

Globalization, Creation of Global Culture Consumption and the Impact on the Church and Its Mission

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Introduction

The World Evangelical Fellowship (now Alliance) is to be commended as one of the few Christian organizations that has made a concerted effort to anticipate the impact of globalization on the church and its mission. Futurists seek to identify ‘driving forces for change.’ There is a growing consensus among leaders in many of our countries that globalization is the driving force for change as we race into the 21st century. Not only is it likely to continue changing the global economic environment for all peoples, but I strongly believe that economic globalization is going to decisively impact our personal lives, the lives of our young and the church in ways we seldom discuss in our Christian forums.

Even though the global economy is struggling one can still identify a range of benefits for many in our planetary community. The numerous protests throughout our world, however, call attention to the fact that numbers of people have widespread concerns regarding the impact of globalization on our poorest neighbors and the environment.

The intent of this paper is to look beyond the positive benefits and the important concerns about just and responsible development of this new global economy. I want to explore another issue regarding globalization that receives very little attention by leaders in either the larger society or the church. The issue I want to explore is how the rapid movement of peoples into a new one world economic order is shaping their aspirations and values in ways that are often at counterpoint to the aspirations and values of God’s kingdom.

Because we evangelicals seldom discuss the growing influence of modernity on our lives and values we are often oblivious to the corrosive influence it has in the lives of Christians in our communities. I will also show how these changes in our values, spawned by modernization, liberalization and globalization, are not only undermining the vitality of believers and the larger church but also the capacity of the church to carry out its mission in our new global future.

Daniel K. C. Ho, a leader in the Malaysian church, stated, ‘...worldwide communications has transformed the world into a global village. Such globalization has made certain cultural traits and practices more international than we realize: by music, fashions, sports, branded goods, and exclusive labels which surround us in Malaysia. All this, capped with direct-to-you satellite television truly makes Malaysia a part of the global village.’^[1]

I had an opportunity to visit with Rene Padilla at the Urbana Missions Conference in the U.S. several years ago. He reported that this sudden movement of Latin American church into this new global village is having a devastating impact on the lives of many believers. He said that large numbers of Christians are getting caught up in the pursuit of affluence, like many North Americans, at a very high cost to their spiritual lives and their churches.

It is important for me to clarify I am not an economist. My analysis is based on a study of cultural and societal trends. As a futurist, historian and struggling missiologist I am trying to make sense of some of the ways in which globalization is likely to impact our lives, churches and the larger task of word and deed mission. Much of the research for this paper is based on my book *Mustard Seed Vs McWorld: Reinventing Life and Faith For the Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

In this paper I want to sound a wake-up call for those of us who care about the future vitality of the church and are committed to completion of both the great commission and the great commandment. I think we need to pay much more attention to the values that are an integral part of this new global economic order which influence the values of people of Christian faith all over the planet. Before we look at how globalization is impacting the church and its mission in the next 20 years let’s briefly look back on what we have to celebrate regarding the mission of the church over the last 15 years.

Looking Back 1991-2004

It seems like only yesterday that many of us gathered together in Manila in 1989 to help set the direction for missions for the nineties. As you know that was a definitive conference focusing on the mission of the evangelical church in the nineties on reaching unreached people groups.

Dudley Woodberry, at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary, stated that, ‘through the efforts of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization AD 2000 and beyond and World Evangelical Fellowship, coordinated efforts are being made in church planting, especially in the 10-40 window... with considerable church growth.’ And major inroads have been made in improving the physical well being of the global poor by the church as well through expanding evangelical relief and development initiatives.

One of the most encouraging signs for the future is the growth and vitality of the Third Church. As Philip Jenkins documents in *The Next Christendom*, Churches in Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia have, in the nineties, experienced remarkable growth and spiritual vitality. He predicts that we will see the center of leadership shift to the church in the two-thirds world. Hopefully this will result in the demise of western paternalism and more true partnerships in the ongoing mission of the church. I am concerned, however, that the rapid spread of this global

culture of consumption could undermine the vitality of the church in the two-thirds world as it is doing in the church in the one third world.

As we look ahead I will show why I believe there is reason for concern about whether the western church will even be able to sustain the present levels of mission support 2004- 2024 based on declining attendance and giving patterns in the western church. I will also explain how I believe the rapidly spreading values of the global economic order are directly contributing to the declining level of Christian involvement and investment in the mission of the western church. Let's look ahead to some of the new challenges that globalization is presenting the church today and tomorrow.

