

## Mission in the Context of Globalization

### Introduction:

We live in an unprecedented moment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, considered the most civilised moment of our time. Yet looking back to the stone age, where there was less development, people lived in community, sharing what they had. There was little looting and craving for more. Today man has become greedy, ready to sacrifice his/her fellow human for his/her satisfaction. In my discussion on the ministry of the church in the context of globalization, I will address four specific areas:

- a) What is globalization?
- b) Why should the church be concerned about it?
- c) What should the mission of the church be in the midst of economic globalization?
- d) How can the church create a counter-culture against economic globalization?

### 1. What is Globalization?

The economist. C. T. Kurien, says: “Globalization ... is not a thing which we can see, feel or taste. It is a concept, a wide variety of processes, possibilities and positions. It is therefore capable of different kinds of interpretations. Hence to say anything meaningful about globalization, including how to respond to it, there is need to know as clearly as possible what it is all about”<sup>1</sup>

Advances in science and technology have turned this world into a village, for many people globalisation means becoming citizens of this global village. Is that what we experience in globalisation, or is there anything beyond this global village concept? Whether or not we accept this concept, this is the new world order. The advancement, achievement and luxuries that people enjoy propel them to accept it as the world order. Almost every country in the world is linked into this world order, and most participate in this process, not by choice but by compulsion.

The purpose of this new world order is to open up more fronts for wider business to invest and gain mega profits. The meaning of globalization becomes clearer when we look at its economic aspects. These “can be seen in three related areas – the movement of goods, capital and labour across national boundaries”<sup>2</sup>. Capital is the most powerful component in this movement. This economic system developed over the years on both sides of the North Atlantic Ocean. Before the eighties, the European countries (excluding Eastern Europe and

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<sup>1</sup> C T Kurien, *Globalization, What is it about*, Voices Vol. XX, No 2, p 16

<sup>2</sup> CT Kurien, *Globalization What it is about* p 17

the US) opened up for free market policies, leading to a free movement of capital, goods and people. When colonialism was abandoned the authors of this system began to promote it in other parts of the world, particularly in the southern hemisphere. The so-called third world countries were forced to accept globalization as their best option, and urged to open up their national boundaries for free trade and foreign investment.<sup>3</sup>

Globalisation and capitalism go hand-in-hand, and “Capital in its quest for profitable investment does not respect national boundaries”<sup>4</sup>. From the perspective of two-thirds of the world, one might also say that capital does not respect labour laws, human rights, profit-sharing or a living wage for workers. This kind of transnational movement is as old as capitalism. History shows how the capital of the European colonisers was utilised in the colonies in Asia and Africa.<sup>5</sup> The British colonisers made profit through plantations, mines and movements of goods. In this sense the colonial period was an early form of globalization. Now colonialism continues under the name of globalization; its concerns are for a market-friendly economic system, not people, who have become commodities in the world trade order. This is neo- colonisation by the West.

It is interesting that the words ‘ecumenical’ and ‘economy’ come from the same Greek root *oikos*, meaning a house, or a household. The word economy means ‘the management of the household’, how the production, distribution, consumption and sharing of the resources of the household are managed for the wellbeing of all its members. Thus, in its original meaning ‘economics’ had to do with the principles and practices of the management of resources for the wellbeing of the whole household. This simple meaning gave way as economics grew into a social science, today taking in technical questions such as economic and monetary policies, money supply, financial markets and interest rates. In the process the interest of the household seems to have been lost and the separation of the wellbeing of the entire household and the management of the resources is today a fundamental problem.

## **2. Why should the Church be concerned about globalization?**

The church talks about mission in context. If the church’s mission is contextual, it cannot be blind to this new context called globalisation. While the world-wide church struggles for fullness of life, the poor in the two-thirds world cry for the right to life. Recognising this, the executive committee of the Association of Third-World Theologians (EATWOT) has adopted

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<sup>3</sup>Robert Cruz, *Encounters with the word* (Colombo: The Institute For Study and Dialogue, 2004) p. 549

<sup>4</sup> CT Kurien, *Globalization: What it is about*, p 19

<sup>5</sup>Robert Cruz edal. *Encounters with the word* (Colombo: The Institute For Study and Dialogue, 2004) p. 451

as their theme for the next five years, ‘Struggles for fullness of life: theology in the context of globalisation’<sup>6</sup>. The church’s theology of mission must include reflection on the issues raised by globalisation.

