**Globalization, Local Realities and Religious Communication**
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It is fashionable to talk about globalization. The word is used by economists as well as NGO's, politicians, business people and many others. A study on the frequency of the use of the word "globalization" in a German national newspaper showed that the word was used in that paper 1993 only 34 times but in 2001 it had multiplied to 1136 times (Stierle, 2003, 345). The word is new but the fact is probably much older. When did globalization start in human history and what does it really mean? Is it used as a promise and threat, as a challenge or culprit? There is no unified and precise definition agreed upon by all or a majority.

In a broader sense, the word seems to indicate an interrelated world where people from different places are related and possibly dependent on each other in some way. Globalization thus, is the growing interdependence of people which began in European history at the latest already after the discovery of the Americas in 1492 when Emperor Charles V stated that "now the sun would not set any more" in his empire. There might be something of this feeling also today when carmakers or other producers tell us that their products are designed and made by teams in Tokyo, New York and Munich or any other place around the globe.

Different from this view, others date the beginning of globalization with the opening of the Suez Channel 1869 which made shipping beyond the Americas and Europe to the East easier. Others date the beginning of globalization with the Bretton-Woods System 1944 or the landing of the first man on the moon on July 20, 1969.

All these attempts try to show that nobody on this planet is isolated but rather all are interrelated and thus, also in one way or the other responsible for each other. The modern means of communication, reporting instant news from all corners of the world into the smallest village of the earth, are developing this experience further and the question arises if we are moving towards a world culture, where the local is endangered or lost (cf. Stierle, 2003).

Already in 1960, Marshall McLuhan coined the expression of the 'global village'. Are we condemned to that?

In a more restricted sense, we talk about globalization as an expression for new ways of interrelation between financial markets and business undertakings beyond nations and continents. Deregulation is one of the key words to loose national ties and push open the whole world as a market for business. If the cheapest places for production are in China or anywhere else in Asia it is no difficulty for European or American companies to shift their production to these places. The governing forces here are profit, money and power but not necessarily the concern neither for people and the individual nor for the well-being of society. We experience the "Death of Distance" (Cairncross, 1998) because everything is instantly available and possible every time, anywhere. Time and space are no longer a hindrance for international business and economy to thrive and finances to flow.

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All this is especially made possible through the modern technologies of communication. It is no longer a problem for newspapers with world-wide circulation like "International Herald Tribune" to be published and printed simultaneously at 26 different places in different continents of the world but edited centrally at the main editorial office in Paris.  Such globalized communication, however, was not born over night. Already the "World Post Treaty" of 1874 prepared the ground with international postal services, overseas telegraph and telephone.  Some people thus have defined globalization as a multidimensional and polycentric happening which can not any more be reversed.