Looking Ahead 2004-2024

Taking the Future Seriously

It is essential that those of us in Christian leadership mission and missiology learn to take the future seriously. Most churches and Christian mission organizations do their long range or strategic planning as though we are frozen in a time warp... as though the future is simply going to be an extension of the present. Virtually no mission organizations forecast before they plan how the context in which they do mission or their support base in the church is likely to change.

There is also a dearth of missiological articles that seek to anticipate how both the larger global context and the changing character of the international church requires us to re-examine how we do our missiology.

In a world changing as rapidly as ours, that we learn to lead with foresight... that we seek to make sense of how the context in which we live, raise our young, operate our churches and do missions is likely to change. Then we need to identify how these changes will not only impact the lives of those with whom we work and the church but how the values that accompany this change are likely to shape our sense of what is important and of value. Outlined below is a brief description of the process of globalization and some of the impacts it is having on our lives, families, churches and the world in which we do mission.

A New Neighborhood

In the nineties we moved into a new neighborhood which is discussed constantly in the business community but seldom in the church. Overnight we have moved into a new one world economic order which is dramatically changing the context in which we live, raise our young, and serve God.

Two major events have directly contributed to this process of rapid globalization. First, in the eighties we began hardwiring our planet at incredible speed into a single global electronic nervous system of satellites, fax machines and internet communications. Borders are melting. Distance is dying. \$1.5 trillion dollars circulates through this global electronic nervous system every day directly contributing to the rapid creation of this new one world economic order.

Second, with the sudden end of the cold war all the centrally planned economies were thrown into the trash bin and for the first time in history virtually all nations in the world joined the free market race to the top. Dorothy said to her dog Toto in the Wizard of Oz, 'I don't think we are

in Kansas anymore.’ And we aren’t in the seventies, eighties or nineties anymore either. We have moved into a new neighborhood that we have never lived in before... a one world economic order.

There are many upsides to this new global economy. It is creating jobs, and increasing wealth for a number of privileged people in many different countries... particularly the United States. The internet has become an avenue for increasing international understanding and creating new forms of advocacy for justice, peacemaking and the care of creation. This new global economy has become in itself a tremendous force for promoting global stability for the simple reason that doing war gets in the way of doing business.

I wrote in *Mustard Seed Vs McWorld* in 1999 that those committed to growing this new global economy won’t tolerate it being threatened by terrorist acts like the horrific events of September 11th. Remember that this wasn’t just an attack on America but really an assault on globalization as well. ‘I predict that if terrorism does increase, those who are intent on protecting the emerging global economy will take decisive, repressive action to try to quell the threat.’^{ii[2]}

The military attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq reflect a troubling new departure in American foreign policy that is attempting to create a new era of Pax Americana and to increase national security by expanding American influence throughout the world by the use of preemptive military force. But those attacks were also intended to create a more stable and predictable environment for the entire global economy.

Global Economy Down Turn

As the world is recovering from the war in Iraq and the SARS threat, it isn’t clear, as I write, whether the new global economy is going to get back on track or not. The Japanese economy continues to struggle and the European economy is beginning to slide. It looks like it is up to the American economy to be the engine of growth to pull the entire global economy through this tough patch. But no one knows whether the American economy can rise to the challenge. Therefore, the most optimistic forecasts projects a period of very slow growth for the global economy 2004 to 2005. Some economists are predicting, given all the uncertainties, that a global recession is also a very real possibility.

There is good reason for concern. Even the strongest advocates for this new global economy tell us that it is very volatile and isn’t well put together... many are playing by different rules. There is growing evidence that numbers of corporations and investment institutions are playing fast and loose with the rules which are causing many investors, all over the world, to lose confidence in economic institutions. Also, as this new economy becomes increasingly inter-dependent and interconnected all our national and regional economies become more vulnerable. For example, if one area of the global economy, like the US, sneezes, there is a growing danger of everyone catching a cold. Church leaders everywhere need to prepare people for the possibilities of a slow up-turn or a serious economic recession.

The Future of the Global Poor

Let me be clear. The architects of McWorld are eager to have all the world’s people become a part of a global labor pool and eager consumers in the global macro-mall. There are numbers who have already found jobs and are able to increase their way of life a bit. But the reality, to

this point, is that this new global economy is an assets-based economy that works much better for those with assets than for those without.

