The Necessity of Unification in Globalization: A Christian Perspective

by William H. Bishop

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” – Genesis 3: 4-5 (NIV)

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. – Genesis 11:1-9 (NIV)

In the third chapter of Genesis, man succumbed to temptation and disobeyed God. Pundits and theologians have long debated the reason for this disobedience. Some stipulate Eve’s decision was based on deception and that she was tricked into disobeying God. Others claim Eve wanted to be like God and so ate the forbidden fruit. Whatever Eve’s reason, her decision had a cascading effect on the history of mankind. Prior to her decision, man lived in harmony with God, his creator, as depicted in Genesis 2:15, which states, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (NIV). The leader-follower relationship was intact and perfect, as it was intended to be. However, once the decision was made to disobey God and become like God, man’s relationship with his Creator was forever marred. No longer was the leader-follower relationship intact. Man had decided he knew what was best and, in turn, chose to be his own leader.

In Genesis 7 and 8, the familiar story of Noah and the flood is recounted. The Lord stated that man’s every inclination was evil from the time he is born (Genesis 8:21), which is why he flooded the earth.
A few chapters later in Genesis 11, we read the story of the Tower of Babel. This was a pivotal moment in the history of man. God had flooded the earth, yet he spared Noah and his family who were charged, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1, NIV). Man’s presence had increased on the earth, and now man desired to glorify himself with a city and a tower that would reach into the heavens and make a name for him. What man really desired was independence from God (Boice, 1982). That is, man wanted to be his own leader.

Up until this point in history, man had one language and a common speech (Genesis 11). When God saw what man was doing in constructing a city and a tower, he observed man’s potential – as it existed within the confines of a single language – was limitless. Nothing man set out to do would be impossible. The people “imagined that by binding themselves together they would be able to organize strong enough to procure their own will” (Barnhouse, 1973, p. 71). In essence, they were attempting to replace God and His leadership. Therefore, God scattered them and confused their language so “their words brought confusion” (Boice, 1982, p. 342). This scattering and confusing of languages created disunity and was the beginning of different cultures as we know them today. As Barnhouse (1973) noted, “Every time they opened their mouths to speak, there was the reminder of their disunity and failure” (p. 72). It was after this event in history that social conflicts are recorded in the Bible. Cultural division played a significant role in conflict development because it provided difference and the means for distinguishing such. In Genesis 14, the first battles in human history are recorded. This occurred after God scattered the people and confused their language. Boice (1985) noted, “The battles described in Genesis 14 are part of the first recorded war in history. That is, although there is evidence of warfare from earlier times, this is the first specific account of a military engagement” (p. 58-59). These battles involved several, different kingdoms.

Ever since the scattering of people and confusing of languages in Babylon, man has been attempting to reunify. In recent decades, man has attempted this via globalization. The term globalization first appeared in academic literature in the 1980s (Sliwa, 2007). However, long before it became an academic buzzword, man set out to explore and conquer his world. In doing so, man began his quest to unite the world. Today globalization is a ubiquitous term even in mainstream media. A recent search on forbes.com revealed over one-hundred articles dealing with globalization. Google lists over 44,000,000 results. Clearly, there is no shortage of material relating to the term.

Globalization has as its root in the word global, meaning “of or relating to the whole world”
As technology has advanced, the term *global* has been used as an adjective to describe many things – *global* communication, *global* crisis, *global* economy, and, in this program, *global* leadership. This essay explores the concepts of leadership, globalization, culture, and the Christian response to a world that is rapidly seeking to return to its pre-Babylonian state. I posit that man’s quest for leadership is the search for harmony between God and man; his quest for global leadership is the search for harmony and sameness among mankind in which conflict is mitigated and minimized and unity is achieved.