In a world that is supposed to be moving away from slavery and towards greater civilization, globalization is a powerful force. As Ninan Koshy says, “Globalization is no longer a theoretical concept or construct. It is an indisputably solid and glaring reality with impact on almost every aspect of human existence. Today the impact of globalization is such that it affects the economic, political, cultural, environmental and religious spheres of human life<sup>7</sup>.

As far as Sri Lanka is concerned globalization means increasing privatization and public services becoming profit- rather than service-oriented. Privatization does not stop with public services and the state sector, but affects the religious sphere as well. I quote from the report of the Ecumenical Study Centre, that “religious society in Sri Lanka fragments into small groupings each with its own frame of reference and religious outlook, and the individual chooses to which of any to belong.”<sup>8</sup> For the churches therefore, even a religion which claims universal salvation comes to be seen as a matter of personal choice. Such is the effect of the privatization of values, a process by which a publicly accepted order of society is replaced by the community at large. Therefore, the church should be involved in the political, social and economic struggles of the people to create a new social order.

### **3. What should be the mission of the church in the midst of the Globalization?**

The church must move beyond critically analysing the concept of globalisation to identifying the root causes of its effects. In Sri Lanka and elsewhere, the church can currently be described as the liberating prophet who has settled for a chaplain’s seat in Caesar’s court. My contention is that the church must play the role of liberating prophet, promoting awareness of the evils of globalization. The church must have a critical understanding of globalisation and its effects before launching its mission within this context. Here I will focus on the free trade zone and its impact on the mission of God, using the counter-cultural model to show how the church can engage itself in the midst of globalisation.

A free trade zone (FTZ) or export processing zone (EPZ) is the specific area in a country where normal trade obstacles, such as tariffs and quotas, are removed and bureaucratic requirements are lowered, in the expectation that this will attract new business and foreign

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<sup>6</sup> Fabella Virginia & Surgirharajah (ed), *Dictionary of the Third World Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000) p.67

<sup>7</sup>Ninan Koshy, *The Political Dimensions and Implications of Globalization Voices* Vol. XX No. 2 P 27

<sup>8</sup> Marshal Fernando, *Dialogue* (Colombo: Ecumenical Study Centre ,2002)p 43

investment. From the late 1970s, free trade zones have been promoted in Sri Lanka as essential to economic development. These specially designated manufacturing spaces were set up to attract foreign investment to the country with the promise of low or non-existent taxes.

FTZs or EPZs are a key aspect of export-orientated development strategy, as promoted by the IMF and World Bank, and are seen as central to the industrialization or “liberalization” of the economy of developing countries.

Like FTZs in other countries, FTZs in Sri Lanka provided modern infrastructure, a broad range of services and generous economic concessions to foreign investors. FTZs certainly help to develop the economic structure of the particular country; however this has widened the gap between rich and poor. 20 per cent of the people are enjoying 80 per cent of the resources, while 80 per cent of the people are using 20 per cent of the resources.<sup>9</sup>

Economic globalisation is not a neutral process. An alliance forged by the forces of domination for profit is the driving force of much economic globalisation. The poor and marginal do not find protection and security here. The global order it builds does not ensure that values are preserved, or that the economic system is free of oppression.<sup>10</sup>

In Sri Lankan reality, FTZs increase poverty among the poor and wealth among the rich. In general, poor countries continue to depend on loan and aid package from the rich countries. Globalization does bring a free flow of goods and people from the rich countries to the poorer ones, and there are good effects of globalisation. Many of us benefit from the use of electronic media and fast communication systems. This helps the church to break religious, political, cultural barriers to become one global village.