In the nineties we saw an unprecedented explosion of wealth among the top 20%... the creation of more millionaires and billionaires than during any decade in history. However, the bottom 20% actually lost ground in this brutally competitive race to the top. The United Nations Development Program states that 30 years ago the poorest 20 percent of the world's population earned 2.3 percent of the world's income. Now they earn only 1.4 percent and that amount is still declining. At the same time the richest 20 percent increased their share of global income from 70 percent to 80 percent.^{iii[3]} Economic globalization has benefited a number at the margins in East Asia but very few of the marginalized in Africa and Latin America have experienced the promised lift off.

One of the major foundation blocks of this new economy is the doctrine of global free trade. The architects of this global economy hold this doctrine with almost religious devotion. Simply stated, the doctrine of global free trade asserts if we are all allowed to own one another's banks and phone companies and fish in one another's ponds it will automatically 'raise all boats.' Early evidence seems to suggest that global free trade raises all yachts but there is no evidence yet that it will ever raise all boats.

Even though global population growth is slowing it will still grow from 6.2 billion today to 8 to 10 billion by 2050. Of course most of that growth will be among our poorest neighbors in densely congested urban areas. Today almost half of the global poor are under 15. Some estimates suggest this emerging population will need between 1.2 to 2 billion new jobs by the year 2020. Therefore, even those mission organizations involved in church planting need to be involved in micro enterprise development, vocational training and girl child education.

One other trend should concern us. In this very competitive global race to the top a number of western countries are trying to find ways to reduce the drag on their national economies by cutting back spending on foreign aid abroad and social programs at home. European economies are going to be under growing pressure in this race to the top to shift from a stakeholder economy, in which they have offered generous social benefits, to more of a shareholder economy like that of United States and Britain. This means that the church and private sector will increasingly be asked to address the growing physical needs of those left behind in this new global economic order.

In America we are seeing the most dramatic cutbacks in programs to the American poor while the government is encouraging more reliance on faith based initiatives. I predict, because of the increasing costs of the war on terror, and the costs of rebuilding Iraq, we will see mounting expectations that the church fund more initiatives to help the poor to help themselves at home and abroad. But we need to ask if the American and the western church is going to be able to find the resources necessary to respond to this growing challenge.

Future of the Middle Class

Regrettably, while many middle class people in all of our countries are making more money as a result of the boom years of the new global economy, that isn't the entire story. Everywhere my

wife and I work in Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States people tell us they are working harder and longer. In 1977 less than half of families in the U.S. relied on dual incomes. Today it has dramatically increased to two thirds and is still climbing. Some women are working to simply help pay the bills and keep their heads above water. Others are working to be able to buy extras.^{iv[4]} This very competitive new global economy wants more of our time and more of our lives.

The Harris Poll reports that the average American spent 41 hours at work in 1973. In 1997 that had increased 10 hours to 51 hours a week.^{v[5]} As we gallop into a new century, McWorld will insist that we spend even more of our waking hours at work. In fact, we have, in the past decade, seen the creation of something altogether new: the creation of the 24/7 work week. In other words, growing numbers of people will never leave work. They will be on-line and on-call 24 hours a day 7 days a week. These trends mean that many middle-class Christians in all of our countries will have less time left over for family, prayer, scripture, church and less time to volunteer for mission activities at home or abroad.^{vi[6]}

The McWorld global economy wants not only more of our time but also more of our money. This new boom economy isn't just an assets-based economy but also a shareholder economy. Shareholders don't want a 3% to 5% return on their investment. They want a 15% to 30% return... if they can get it. The only way that can happen is for all of us to be persuaded to consume at levels never seen before on this planet—so that yesterday's luxuries become today's necessities. And the messages are working. Americans have the lowest saving rate in 60 years and the highest personal bankruptcy rates. Apparently many Americans are bingeing out of their savings and on other people's money.

As a part of the need to get the boom economy booming again our young are facing escalating pressure to consume at levels not conceived of even a few years ago. 'You must get kids branded by age 5 if you want to have them as faithful consumers of your product,' admonished a marketing executive in a corporate training session on the PBS documentary *Affluenza*.^{vii[7]} If you have ever tried to get a 5 year old past McDonalds you know how effective these marketers are.

