Bryant L. Myers

Engaging Globalization: The Poor, Christian Mission, and Our Hyperconnected World

Should the quality of writing continue on the level of Bryant L. Myers’ latest work, what follows in the Mission in Global Community Series will warrant future attention by engaged lay people, students, pastors, and scholars. Myers is the Professor of Transformational Development at the Fuller Seminary School of Intercultural Studies who formerly worked with World Vision International. He has written and acted as a consultant with the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelism and is also the author of the classic Christian development text, Walking with the Poor.

If there is any downside to Bryant L. Myers’ important and timely text it is that it will be tragically ignored and unread by American Evangelicals—for whom this message is so desperately needed. Evangelicals, in general, tend to view globalization with unease and suspicion. Globalization is, in the minds of some, a phenomenon that needs to be contested rather than viewed as a possible pathway toward ministry. Myers lays out three choices in regard to a stance on globalization: “resisting globalization, ignoring globalization ... or engaging globalization” (243).

Indeed, an example of resistance to, and general ignorance of globalization was recently made crystal clear to me while meeting with a young believer as we shared a discipling moment together. In the course of the conversation I mentioned the title and illustrated a point utilizing a small portion of data from Myers’ text. “Globalization?” he exclaimed with voice rising and a shadow of alarm darkening his face, “Isn’t that the One World government and the antichrist?” Thankfully, my explanation of the term and the importance of Myers’ point (engagement rather than retreat) seemed to mollify his consternation. Alas, parts of the American Church that have been fed a steady “diet” of the Left Behind eschatology are in peril of getting left behind in terms of the Lord’s commission to “all the world.”

Engaging Globalization is a serious-minded reflection on the ever-growing footprint of a global connectivity and culture. Myers lays out a persuasive case for the participation of the global Church in helping steer the phenomenon of globalization away from the nihilisms of secular humanism and toward a full-throated Christian expression of human flourishing. The text breathes an air of “glass-half-full” optimism which is a tonic to the current atmosphere of global gloominess, to which large swaths of the American Church have succumbed.

Myer’s book is heavily influenced by his work in Christian development which, while giving due diligence to empirical data, bids us to go in the direc-
tion of hands on application. He reassures the reader that the world needs the Church at its best more than ever. Throughout the text the reader is reminded of the Church’s commission, and the challenge not to shrink back into the bunker of a Christian subculture. Myers confidently states, “We need courage to act as if it were true that the kingdom of God is the only kingdom that will be left standing at the end of time” (7).

While Myers does not really nail down his own definition of globalization—which would be helpful in light of the material covered—he does provide insights from other authors and also gives two helpful metaphors to help describe globalization’s manifold and, often, bewildering expressions. First, that globalization is like a multi-faceted gemstone, and second, the Hindu parable of the blind men discovering an elephant, where each one touches a part of the elephant without discerning the whole.

The text is sectioned into six parts and flows from introductory data, regarding history and theology, to a conclusion of possible engagement from Jewish (Jonathan Sacks), Roman Catholic (Daniel Groody), and Protestant (Max Stackhouse & James Davison Hunter) scholars. Throughout, Myers’ view of globalization is repetitive without being pedantic and sanguine without being tiresome.

I especially appreciate Myers specifically addressing the issue of prayer (citing Walter Wink’s works) in the last section on engagement as it is something that is often assumed, but never nailed down in some scholarly writing. For Pentecostals, the engine of prayer, in addressing the powers behind the dark side of globalization (organized crime, human trafficking, drug-running, et al.), is one of the strongest weapons (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Myers appeals to his readers to contribute a “moral ecology” to globalization. One of Christianity’s unique contributions in engaging globalization is to address the failings of secular humanism’s thin anthropology, flawed understanding of power and “inability to satisfy the human hunger for meaning and morality” (208). Speaking to these philosophical vacuums, Myers advances the rich theologies of image-bearing, humble service, and transcendent meaning. Throughout the book Myers also masterfully utilizes the voices of believers from the Global South, acknowledging that theology is no longer just the plaything of the Anglo-Western Church.

Globalization is part of the context of all of our lives and will continue to be. All of us have been touched by its wake. While reading Engaging Globalization, I was reminded of a moment in my life as a missionary to the Philippines that partly describes and affirms its narration of globalization’s many-layered reality. In the early 90’s my European-born (French) mother was visiting our family in the Philippines, where we served as missionaries. We elected to take