The danger is that we are accepting globalization as the norm for the world within a system where the rich become richer, gaining even the little that the poor have, and thus the poor become poorer. The advocates of the FTZs argue that the distance between rich and poor will be reduced, but this does not appear to be happening. Whether the church likes it or not it goes with the current. “Western individualism and materialism include stocks and attitudes. ‘Once I am millionaire then I will worry about the poor’ or ‘once I have proved myself as a successful pastor then I will try to change the church’”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup><http://www.tradechakra.com/economy/sri-lanka/free-trade-zone-in-sri-lanka-377.php> [Accessed on 30/3/2011].

<sup>10</sup> Chang Ha-Joon, *Bad Samaritans* (London: RH Books, 2007) p, 40

<sup>11</sup><http://www.tradechakra.com/economy/sri-lanka/free-trade-zone-in-sri-lanka-377.php> [12/04/2011]

This is how the church relates to globalisation; what should not become the norm has become the norm. To quote Justice Krishna Iyer, “fair is foul and foul is fair is the paradox of our decade and the crisis of culture and character, will no happy denouncement I sight may well escalate to end in a collapse and chaos unless we act globally and locally to save human kind”<sup>12</sup>.

The churches are faced with the challenge of determining whether the impact of globalisation is “fair”. For the poor it could be described as “foul”, but even for the poor (willingly or unwillingly) this has become accepted as the norm. This presents the church with a dilemma: on the one hand there is no alternative to globalisation, and on the other human lives are deteriorating.

Globalization creates a class structure in society which is found in the churches as well. The middle or upper class are at the centre, while the poor and the marginal are left at the periphery. During the time of western colonialism missionaries used Christianity as an instrument to divide people.<sup>13</sup> In the same way, western countries use globalisation as an instrument to introduce class systems to create tensions in the church. Therefore neo-colonialism challenges the unity of the church. This new situation calls for the churches to come together as one community, and to raise their voices against global evil.

Neo-colonialism has turned people away from a God-centred life to a mammon-centred life. Mammon has taken the place of God, leading to questioning of the existence of God and purpose of worshipping God. During the time of colonialism other living religions were seen as the enemies of Christians. But neo-colonialism has introduced a new enemy in the form of mammon. In the light of this churches are called by God to fight against mammon. This is a shift in the thinking and the practice of the church: throughout its history the church has focused on the personal sin of individuals. The new economic situation forces the church to challenge the structural sin of the community.<sup>14</sup>

FTZs not only widen the gap between rich and poor, but also force people into poverty. Poverty forces people to leave their homes to find employment to survive. Dulani Wasala, a young widow working in a FTZ, was interviewed by an IPS<sup>15</sup> journalist, who wrote, “Despite the abject longing to see her two children every day, she only travels home about thrice a

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<sup>12</sup> Krishna Iyer, V.R. *Globalization Threatens Humanism* Hong Kong: 1998 p. 9

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.asiantribute.com/?q=node/15097> [Accessed on 5/3/2011]

<sup>14</sup> Richard Bauchham *Bible and Mission* ( London: Baker Academic, 2003) p. 94

<sup>15</sup> IPS one of the local radios in SriLanka.

Ashila Mapalagama was interviewed by IPS radio

year, unless there is an emergency. 'My mother looks after them. I have no option but to stay (at the FTZ) and work. My smallest son thinks that I have gone to Colombo to bring back his father,' she said." "These are the best days of a young life, but they get sucked into a whirlpool and you cannot get out of it that easy," Ashila Mapalagama, director of Stand-up, told IPS.<sup>16</sup>

The above incident indicates how economic poverty divides people from their families. This creates unpleasant situations and can lead to divorce. A majority of the young women working in the FTZs are sexually abused and some of them commit suicide. This is a new crisis for the churches, which have tended to concentrate on 'missio ecclesia'.<sup>17</sup> These new challenges are an imperative for the churches to move from 'missio ecclesia' to 'missio Dei'.<sup>18</sup> This challenges the churches to concentrate not just on saving souls, but also to work for the total liberation of the person or the community. In other words, this is a call to concentrate on a holistic understanding of mission.