This is about more than global consumerism. I believe we are facing a crisis of formation in the western church that will spread to the entire church in the very near future. A recent report states that the average American child is on-line 37 ½ hours a week—TV, MTV, video games and computers. Plus, that same child is exposed to 3,000 to 5,000 advertisements a week. Isn't an hour of Sunday school a week absurd in light of this level of input? Isn't the influence of home, church and family likely to be increasingly eroded as the marketers of McWorld dramatically increase their influence in shaping the worldview, preferences, and values of the next generation to persuade them to increase their consumption?

Future of World Evangelization

What are the new challenges facing the international church and its mission in this new global future? In the West there is a growing hunger for spirituality. But frankly, there is little interest in what most of our evangelical churches are offering. Many of those who hunger for spirituality are looking for a vital whole life faith. They find little in the 15-minutes-in-the-morning/church-

on-Sunday faith—in which our lives seem to simply reflect the values of modern consumer culture the rest of the week.

All of our churches will be challenged to not only do more to address the mounting physical needs that fill our planet but the growing spiritual challenges as well. What isn't generally recognized is that we are actually going backwards not forwards in world evangelization. Peter Brierley of the Christian Research Association reported that in the year 2000 28% of the world's people identify themselves as some brand of Christian: Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox. Because population growth is outstripping the slow growth of the global church the percentage will decline to 27% in 2010 and continue to decline after that.^{viii[8]}

I am convinced that the international church also has some new competitors that are rarely mentioned at evangelical missions conferences. Those who are doing a brilliant job at world 'evangelization' are the marketers of McWorld. Two Pentecostal pastors, from the Dominican Republic, came up to me after I had spoken about globalization at a WEF conference in British Columbia. They reported that in the last 5 years they had both lost their entire youth groups. When I asked how that happened they explained that 5 years ago American MTV came to town and had a major influence in the lives of their youth that they hadn't found a way to contend with.

In the last 15 years we have witnessed the creation of something we have never seen before: a borderless global youth culture. Everywhere we travel we find young people wearing the same jeans, drinking the same soda and hard-wired into the same American pop-consumer culture. They have much more in common with the youth in our western countries than the traditional cultures from which they come.^{ix[9]}

There is compelling evidence that the marketers of McWorld aren't just selling products to the global young. They are consciously at work seeking to persuade the young to embrace the same values so they will all buy the same products so they will become part of a homogenized culture of consumption. You see the church is in a battle for the hearts and minds of a new generation which requires some whole new mission strategies that can challenge and supplant some of the seductive messages of the ever expanding global mall.

Future of the Western Church

While there is a growing hunger for spirituality in the West, church attendance statistics in continental Europe are in free fall as it rapidly becomes a post-Christian culture. Virtually all old-line denominations in all the western countries are graying and declining. The growth of evangelical and Pentecostal churches in many of our western countries doesn't alter this pattern of decline. Church attendance in Britain fell from 10.2% in 1980 to just below 7% in 2003. In Australia weekly attendance is closer to 10 percent and declining. Research in New Zealand suggests their attendance is a little higher, 17 percent but in decline. In Canada the falling attendance rate is closer to 19 percent.

In the United States the Catholic church is still experiencing a bit of growth primarily due to immigration. But mainline denominations are in serious decline in part because mainline Protestants are aging much more rapidly than the society at large.^{x[10]} For example, there are

twice as many ELCA Lutherans over 75 as in the general population.^{xi[11]} The Presbyterians, the United Church of Christ, the American Baptists, and the United Methodists are all dealing with the twin hits of declining numbers and graying congregations.

The major growth in the US, as elsewhere in the West, is among immigrant groups. The growing edge also includes: Black and Hispanic congregations, Assemblies of God, The Vineyard, The Evangelical Free, and the Covenant Church in America. But this growth doesn't offset the overall trend.

Since the fifties George Gallup has placed American church attendance at a relatively constant 40% to 45%. But since these figures are based on self-reported attendance there has been growing skepticism among other demographers of their validity.

To check the validity of this kind of self-reporting method Kirk Hadaway, a demographer for the United Church of Christ, had his research team count cars in church parking lots in a small Ohio county over a period of several months. 'His finding: Americans over-report their actual church attendance by a marked degree. Actual attendance is closer to 24 percent, Hadaway said, and is falling slowly.'^{xii[12]} This research puts American church attendance closer to that of the other western countries.

While the American church is still experiencing very slow growth it is actually shrinking in relationship to the growth of the total American population. According to the research of the Empty Tomb, American Christians constituted 45 percent of the total population in 1968. By 1998 that had declined to 39 percent and is likely to drop dramatically by 2010 because of the rapid graying of the mainline denominations.