**Culture: What’s it good for?**

As mentioned above, cultural variation has its origin in ancient Babylon. Since that time, the world has become replete with cultures and subcultures. Northouse (2007) defines culture “as the learned beliefs, values, rules, norms, symbols, and traditions that are common to a group of people” (p. 302). Culture is the construct wherein values exist. It is comprised of people who, for the most part, ascribe to the established values, which are defined as “socially and personally shared conceptions of the good, desirable, and righteous. They are stabilized beliefs about personally or socially preferred modes of conduct or end-states of existence. They determine how one ought to or ought not to behave or act” (Suar & Khuntia, 2010, p. 443). Values define a culture and are what distinguish one from another. For example, “one of the most important basic Japanese values is harmony” (Mooij, 2005, p. 87), i.e., doing things together. The Japanese are fond of doing things together whether it involves eating or working (Yasutaka, 1995). “In Japan, to be well adjusted one must fit into many social groups harmoniously rather than stand out” (Yasutaka, 1995, p. 5). Chinese culture is rooted in cohesive groups, which is based on their history of working in tight-knit clans (Hu & Grove, 1999). “A person who wishes to make a favorable impression [should] avoid being self-congratulatory or personally assertive” (Hu & Grove, 1999, p. 56).

In addition to values, cultures can be defined and divided by their orientation. Monochronic orientations are more concerned with tasks, punctuality, sticking to plans, short-term relationships and privacy, while polychronic orientations are flexible with their plans and timing, and are more concerned with long-term relationships, and have little regard for privacy (Bluedorn, Kaufman, & Lane, 1992). “In monochronic cultures, such as Northern Europeans and North Americans, people prefer to do things in a structured and linear manner – one at a time, and tend to be well organized and punctual” (Gong, 2009, p. 88). Whereas “in polychronic cultures, such as Latin America and the Middle East, people are laid-back, less concerned about how long a process takes, and tend to entertain multiple demands and handle several tasks simultaneously” (Gong, 2009, p. 88).
Another consideration in regard to cultural differences and division is high versus low-context cultures. In high-context cultures, “people are involved in many different activities with different people at the same time” (Kersten, Koeszegi, & Vetschera, 2003, p. 8). Conversely people in low-context cultures “prefer to undertake one activity at a time and emphasize priority setting, schedules, segmentation, and promptness” (Kersten, Koeszegi, & Vetschera, 2003, p. 8). For example, in high-context cultures such as Japan, meaning is conveyed through non-verbal cues, whereas in low-context cultures such as Germany, meaning is conveyed through words (Tanova & Nadiri, 2010), which brings me to the point of language.

In our everyday life, we often do not give our language much thought. We might have the opportunity to consider it should we encounter a situation in which English is not spoken. This is becoming more common in the United States, where there is a growing portion of Spanish-speaking inhabitants. In fact, Fox News predicted that by 2050, the U.S. would be the largest Spanish-speaking country in the world (2011). Language is an inherent part of a nation’s culture. Hobsbawm (1996) stated, “Nothing is less common than countries inhabited exclusively by people of a single uniform language and culture” (p. 1068). Language unites people with their culture and provides national identity. For example, consider the process of education, which is typically conducted in the national language, or the running of local and national governments, both of which rely on a single language for effective communication and implementation (Hobsbawm, 1996). Language reinforces cultural norms and has a unifying effect within a single geographic border. On a global scale, it serves the purpose of distinguishing nations and cultures from one another.

For all its pomp and circumstance, globalization has done little to proliferate the acceptance of differences between cultures. Rather, it has been a catalyst in promoting sameness (Ardalan, 2009). “The globalization of culture does not mean its homogenization. However, globalization uses instruments of homogenization such as armaments, advertising techniques, language hegemonies, and clothing styles” (Ardalan, 2009, p. 522). Globalization represents a threat to the proliferation of unique and distinct cultures, and it serves to minimize and nullify cultural values and beliefs and replace them with a set of universal moral principles (Esikot, 2012).

While globalization may have initially created a cultural melting pot of sorts, it has been stirred vigorously to the point of creating a level of uniformity and sameness across cultures. Davis (2008)
observed the “problem is not that we overvalue cultural differences but that we underestimate them. Even in our multiculturalism, we imagine a sameness of outlook and aspiration, an unwitting projection of ourselves in the end” (p. 270). In other words, globalization has all but erased relativism, “where cultural differences [were] held to be inviolable and cross-cultural judgments have been rendered impossible” (Davis, 2008, p. 270).