Financial markets are in the center of the discussion in their limiting and/or determining social, economic and communication developments.  If 75 percent of the world capital flows only into 12 countries of the world and only the rest into the remaining 140 other countries of the world then there is an imbalance which calls for remedies and concern.  Globalization in this understanding therefore, does not promote balance but rather promotes greater imbalance. The same holds for the development of trade and commerce.  It is mainly the rich countries which profit from free trade zones and liberalization (Stierle, 2003).
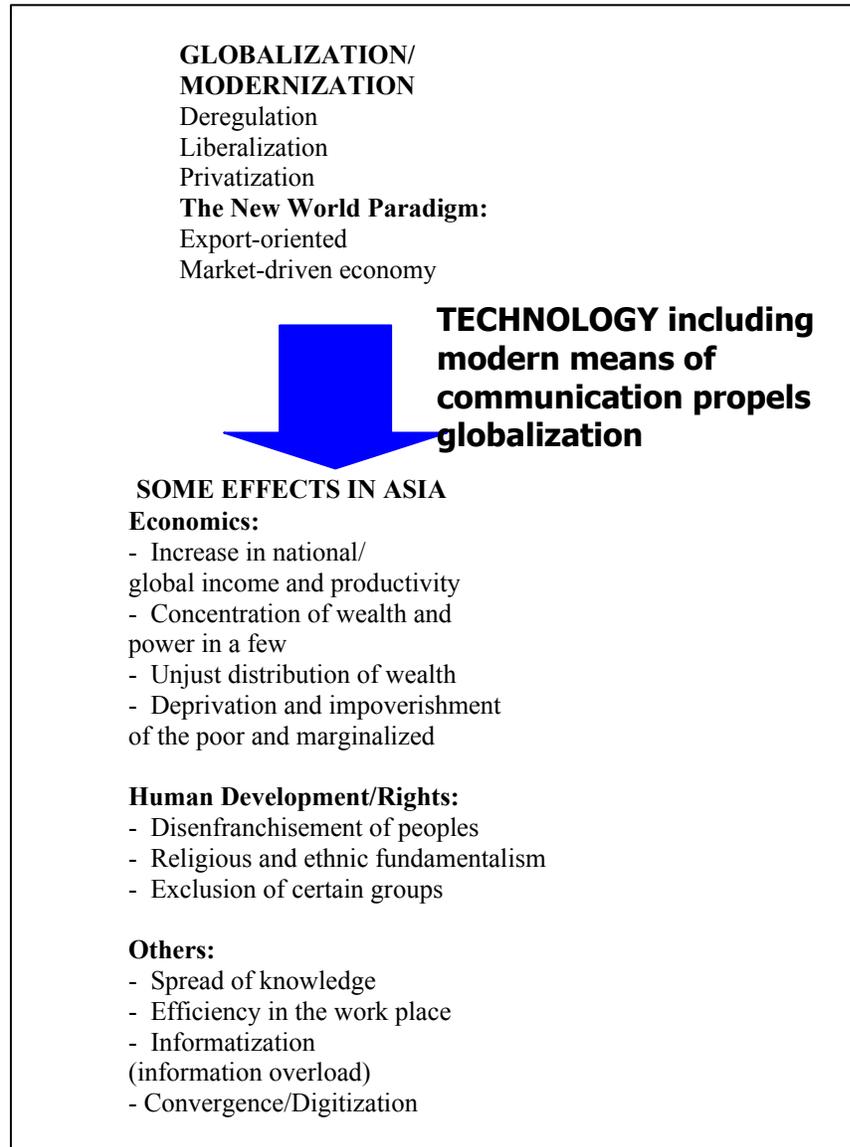
In this situation, human rights are easily violated and human development hindered. There are structural injustices leading to unrest, but also hostilities, armed conflicts and power struggle.  Some Asian countries experience civil and/or political repression, disenfranchisement of individuals and groups with repressive national security acts and endemic graft and corruption.  There is lack of religious freedom.  And, problems of religious and ethnic fundamentalism are on the rise.  Job insecurities and inhuman labor practices are another reality partly caused or promoted by globalization.  Genuine human development is not realized, and groups of people are marginalized or excluded from public participation and a decent human life.

On the positive side, globalization increased efficiency and production of goods and services.  Access to new technologies makes more intensive and ongoing relations between people possible leading to deeper understanding and solidarity among people.

The modern means of social communication facilitate the exchange of knowledge and scientific developments but in many ways also change the way people live.  If one considers the use of cellular phones and computers, especially in urban centers but also in a growing way in the country side, instant information becomes accessible to almost everybody.  Through satellite and cable television as well as the increasing privatization of these means, change (if not to say threat) is becoming widespread among individuals as well as regional and local cultures.  Simple people are confronted with lifestyles, values and world views that are completely divergent, even contrary, to their own traditions. How can we reconcile local cultures with the "new culture" characterized by new ways of communicating – "new languages, new technologies and a new psychology" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio, 1990, 37c*)?

Behind such a situation are mainly multinational corporations and in some cases, even political powers.  Because such developments are mostly export-oriented and market-driven, local cultures are often sidelined.  Instead of promoting people and their cultures, they are made objects of business.

An overview of these realities could look like this:

**GLOBALIZATION/
MODERNIZATION**
Deregulation
Liberalization
Privatization
**The New World Paradigm:**
Export-oriented
Market-driven economy

**TECHNOLOGY including modern means of communication propels globalization**

 **SOME EFFECTS IN ASIA**
**Economics:**
- Increase in national/
global income and productivity
- Concentration of wealth and
power in a few
- Unjust distribution of wealth
- Deprivation and impoverishment
of the poor and marginalized

**Human Development/Rights:**
- Disenfranchisement of peoples
- Religious and ethnic fundamentalism
- Exclusion of certain groups

**Others:**
- Spread of knowledge
- Efficiency in the work place
- Informatization
(information overload)
- Convergence/Digitization

## Local Realities

The new information and communication technologies and the resultant "Death of Distance" are decisive elements in our modern world. They might threaten local cultures and communities but not everybody is convinced that this will really lead to a world culture which substitutes the local. Wang, Servaes and Goonasekera e.g. argue "for the strength of the local cultures and even cultural industries

that mitigate the threat of dominance and monoculture posed by global media" (cf. Mc Anany 2002, p.10).