The Church and the under 35s

The missing generation in the church in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States are the under 35s. As we travel, we witness the young are disappearing from our churches in alarming numbers.

In his seminars George Barna says the Buster generation [born between 1965 and 1983], age 17-35, is the first generation in America which isn't starting life with some kind of clear Christian heritage. The buster generation in the US attend church significantly less than any other generation.^{xiii[13]} If the western church is to have a future we need to strategically target the evangelization of the under 35. We must also give the Christian young who are with the church greater responsibility for leading and reinventing the church for the twenty-first century.

The under 35s in the West have hit this new boom economy at a particularly tough time. While some are landing high paying jobs in business and computer shops, many aren't finding jobs and many will never achieve the lifestyle levels of their parents and grandparents' generation. Why is this the case? Because the relationship of what the young can earn to what they can buy has changed dramatically since I was a young man. First, this generation of college students is running the highest debt load of any prior generation. This seriously limits these grads being involved in mission. Secondly, while my generation seldom spent much over 20 percent of our

income on rent or mortgage we find a surprising number on the under 35 who are spending over 50 percent of their income for rent or mortgage—in all our western countries.

This means in the next 20 years fewer young people are likely to stay with the church. And those that do are likely to have less discretionary income left over than older generations. This means that as the young move into leadership in the western church they will not be able to sustain the present level of funding for the church and its mission. This is likely to have a dire impact on the future of missions support of the western church.

The problem with declining numbers in all our western churches, of course, is that it automatically reduces the amount of time and money available from the western church to invest in the advancement of God's Kingdom in world mission. Declining giving patterns in the American church will probably further compound the crisis in missions funding in the American church.

The Incredible Shrinking American Purse

The amount of money given to many churches in the U.S. was up during the last years of the boom economy. However, in 2003 virtually every Christian missions organization reported a serious decline in giving as the American economy struggles to get started again. But research reveals that per capita giving patterns of the American church has actually been in decline for over 30 years.

The Empty Tomb, which does some of the most helpful research on giving patterns in the American church, reports from 1968 to 1998 US per capita income increased 91%. But per capita giving of church members during the same period declined almost 19% from 3.10% in 1968 to 2.52% in 1998. Even more concerning, benevolence giving declined 40% during the same period.^{xiv[14]}

Between 2010 and 2030 the church will take a major economic hit when the baby boomer generation retire. The boomers, born between 1946 and 1984, are 77 million strong. All the western governments are constantly attempting to anticipate how the retirement of the boomer generation is likely to impact their retirement pension and health care systems. But in the American church very few leaders are forecasting the potential impact the retirement of the boomers generation will have on the church. Churches are likely to see a sharp decline in giving as the boomers retire. However, they represent potentially a huge new volunteer core for the kingdom if they can be recruited before they head for the resorts.

My reluctant forecast, in light of all these trends, is that the western church will not even be able to sustain its present levels of giving to the church and its mission, let alone increase them to address new and growing challenges facing our poorest neighbours. If we fail to reach significant numbers of the young in all our western countries and challenge Christians of all changes raise the bar on personal stewardship, then the church in the two thirds world will have to provide a much larger share of the resources for mission.

Values Impact of Globalization on the Church

Why are western churches experiencing declining levels of attendance, involvement, volunteering and giving? Why are we failing to keep the young that are raised in the church and failing to reach the young outside the church? Why do we seem to be experiencing not only declining levels of involvement and giving but declining levels of spiritual vitality in many of our churches?

Of course there are a number of answers to these tough questions that include changing demographics, out-moded forms of church and outreach. We are also witnessing changing patterns of involvement in all types of associations in western culture. But I am convinced that one of the major causes, which we seldom discuss in the church, is the growing influence of the values of modern western culture and economic globalism on Christians everywhere.

As I assess how I believe the values of this new global economy are impacting the church I want to be very clear. I am not proposing the creation of an alternative to free market capitalism. There is a very good reason that centrally planned Marxist economies have been abandoned. They don't work well. The free market is better at producing goods and services than any other system I am aware of.

However, while some treat the free market as though it is simply a values free economic mechanism for selling goods and services, I don't. Nor do I share some of the almost religious reverence towards the free market that some American evangelicals reflect. I will attempt to show that some of the values assumptions on which free market economics are based are directly counterpoint to biblical values. Plus, the way the free market operates tends to be blind to ethical issues. If there is a buyer and a seller then the free market is blind towards the ethical issues that might be a part of that exchange. For example, in the last 5 years the back street pornography shops have become respected on-line businesses as has gambling.