The effect of globalization has been one of ignoring cultural differences and creating sameness. While it has not, and cannot, remove the barriers of language, it has nullified many cultural differences. A key component of this process has been economics as the world continues to develop a global economic system. Economics is a unifier that is erasing cultural boundaries and geographic boarders in the name of globalization (Halme, Park & Chiu, 2002). In fact, the International Monetary Fund and Federal Reserve are currently working to develop a global currency (Jasper, 2013).

**Globalization: The Ancient Frontier**

Globalization has been occurring since Adam and Eve were banned from the Garden of Eden and their offspring multiplied and spread throughout the earth, particularly after the scattering at Babylon. Man traveled and settled throughout the land in his effort to take dominion over the earth. This became a predominant theme throughout early history as early explorers set sail to discover new worlds. This is recognized and celebrated every year in the United States on Columbus Day. So what is globalization? “Globalization in the literature can be described as an absence of barriers and borders of trade” (Cristian & Raluca, 2010, p. 589). It is not so much the removal or surmounting of geographic borders as it is the insignificance and lack of importance ascribed to them.

Beyond the absence of barriers and borders of trade, globalization is fundamentally a movement toward global unity. Ali (2001) noted:

> In today's society, access to information and opportunities to interact with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds ease communications and sensitize others to the realities and the contributions of different groups to civilizations and their progress. Indeed, people, in general, have become more tolerant of others' points of view and have simultaneously raised their expectations regarding civilized behavior (p. 1-2).

Globalization is not simply limited to trade and borders; it consists of several key elements that comprise a globalization index. A.T. Kearny created an index based on “information technology, finance, trade, politics, travel, and personal communication to evaluate levels of global integration in dozens of advanced economies and key emerging markets worldwide” (Foreign Policy, 2002, p. 40).
The all-encompassing effect of globalization permeates modern society.

Globalization is based on a multi-faceted strategy to make cultural differences irrelevant and unify the world. Part-and-parcel of its strategy is:

- Spreading confusion about the meaning and intent of globalization; inducing fears among CEOs that global trade and business will not flourish without maintaining some type of world conflict and military intervention; and promoting the proposition that the cost of allowing participation and inclusion on a global stage outweighs the benefits (Ali, 2001, p. 2-3).

The globalization train is leaving the station and all nations want to be aboard lest they miss out on economic advantage, which involves the interdependence of national economies (Ardalan, 2011). This interdependence has the power “to strengthen alliances and improve relations with adversaries” (Blanchard, Mansfield, & Ripsman, 2000, p. 311). In other words, economic interdependence has the power to unify! Financial transactions are becoming increasingly international, as well as the production process, which is diminishing economic control and adding product value (Ardalan, 2011).

Economically speaking, globalization has financially connected nations in that events in one country “have an immediate and direct impact on other countries. Countries and societies no longer live and operate as isolated self-sustained entities” (Ali, 2001, p. 6). The world is financially connected in a way it never was before in human history. Interestingly enough, “the global economy consists of hundreds of countries and yet it is heavily influenced by a relative few” (Patton, 2012). The four biggest economies are the U.S., China, Europe, and Japan, and they represent sixty percent of the world’s gross domestic product (Patton, 2012). Needless to say, their performance has a tremendous impact on the rest of the world.

In addition to economics, globalization has had a profound impact on religion. The primary effect of globalization upon religion has been “the relativization of particularistic identities along with the relativization and marginalization of religion as a mode of social communication” (Burns, 1995, p. 174). In other words, the importance of religion becomes marginalized, and it becomes nothing more than a social function, or as Hitt (2006) referred to it, “a global ethic” (p. xi). That is, religion will only serve as a guide without absolute values and norms. It will be inclusive rather than exclusive; it will be tolerant versus discriminating. The global culture is representative of such ideologies. Long-time fissures between churches are now being bridged. “One
consequence of globalization is that the walls that have long divided Catholics from Orthodox, mainline Protestants, evangelicals, and Pentecostals are eroding” (Morgan, 2013). Globalization is unifying religion and marginalizing it at the same time.