Some people see a 'world culture' emerging which subsumes local cultures to loose their identity. Thus, with an emerging world culture for entertainment especially for young people for example, traditional values and productions of art might be lost. It is difficult, however, to see this in a simple black and white, either-or manner. Globalization also challenges local cultures to become more aware of their values and treasure more their own philosophy and religion which has grown over centuries and are not lost automatically to modern superficiality. In fact in many cases, "there is a refusal to be uprooted from particular religious soil, precisely because without such concreteness, religion evaporates into thin air" (Wilfred, 2002, 3).

The new possibilities, on the other hand, can also help to share local cultures and have them reach greater beyond a single country or region. Raka Shome and Radha S. Hegde (2002, 184 f.) refer to the Indian influence on Hollywood for a world market:

> "India produces more feature films a year than any other country and Asian countries together produce over half of the annual production of films. Yet, standard film histories ... rarely engage with this filmic cornucopia. Hollywood's way of turning global and spreading its transnational tentacle is to appropriate genres such as kung-fu, martial arts movies and incorporate the exotic into its text. Recently, Bollywood even provided a new style for Hollywood to absorb. Baz Luhrmann, director of the film extravaganza Moulin Rouge, said in an interview that the production was deeply influenced by Bollywood. He stated to the New York Times: 'I started thinking, could a Bollywood-like movie work in a western vernacular? It is high comedy, high tragedy, and then they break into song. You know? Moulin Rouge is deeply influenced by that.' The film Moulin Rouge is an interesting example of Bollywood being recreated and produced through a new system of signification, the dominant Hollywood framework. Images from the third world get to the West through the back door, as it were and are either subsumed totally or ignored."

> "The question that confronts us as communication scholars," the authors continue later "is to see how cultures collide and position themselves with reference to hegemonic structures of power on the global scene. The exchange and flow of images, however unequal, still does not lend much support for the linear cultural homogenization thesis. The hypothesis, propounded by various globalization theorists, that all cultures will be invaded by American culture and eventually obliterated, is simply untrue…"

Acceptance of and /or resistance to modern globalization have also to be considered under the perspective of culture and cultural strengths. Cultures change but they are also deeply rooted in the lives of peoples and their communities. Dharm P.S. Bhawuk has studied "culture's influence on creativity" for India and comes to the conclusion that it is Indian spirituality which has shaped the country over 2000 years. He presents a long list of spiritual masters over 2500 years. "A closer examination of the list shows that these spiritual gurus came from all castes, and were not limited to the caste of Brahmin only, the caste that had the privilege of being a teacher or a guru. They also came from many religions, e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, and Sufism. Also, they were not limited to any particular part of the country…" (2003, 5) After a more detailed presentation of three modern spiritual masters, he states "that India continues to innovate in the field of spirituality even today." He also sees mother Teresa of Calcutta as a recent example. "Mother Teresa's Nobel Prize could be argued to recognize Indian spirituality, since she is the only Catholic

'saint' to receive this prize, albeit in the form that the sponsors of the prize can relate to." "Spirituality can be seen to permeate the masses in India, and social life revolves around rituals that work as a symbolic reminder that people in this culture value spirituality…" (2003, 17)

All this shows that especially spirituality and religion are important sources to counteract or balance negative developments of globalization and to save and even develop also local realities and independence.

Philosophy and religion of cultures and people are generally rooted deep in peoples' lives and beliefs so that they change only slowly, over a longer period of time. On the other hand, also cultures are not museum pieces and untouchable. They always have developed over time and tried to find answers to new and challenging situations.  This  refers especially  to religions and religious communication.

**Religions**

How should religions as essential part of culture respond to the challenge and especially also the negative effects of globalization? The Indian philosopher and theologian Felix Wilfred (2002) sees three possible responses:

First, the thinking could go "in the direction of creating a planetary religion and ethos that presumably would match with the nature and demands of this process (globalization).  In keeping with the process of homogenization, religions also could be metamorphosed into an ideally conceived 'religion' coupled with a well-packaged 'global ethics' which everyone all over the world would consume as standard spiritual and moral goods. Humankind, equipped thus with an ideally shared religion and ethics, could expect, as a matter of natural course, that the long-cherished ideal of unity and peace would come its way… In this model we could note that dialectics between the particular and universal is resolved in favor of the latter…"