Buying into the Wrong Dream

Let me explain why I don't believe that our new global economy is simply a neutral or value free means of economic exchange. Global free market capitalism has its roots in the Enlightenment and is a part of a larger world view born of that age. At the very center of our new one world economic order and modern western culture is a vision for the better future, born of the Enlightenment and the doctrine of economic liberalization. It is a dream that strongly believes in the inevitability of economic and social progress, called the Western Dream or the American Dream. This dream defines the notion of the good life and better future almost exclusively in terms of economic growth and individual economic up-scaling. This is the dream that powers and directs the rapid spread of the new global economy all over the planet.

This is not, of course, a new dream. The process of western modernization has been going on for decades. What is new is that with the creation of this new global economy the process of modernization has been dramatically accelerated. As a consequence, the Western Dream and the American Dream of individual economic upscaling is rapidly becoming the dream for people every where including deeply committed Christians. My concern is that many of the cardinal values of this dream, including individualism, the pursuit of self-interest, materialism and consumerism, are directly counter-point to the vision and values of God's kingdom.

God's new order is committed to a very different vision for the global future that is devoted to societal transformation instead of the pursuit of economic self interest. It operates from a very different set of values, as well, that include service to others, celebrating life and faith and the joy of giving life away.

Why are we seeing declining levels of involvement and investment in the work of God in the western church? I am convinced that one of the major reasons is that many of us western Christians have allowed modern culture and the new global economy to define for us what is important and of value in terms of getting ahead in the work place and our own personal lifestyles. Our views of what is important and of value defines in turn where we spend our time and money.

As the marketers of McWorld increasingly bombard us and our young with the messages that our identity and self worth comes from what we buy and consume I believe we will see patterns of declining involvement of not only western Christians but among believers all over the world. I sincerely believe if this pattern continues it will not only result in increasing erosion of levels of involvement and investment but it will sap the very vitality of our communities of faith. We must help Christians to not only reject these values but enable them to create new models of whole life faith, that reflect the aspirations and values of God's new order instead of the aspirations and values of the new one world economic order. To understand why so many Christians of genuine faith have been seduced by the values of the new one world economic order we need to examine some of our unstated assumptions.

Asking the Right Question

Why have evangelical leaders everywhere, but particularly in the United States, been slow to challenge this growing secularization of our congregations by modernity's new global culture of consumption?

The first reason is that many economists would have us believe that their economic practice is 'science' and therefore has nothing to do with values. They would argue that economics is simply the cold detached laws of supply and demand at work. Rob van Drimmelen, in an important book *Faith in the Global Economy*, calls for the demystification of economics. He persuasively points out that the assumptions on which modern economics are based are far from being value free.^{xv[15]} For example, there is an assumption that there is no place for the influence of a creator God in modern economics. It is a theoretical system largely divorced from faith, culture, the environment, politics, and human life. We are encouraged rather to trust the secular providence of the 'invisible hand' of the marketplace to define the course of the human future.

While the bible speaks out very clearly about greed being evil, modern economics baptizes acquisitive behavior and greed not only as normative but as desirable. While biblical faith encourages us to derive our sense of identity and self-worth from being image bearers of the living God, the marketplace encourages us to derive our identity and self worth from what we buy and what we consume. My greatest concern regarding this new global economy is the way it seeks to fundamentally redefine the sense of what is 'ultimate' principally in economic terms. At our core I am sure that no thoughtful Christian would ever settle for defining the ultimate

principally in economic terms. Wouldn't we be more likely to define the ultimate in terms of spiritual, societal and creational transformation?

The second reason is that we evangelicals have been very selective where we chose to do battle with modern culture. Many American evangelicals will endlessly battle modernity over personal morality issues like porn on the internet and we should. But we tend to treat all the other values messages from modern culture like the pursuit of self interest, individualism, materialism and consumerism as though they are values neutral. Not only aren't they neutral, I sincerely believe that the aspirations and values of the global consumer culture are rapidly replacing traditional values and undermining the values of Christians everywhere. Again, this poses a serious threat to the vitality and the authenticity of our lives and witness and the extent to which we invest our time and resources in the work of God's new order.