The Christian Perspective

The world became global because God scattered the people and confused their language. Therefore, after Jesus’ death and resurrection, a global command and strategy was necessary in order to spread the Gospel. Jesus commanded his disciples, “… go and make disciples of all nations…” (Matthew 28:18, NIV). This command, known as the Great Commission, was the first global edict. It was predicated on a simple strategy that involved crossing cultural borders in order to spread the Good News.

The strategy of the Great Commission was effective because it was simple. It involved preaching the Word, establishing churches, and appointing elders to rule local churches. In Acts 14:23 Paul writes, “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust” (NIV). Boice (1997) observed, “Here for the first time in the Book of Acts we find the appointing of elders (v.23), which we learn later was to become Paul’s natural pattern of church organization” (p. 257). It was through this simple pattern the disciples globalized Christianity and Christian leadership, both of which are based on Christ’s example.

Northouse (2007) defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). Jesus certainly did that and so did the disciples. However, more is involved in Christian leadership. Hanna (2006) defined Christian leadership as, “a dynamic relational process in which people, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, partner to achieve a common goal ... [which is] ... serving others by leading and leading others by serving” (p. 21). This definition precisely captures the mission of Jesus and the disciples, and it embodies the strategic intent of the Great Commission. The advent of globalization has changed the face of Christianity from its early days. “The forces of globalization have refashioned the geographic and cultural boundaries of American Christianity, thereby paving the way for new types of cross-cultural religious encounters” (Baker, 2012, p. 132).

Globalization has had a profound impact on Christianity. It has a “tendency to foster secularization among peoples and cultures that are not secular and do not want to be secular” (p. 157). Man was
originally intended to rule over the earth and take dominion of it, which he has been gradually doing since creation. In fact, it has been man’s desire to master and control the world and leave his imprint on everything he touches; he is a globalizing force (Damian, 2008, p. 160). However, although man is living in a direct relationship with God, he is a corruptible being. Creation exists in order that man might commune in harmony with God. Sin disrupted that process. Damian (2008) noted, “In order, then, for globalization to become a positive factor in the development of human civilization, it has to be perichoretical or else it will become a factor of destruction (Damian, 2008, p. 161).

Christians were given the first global command— to evangelize. This command was one in which the relationship between God and man is harmonious. Globalization was God’s idea, not man’s. It was and is necessary to circumvent the cultural division and language confusion that occurred in Babylon. In regard to globalization, Damian (2008) concluded, “The real conquering of the world which makes man a master as he was meant to be, but which does not bring about destruction, the real globalization is when man understands the original purpose of the world and his own vocation in relation to it” (p. 166).

**Conclusion**

Man’s quest to globalize is an attempt to unite the world— economically, politically, and religiously. His quest, in many ways, is the fulfillment of his destiny and prophecy. Globalization is not removing cultural boundaries and barriers as much as it is nullifying them and rendering them void. The leader-follower relationship that once existed has been altered due to the presence of sin in the world. Since the scattering and confusion at Babylon, man has been gradually working his way toward global domination in order to assert his dominion and leadership in place of God’s leadership. Hitchcock (2012) observed:

> Now for the first time in history since Genesis 11 and the tower of Babel, globalization is within man’s (and Satan’s) reach. It is most significant that in the twenty-first century not only does a need for world government exist, but the technology for establishing such a government is now in our hands (p. 116).

In Genesis 18:18, the Lord said, “Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him” (NIV). This was the great “announcement that the Lord Jesus would come from Abraham, that he would die for the redemption of believers who would come out of every nation” (Barnhouse, 1973, p. 154). It was, in effect, a global prophecy that
foreshadowed Jesus’ edict at the Great Commission. The nations of the world have been blessed by the presence of believers, who are in those nations as a direct result of Jesus’ command.

As man attempts to unify via globalization, he is unwittingly fulfilling Biblical prophecy in pursuit of his own agenda. Christians have been called to provide global leadership, to be the light in the world, and disciples of Christ. We must continue in the mission with which we have been tasked. Believers are called to exemplify Jesus’ leadership and be his representative global followers.

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