The second possible response would be religious tribalism against globalization. Similar to the latter, "religious tribalism too is a projection of a particular religious identity which claims to be the universal. Here religions vie with each other  to catch the global religious market and sell their spiritual goods as the best and even the only one. What appears to be global outreach hides a power agenda which is behind such aspirations as to see the whole world as Islamic, Christian, Hindu etc. The process  of globalization has added  fuel and supplied  the instrumentalities  for competing of religions, and indeed for religious conflicts…What is worse is that religious tribalism does not allow any room for self-critique…The threat religious tribalism feels, coupled with the absence of self-critique, incapacitates  it to revise  its own traditional image of the other groups…Much  like the process of globalization which  'progresses' by continuously  excluding more and more people, so too religious tribalism excludes all who do not belong to it…"

The third possible response would be religions in struggle for universal community which is not the same as 'global' community. "Globalization in its nature and trajectory is opposed to the project of genuine  universal community. The very fact that it creates  deep divisions in the contemporary world and causes  a chasm between the rich and poor offers no prospect for any universal communion… In a situation of inherent disintegration of community through globalization, the religions could  re-define their relationship to community in a new way and in new terms. In the first place religions

need to be aware of the fact that the reality of community does not end with those belonging to its fold. In other words, there is legitimate place for a confessional community based on shared symbols, beliefs, rituals etc. But there is also the larger community which goes beyond the confessional boundaries. The crucial question is to what extent the various religious traditions are capable of supporting the coming together of peoples, nations and cultures… the disintegration inherent in the globalization process needs to be challenged by religious traditions, by their role in the public sphere to help transcend the identities based on language, ethnicity, culture and nation." Here in a special way social communication comes in and should help to pay attention to grassroots and to bring people together in solidarity and in common concerns.

## Religious Communication

Such developments challenge Religion as an essential part of cultures especially in their own the teaching and formation for and in theology. In western Christian theology it is mainly the 'ratio', the head which is essential to teaching and preaching but also to living religion. Modern communication technologies are mostly not rational but rather image and emotion oriented. They try to reach and 'buy' the heart of people often in such a way that there seems to be no space any more for religion (Palakeel, 2003). Our Asian cultures are based to quite an extent on spirituality and religion as essential elements (cf. Bhawuk, 2002).

Looking back in history, it is revealing to see that religious convictions and commitments are also fruits of certain communication trends moving towards universality – or should one say 'globalization'? Most world religions, especially Islam and Christianity have been right from their beginning 'global' in trying to grow all over the world. Even Buddhism spread all over Asia including India though in different traditions at a very early stage. There seems to be a parallel with modern globalization if one remembers that religions in the past were very often spread and promoted through business by itinerant merchants who brought their religious convictions to the places they visited or even created for their business undertakings. Already Marco Polo reported in 1292 that on his return from China he found at the northern tip of Sumatra Indian business men who converted the local people to Islam. The foundation of Malacca (now: Malaysia) goes back to the beginning of the 15th century. Since it was a main place for business, also here Islam found fertile ground from where it further spread to Java and Sumatra thus being the beginning of Islamisation of Indonesia (Stoehr/Zoetmuller 1965,280ff).

Long before modern globalization all world religions aimed at extending and communicating their beliefs and practices beyond their place of origin. Buddha sent his monks out individually and Buddhism developed all over Asia in different forms (Waldenfels, 1987, 81ff).

Hamid Mowlana in writing about the "Foundation of Communication in Islamic Societies" refers to the Islamic term *tabligh* (Propaganda) which is distinguished from the general modern use of the term 'propaganda' (2003, 306 ff). It "is dissemination and diffusion of some principle, belief or practice. It is the increase or spread of a belief by natural reproduction; it is an extension in space and time." He sees in this expression in a broader sense "a theory of communication ethics." Here, 'truthful propagation (*tabligh*) and group cohesion (*assabieh*) are considered "as two fundamental factors in the rise of world powers as states and large countries." It further emphasizes intrapersonal/ interpersonal communication over impersonal types (308 ff).

Jesus Christ sent out his apostles into the whole world to preach the 'good news.' He sent them "catholon" (all embracing), and this is the beginning of the 'Catholic' Christian Church:

"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt. 28,19 ff.). This "catholon" was reflected right at the beginning of the Church on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came over the disciples to preach about Jesus to representatives of the whole world who were present that time in Jerusalem: the "Parthaians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesapotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome; Cretans and Arabs…" (Acts 2, 9-11).

The birth of Christianity was thus a global happening right from the beginning even without modern technologies of communication but in the power of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit also accompanied the first preachers and apostles in sharing their faith beyond the limited Jewish community of that time to the Hellenists and non-Jews. In fact this 'globalization' was especially developed by the apostle Paulus who continued his profession as a tent maker. He was confirmed in this undertaking through the first council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), the very first council in the history of Christianity. The recipients of Christian communication were not only the Jews but all the people of the world.