The new economic crisis not only created economic poverty, but also produced human rights issues. In the FTZs employees are treated inhumanly by employers. "In 1992, a newcomer protested this inhuman act which caused her dismissal from her job after serving for a period of six months, during their strike in December. The cause was after one week of her joining the factory. One day she felt the call of nature and asked for the "choo card." These cards were in the possession of the seniors, and one of them retorted: "This woman, appointed two weeks ago, has the cheek to request for the card. Can't you suppress the urgency? Do you know that we request for the choo card after three months in service? There is no card." "Get out" and "no" was no answer to this fresher who was determined to break through this dirty practice by repeatedly requesting the card for three consecutive days. Finally, she said, "If you are not giving me the card, I will urinate right here," and she sat down. The girl issuing the card got agitated and adhered to her request.<sup>19</sup>

This example clearly shows some of the problems of employees. Generally churches focus on life after death, rather than the present struggles of the people. This new situation challenges the church to move from 'missio ecclesia' to 'mission humanitatis',<sup>20</sup> which means identifying with oppressed and marginalized people, and raising a voice against the oppressor in order to liberate people.

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<sup>16</sup><http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=48389> [27/03/2011]

<sup>17</sup>Missio ecclesia are Latin words meaning mission of the church

<sup>18</sup>Missio Dei are a Latin words meaning Mission of God

<sup>19</sup><http://www.hrsolidarity.net/mainfile.php/1998vol08no10/1828/> [27/03/2011]

<sup>20</sup>Missio humanitatis are Latin words meaning holistic mission

#### **4. How can the church create a counter-culture against economic globalization?**

Churches are called to create a counter-cultural response to economic globalization in Sri Lanka. The transformation of power into the theo-centric vision of God and equality in distribution are the main elements to preserve Gospel values and economic justice in the context of globalization.

#### **A Theological Rationale:**

##### **Power Belongs to God**

Economic globalisation has concentrated power in the hands of the rich. Even at its founding assembly in Amsterdam in 1948 the World Council of Churches questioned the enormous concentration of power (primarily economic power) in the capitalist world and economic and political power under communism. It held that it is a false assumption that a choice must be made between these two ways of organizing our political and economic lives, arguing that the fundamental mistake in economic life happens when there is a concentration of economic power in one place. It recognized that, in the capitalist system, power is concentrated in the economic area, while in the communist system power is concentrated in both the political and economic areas; neither system is able to deliver what they promise, and both ideologies should be rejected. “Each has promised which it cannot redeem,” said the Assembly. “The communist ideology puts emphasis on the economic justice and promises that freedom will come automatically after the completion of the revolution. Capitalism put the emphasis on freedom and promises that justice will follow as a by-product of free enterprise. That too is an ideology which is proved false. It is the responsibility of Churches to seek new and creative solutions which will never allow either justice or freedom to destroy the other” (Documents of the Amsterdam Assembly).<sup>21</sup>

The proclamation in the opening verse of Psalm 24, ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; the world and all who dwell in it’ indicates the comprehensive nature of this claim: Power belongs to God and all exercise of power is accountable to God. The basic question for our present discussion therefore is the concentration of power in the market which, today, is treated almost as a distinct individual, acting independently. Governments, it is claimed, should not ‘interfere’ with the ‘will’ of the market, which is self-regulating, self-ruling and ‘knows’ what to do and how to behave in different situations! It would appear that the market is not only a person, but also has its own peculiar and irritable personality.

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<sup>21</sup>Preman Niles, A History of the Ecumenical Movements Vol II p. 21

### **God and Mammon:**

It is interesting that Jesus, in his teachings, follows the basic Buddhist understanding that the real challenge of human life is the choice between God and Mammon.<sup>22</sup> Jesus spoke resolutely against the desire for wealth and power and insisted that the rich cannot enter the kingdom of God. He pointed to the strength of the allure of wealth and power, claiming that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. He challenged the rich young ruler (Mk:10: 17-22 ) to go and sell everything he had and give to the poor. Behind his anti-wealth rhetoric lies the assumption that the power of the desire for wealth is such that one would not be free to seek other goals, 'No one can serve two masters' he insisted, 'for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other'. 'You cannot serve God and mammon.' Christian teaching against greed is a radical challenge to a market economy based on consumerism, and here religious traditions have something to teach us. The economy is being run as though there are no limits either to growth or to our resources, with serious implications for the earth and its limited resources. Buddhist teachings talk of *tanha* (translated variously as desire, craving, attachment) as the primary problem of human existence. Buddhist teaching against inordinate attachment, craving, self-gratification and lack of self-restraint is an important corrective to economies built on greed, gluttony, and limitless consumption.