The third reason I believe many of us have succumbed to the aspirations and values of McWorld is that many of us evangelicals have unwittingly settled for a dualistic form of discipleship in which we live our lives on two separate tracks. On the spiritual track we are, at our best, totally committed to Christ, we live with moral integrity and maintain consistent religious practices. But on the other track our lives are virtually indistinguishable from our non-believing neighbours.

We American evangelicals often tend to be just as caught up as they are in getting a piece of the rock, buying expensive homes and defining the good life as getting ahead economically. We don't seem to recognize that we aren't just buying houses, cars and RV vehicles, we are buying into the status and the values that go with them. The number one reason evangelical college students in the States are not going into mission is the resistance of their Christian parents who insist on their young getting their house, car and pension system underway first. And then after they have all the things they can go visit missionaries during their vacations. In the US context many Christian leaders have started receiving very large CEO salaries in the last 15 years. As a result, numbers of them are living in very wealthy communities which makes it difficult for them to address this issue.

We need to call believers in all of our societies from this dualistic model to 'whole life discipleship' in which we invite God to transform us not only spiritually and morally but culturally too. Then our lifestyle priorities will no longer be defined by our income levels or the aspirations of the global consumer mall but by the values of God's kingdom. If we can help our people become whole life disciples of Christ by inviting God to transform our cultural values too I can assure you it will result in all of us being able to free up more time and money to invest in the work of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

New Responses

Clearly business as usual won't begin to respond to the mounting challenges of tomorrow's world or of the reality of the incredible shrinking western church. Let me try out a few unusual ideas of how we might respond to this serious crisis of faith, values and investment. I believe that all of us committed to the completion of the Great Commission and the Great Commandment are going to need to radically reinvent much of what we do in our lives and congregations to address this crisis.

I find that many operate as though all the important questions regarding what it means to be a disciple of Christ and how we steward our entire lives have been answered. I believe we need to revisit those assumptions and do some fresh biblical reflection on what it means to be a follower of Jesus. The first question I am inclined to start with is: ‘how do we as followers of Jesus get off the track?’ In other words, what is our view of secularism? Virtually the only explanation of how we have gotten off the track is the secular humanist critique. I don’t happen to believe that this view holds water either biblically or historically. Let me suggest another critique that traces the problem much more directly to the Enlightenment than to the Age of Humanism.

How We got off the Track

I believe one of the major reasons we are likely to see continuing decline in attendance and giving in the western church and we are going to continue to lose the battle of the formation of our young is that many of us have unwittingly bought into the same aspirations and values that power McWorld. I believe in our dualistic discipleship view many of us have succumbed to the Western Dream which defines the good life and better future in terms of individual economic upscaling, consumerism and materialism. And then we embrace the gospel of Jesus too in a small spiritual compartment of our lives as though it all fits neatly together. And of course it doesn’t. Most tragically western missions have often exported this kind of dualistic compartmentalized faith all over the world.

Latin American missiologist Orlando Costas has indicted the western church for exporting a culturally accommodated gospel all over the world that calls people to “a conscience-soothing Jesus, with an unscandalous cross; an other worldly kingdom; a private inwardly, individualistically limited Holy Spirit; a pocket God; a spiritualized Bible” and a church that escapes the gut issues of society. It has conceived the goal of the gospel as “a happy, comfortable and successful life”It has made possible “the ‘conversion’ of men and women without having to make any drastic changes in their lifestyles and world views,” guaranteeing thereby “the preservation of the status quo and the immobility of the people of God.”^{xvi[16]}

A Biblical Vision for all of Life

The only way we can begin to contend with the seductions of McWorld is to offer people in communities of faith a more compelling dream than the Western Dream. We need a reawakening of biblical imagination. We need to rediscover that God’s agenda for globalization begins with a mustard seed but it is destined to transform a world. The scripture teaches that God intends to create a new heaven and a new earth in which all things are made new. It is a vision of a great international homecoming of the resurrected people of God coming from every tongue, tribe and nation to a restored creation. It is a future in which the blind see, the deaf hear and the lame dance. It is a new global order in which justice comes for the poor, the instruments of warfare are transformed into the instruments of peace and festive banqueting and celebration will welcome us home. We need to help believers everywhere place the purposes of God’s kingdom, instead of the aspirations of the global economy, at the center of their entire lives.

A Whole Life Faith

To overcome our dualistic discipleship and our compartmentalized faith it is not enough to embrace this vision of the kingdom of God theologically. We need to also embrace it

culturally.... as an alternative vision of the good life and the better future to the one that powers this new global economy. It will no longer work for us to give our lives unquestioningly to the aspirations of modern culture and seek to serve Jesus too.