But this kind of "globalization" of religions is quite different from modern globalization where profit, influence and power are decisive. The sharing of religion is to uplift the 'inner person,' to support the dignity of humans and to bring meaning and fulfillment to their lives. This is true especially also today in Asia. It is revealing that Dong Underwood titles his recent book on the history of Journalism in the United States "From Yahweh to Yahoo!" looking at "the religious roots of the secular press." He shows that right from the beginning even of the secular press in the States there is a religious root which even today is reflected though not always in a conscious way .(Underwood, 2002).

How now should religious communication respond to the fact of modern globalization, which is based especially on new ways of developing and using communication technologies?

For Christianity, the "Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences" (FABC) has pointed to a "new way of being Church' making the Christian community a witnessing, dialoguing, participatory Church which understands herself as a communion of communities. Such an approach has communication consequences, which present her as a co-pilgrim with peoples, a humble servant and a credible witness, a Church in dialogue with people, cultures and religions. Such a community feels especially responsible for those marginalized who are victims of an export- and market-driven economy (Eilers, 2002, 33-40).

John Naisbitt has predicted for Asia eight 'megatrends' which are partly promoted by globalization: 1. From Nations to Networks, 2. From Export to Consumer cultures, 3. From Western to the Asian Way, 4. From Government-controlled to Market-driven, 5. From Villages to Super Cities, 6. From Labor Intensive to High-technology, 7. From Rich to Poor, and 8. From Men to Women. These megatrends were taken up by a group of Asian communication bishops in 1999 and analyzed their communication consequences. They added two further developments which should not be overlooked: "From Traditions to Options" and "From Belief to Fundamentalism."

The first of these poses a special challenge in the defense and strengthening of local cultures. Young people in the past grew up within traditions but today they have many options. How are they accompanied in this process and how to find the proper balance? Cultural values and traditions should still accompany them and have to be integrated. The same is true for a wholesome integration of religion into life without getting in extremes which are never a reflection of reality but rather of an ideology.

Modern religious communication should not be a matter of 'trial and error' but should be based on solid research and reflection of reality. This was stated by a group of Asian communication scholars in a Round Table' organized 1999 at the Assumption University in Bangkok, which led to the foundation of the "Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication" at St. John's University in Bangkok (cf. Eilers, 2002, 49-54; Kofski 2002, 129-134)

Based on presentations at a congress on Media, Religion and Culture in Edinburgh (1999) Jolyon Mitchell (2003, 337-350) sees seven areas of concern for religious communication which might be helpful also in our Asian situation and globalization:

1. He sees a *participative turn* in seeing the audience not merely as passive objects but as active participants in any communication process "creating their own identities with the help of mediated narratives."

2. The *narration of identity* follows similar lines and helps to better understand "how viewers account for their uses of the media" (339).

3. The *multi-religious perspective* refers "to the emerging work on separate religious traditions and the media" (340) which is especially important in the view of globalization and local realities. Here Mitchell notes that" other rich, historic religious traditions have not to-date received such extensive treatment as Islam and the media or Christianity and media." He sees a real need for scholars to deeper investigate the relation between the media and other religious traditions.

4. *The quest for communicative justice* is another field which has to be dealt with. Communicative inequalities in technology, in news and information flow but also in distorted reporting characterize our world. Especially scholars on religion and media are challenged in their concern for ethics and the protection and development of values.

5. Develop the *historical perspective* which means to put context and background on the information which brings also the religious dimension into the interaction of religion and social communication.

6. A *transformation of religious and theological reflection* goes beyond the instrumentality of the media as vehicles for religious communication into a deeper theological understanding of the communication process as a theological happening.

7. Finally, the *ethics of the audience* emerges especially in view of the new media. How far do users of media really take responsibility? Can a virtual community on the Internet really 'care' for

somebody? This indicates a move from producer-oriented ethics to an audience-centered approach.

## Conclusion

Modern globalization is market-driven and export-oriented resulting in some marginalization and violation of human rights. It offends the dignity of persons and nations to some extent and this can not be tolerated. On the other hand, it also introduces new communication technologies which can be used and harnessed to unite people, bring them closer together and raise them up from their isolation. Globalization must not necessarily destroy or substitute local cultures. They rather should be encouraged to develop strongly on their own, especially based on their spirituality and religious roots. Religious communication has to play a special role in this through inter religious dialogue, sharing of values and experiences in such a way that they promote human dignity and quality of life. Academic research in this is especially needed. The "Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication" at St. John's University is a step in this direction.

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