Can we flesh this out in practical terms for application in our churches and practice by our people?
3. We need to re-examine our eschatology. An eschatology that disconnects us from the reality of practical ministry in a sin-soaked world is not a helpful eschatology. An eschatology that causes us to be peering skyward for a trumpet blast instead of engaging the realities of the world around us in meaningful, Spirit-directed ministry is an eschatology that is a hindrance. Our eschatology should impel us to greater efforts, renewed ministry, the practice of walking in the presence of God, and purity of life.
4. As Ravi Zacharias asked, “What difference do we make as a people of faith?” (Zacharias 1994). If the practical outworking of our theology does not make a difference in the villages and communities where we live then of what use is that theology beyond the academic exercise?
5. Do we need to constantly re-examine how we teach our theology so that we ever remain fresh, in touch with God, renewed, relevant to our context and avoid the obvious pitfall of becoming academic, dry, and removed from the realities of life in these Caribbean lands?

Conclusion

In the midst of all that is going on around us we sometimes need to ask about the unintended consequence. For example, the automobile has transformed our lifestyles and forever changed our societies across the world. There has been much benefit. The unintended consequence includes awful pollution in major cities of the world. What will be the unintended consequences of some of the areas we have so briefly touched upon. Truly, only God knows.

Yet I am excited about the future. As I consider all that lies before us in the twenty-first century I see incredible possibilities. I see nations to be won. I see billions of people to be brought into the kingdom. I see new knowledge waiting to be discovered. I see the whole of creation reflecting the glory of God. I see the incredible potential of humans filled with the Holy Spirit hastening to live in obedience to our heavenly Father.

My mind goes back to school days when I was drilled in the delights of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. After the assassination of Caesar, Shakespeare has Brutus say to Cassius:

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea we are now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures. (Shakespeare *Julius Caesar* 3.3.216-222.)



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