Imagine a ten week course in which believers in a church could not only study God's kingdom purposes but embrace them as their own... for all of life. Then they would use that sense of God's vision for the human future to draft personal and family mission statements. Finally, in this class they would be invited to use those mission statements not only to redefine the good life for themselves but to reinvent where their time and money goes and raising their kids on purpose.

This could result in believers creating a liturgy of life that looked more like the kingdom than the McWorld shopping mall. It would be one in which daily time is set aside for spirituality, weekly time is set aside for witness and service and a significant portion of the income is set aside to advance God's kingdom around the world.^{xviii[17]}

A Whole Life Church

With the growing pressure of this new global economy, defining church as a place that we go to once a week will no longer be adequate. I am convinced that in the twenty-first century we will need to reinvent the church as new missional communities where we live seven days a week and where we also happen to worship. Rockridge Methodist Church in Oakland California is one of the first models of a new missional church. Not only has this church reinvented itself to place mission at the center of congregational life but its members have just completed construction of a nine-unit Christian cooperative in an inner city neighborhood near the church where 25 members have relocated to do tutoring with neighborhood kids and be a witness for God's kingdom. Living in this cooperative community reduces their lifestyle costs so they have more time and money left over to invest in mission. And the formation of the young is not left to an hour of Sunday School a week but it is a part of the daily activity of this new celebrative expression of church.

A New Generation of Leaders

One of the most encouraging trends in the western church, in spite of declining numbers of the under 35, is that God is raising up a new generation of 20 and 30 year olds in Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States to lead the church into the twenty-first century. This postmodern generation is fundamentally reinventing the church, creating new forms of church plants, urban ministries and celebrations that bear witness to God's great homecoming celebration. This movement has very little visibility and little support from the established church. If the western church is to have a future we must give our fullest support to this new generation of leaders and invite them to help reinvent the church for the twenty-first century in partnership with the third church to address the new challenges of our new one world economic order.

WEF – A New Opportunity

In 1980 the WEF Commission on Ethics and Society met in Britain with their counterparts on the Lausanne Theology and Education Commission to deal explicitly with the issue of how evangelical Christians all over the world steward their lives to advance the cause of God's

kingdom. ‘An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle’ was the product of that conference. This statement reads in part, ‘Our Christian obedience demands a simple lifestyle... We intend to reexamine our income and expenditure, in order to manage on less and give more away.... We resolve to renounce waste and oppose extravagance in personal living, clothing and housing, travel and church buildings. We also accept distinctions between necessities and luxuries... and between service to God and slavery to fashion.’^{xviii[18]} Initially this WEF statement and several related books of the period had a profound impact on evangelicals all over the world. I know personally of a number of Christians who really did change their lifestyle priorities ‘to live more simply than others might simply live.’

Frankly, as I read these words in the American evangelical context in 2003 it seems like a totally foreign message. The American church benefited enormously from the new boom global economy. We have palatial buildings and all kinds of high powered programs. But I simply can’t remember reading anything published in the last ten years that has the edge this statement does. Certainly I have read nothing in evangelical literature that challenges us to ignore fashion, distinguish between necessities and luxuries or call people to reduce their personal lifestyle costs to free-up more time or money to invest in mission.

I believe this is a WEF opportunity. It is an opportunity for the WEF theological commission to do some fresh work on: First, how the global consumer culture is undermining vital Christian faith and how we can help believers in different cultures decode the messages and resist the seduction of the Western Dream; and second, how to rediscover the theology of the kingdom of God as an alternative cultural dream to the Western Dream as a springboard to enable believers to create lifestyles, time styles and celebration that look more like the kingdom banquet than the global economic order.

I believe this is a WEF opportunity for all of us to create curriculum to enable our adults and young people to become whole life disciples creating more festive lives in which we put God’s mission purposes first. We can free up much more of our time and money to invest in the mission of Jesus Christ to the mounting needs, challenges and opportunities of our new global future. I am sure we would be surprised at how God could use our mustard seeds to not only reverse many of the trends discussed in this paper but to bring a new period of expansion of God’s kingdom globally...if we choose to put God’s purposes first...in all of our lives and communities.

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EDITOR’S NOTE: Other resources from the author can be found at [Mustard Seed Associates’ website](#).

Endnotes

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