The shaking of the foundations of the market economy provides an opportunity to rethink our way of life. It is a golden opportunity to rethink the organization of the economic life of nations, however complex and interconnected they have become. It is not true that markets operate freely or regulate themselves; they are in fact managed by invisible hands for the benefit of certain sections of society. Destroying the myth of the market and demystifying the workings of the economy is an important task for the churches and other religious communities. The collapse of communist totalitarian organization of economic life and the upheaval in the free market economy provides a rare opportunity for concerned religious communities to begin to address some fundamental issues: the purpose of economic life, the limits to growth, the health of the environment, the nature of the community we seek, the plight of the poor and dispossessed, needs and wants, economy and ethics, and the ultimate meaning of human existence. The beating taken by Wall Street opens a new conversation

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<sup>22</sup>Robert Cruz edal. *Encounters with the word* (Colombo: The Institute For Study and Dialogue, 2004) p. 456



with potential to go beyond the groups that have traditionally been concerned with these issues.

### **Equality in distribution of Wealth:**

A third area concerns the whole question of the distribution of wealth. Religious teachings do not support the idea of an automatic distribution of wealth through the trickle-down effect in the market. Rather, being realistic about the nature of human beings, religious traditions postulate that economic systems must make intentional provision for the distribution of wealth and the care of the poor, oppressed and marginalized. Religions teach that economic systems, and the persons and groups within them, are accountable for the way wealth is created, distributed and used.<sup>23</sup> For example, Deuteronomy offers a prophetic challenge to the nation, insisting that religious practices and rituals have no meaning or effect unless they direct persons and the nation into practicing economic justice. In fact the Old Testament associates sin primarily with economic injustice. The concept of sin as an ontological condition of human beings is of much later origin (perfected during the Patristic period); the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as the teachings of Jesus, regarded sin as a fracture of human relationships, especially in the economic field.

Today the idea that a non-interfered market would do what is needed for the economic life of the nations has been proved wrong. There is so much poverty and deprivation, and such a concentration of wealth in few hands, that there can be no corrective without intervention on the part of the state, working for the well-being of all its peoples.<sup>24</sup>

Can the churches rise to the challenge? Unfortunately we, as churches, are also slaves to mammon; we crave power and succumb to the allure of wealth. Many of us believe in social Darwinism, and that the market has a life of its own. We, together with other religious traditions, need to rethink our own attitudes to wealth and power. Christians still struggle to champion an economy which serves the well-being of the people, as opposed to people serving the well-being of the economy.

### **SOME SUGGESTIONS:**

01) Conscientisation: The ministers/clergy need conscientisation first; thereafter they can conduct awareness programmes on the challenges of globalization. If conducted ecumenically, these could help to bring the churches closer.

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<sup>23</sup> Preman Niles, A History of the Ecumenical Movements Vol II p. 7

<sup>24</sup> Hicks Douglas A (et al), *Global neighbours* (Cambridge: William B Eerdmans Company,2008)p.65

02) Communication: A number of organizations and individuals are working to promote alternatives to economic globalization. Their stories should be communicated to church people, through all available modes of communication.

03) Counter-Culture: Culture cannot be confronted through rallies alone; also needed is a counter-cultural perspective working itself out in practice, for example, counter-consumerism, where a different ethic for buying and selling can be developed.

**Conclusion:**

I recommend economic dialogue, through which the rich are challenged to recognise their riches as being placed in their hands for the blessings of humanity. By sharing their wealth they can they become part of God's preferential option for the poor. Free Trade Zones could be counter-balanced by Free Distribution Zones, where people meet to share the Earth's resources equitably with one another, ensuring that none will lack. The rich will see their wealth as a community resource; the poverty of the poor will be seen as the poverty of the community. Thus community living will create a holistic existence.

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