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GLOBALIZATION: OPPORTUNITY OR THREAT?¹

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R.A. Finlayson was a kind of hero preacher to me in my late teens and early twenties when I was in Glasgow University. I heard him twice in a double bill with Martin Lloyd Jones in the St. Andrews Halls and in an SEC conference in Rothesay. 'There were giants in the land in those days.' Prof. Finlayson had the gift of lifting you into the presence of God even while he spoke. I hope with the help of the same Spirit who inspired him, I can do justice to his memory.

My subject is 'Globalization: Opportunity or Threat?' Between 1994 and 1998 I gave six substantial lectures on several aspects of Globalization in Europe, USA and Canada. So, I have had my turn at dazzling audiences with displays of facts and figures, mesmerizing or boring them with Sociology-speke, and pontificating on where it was all likely to lead. The major additional factor since then has been the Internet and the World Wide Web, but I do not intend to weary you with a tendentious update of where we are now in the light of recent advances in technology, like Google, mobile phones, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, blogging, iTunes, iPad, etc.

Rather I will try, like Prof Finlayson, to treat the subject in common language, within a biblical framework, relate it to our everyday experience and leave us with something to do at the end.

I will also state the obvious that Globalization is both opportunity and threat and try and spell out the threats and opportunities that affect this audience. The subjects set for the Conference we are having will be a good enough guide for that. That means I will try to cover:

- the progress of the gospel in the South;
- the retreat of the gospel in the West;
- the shape of churches in multi ethnic societies;
- the advocacy of the gospel in religiously and philosophically pluralist cultures.

¹ The Finlayson Lecture, delivered at Rutherford House, 6 April 2010.

Perhaps a text would be in order. I refer you to the words of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, 'The stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth' (Dan. 2:35).

To make sure we are all talking the same language, I will take a moment to say what globalization I am talking about.

1. WHAT IS GLOBALIZATION?

Globalization is a social process in which (1) locality, nationality and geography control societies and cultures have a lessening, and (2) international cultural trends have an increasing effect on human behaviour.

This became a key concept in the nineties.

The world is becoming more and more one place. Many kinds of boundaries that were previously important are crumbling. The most important of these are national boundaries. For four hundred years we in Europe have all lived in Nation States, England, Britain, Germany, France, the United States, and so on. These states had rulers and governments which looked after things for their citizens, made and enforced laws, defended their territory and their rights and directed their economies. The structures by which these functions are carried out are called bureaucracies. All our institutions even Christian institutions have been heavily influenced by these nation state structures and tend to be highly bureaucratic.

On the world scene, these nation states had related to each other through their Foreign Offices and their Embassies and in International organizations like the United Nations. This is 'internationalization'; Each nation retained its distinctiveness. We called it 'sovereignty'. Globalization is the stage beyond internationalization. It tends to undermine both the national and the international. Every kind of bureaucracy is under fire.

Globalization came about first through the de-linking of finance from national controls. We called it offshore finance. The multinational companies came into being, many of them with budgets greater than nations where they had businesses. Then with the advent of computers and related technology, it became possible to transfer vast sums of money at lightning speed anywhere in the world. Events like our recession happened when the banks used this facility and overextended their borrowing and lending. Further effects were felt as it became possible to mass produce goods incredibly cheaply, to transfer production anywhere in the world to take advantage of cheaper costs, and to outsource even services to call centres

in India and elsewhere in Asia. Several major airlines do all their ticketing in Bangalore, India.

Linking the computers to radio and TV and other media, it became possible to market any product anywhere in the world. When I was in Beijing as early as 1996, all the main neon signs that you would see in Europe and America lit up the skyline there and all the brand name goods that you see here, I could have bought there. This link also democratized taste and fashion. It is not only the rich who control and enjoy culture any more. There are growing popular cultures within the reach of everyone. This has created the consumer culture, where the key values are now individual choice, self expression and quality of life.

At the same time the speed of travel has increased and its cost has come down. This has resulted in great mobility in people and the internationalizing of labor—just think of the names of foreign doctors that you hear every day—the mixing of cultures, with the east coming to the West and vice versa in massive migration, and the rubbing shoulders of the religions and the worldviews in both east and west.

The final step came through the Internet and the World Wide Web which has made knowledge universally accessible at the click of a computer key or mobile phone button. We have become societies where knowledge is the most significant commodity.

You could say everything is everywhere and if you have the technology, it is open to everyone. This means that every culture's story is no longer a stand-alone story. It has to live alongside everyone else's story. This is true about our gospel story. We no longer have any fields to ourselves. We share the faith marketplace and our goods are in competition with all the 'other faith' or 'no faith' goods that are there. That is globalization and that is the new context in which we have to live as Christians.

2. HOW DO YOU THINK BIBLICALLY ABOUT GLOBALIZATION?

I find the most helpful biblical framework for this is in the apocalyptic parts of the OT and NT. The book of Daniel, the Olivet discourse in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, and the book of Revelation. That is why I took my text from Daniel: 'The stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth' (Dan. 2:35).

The bookends that mark the beginning and end of the nation of Israel were the two tyrants, Pharaoh in Egypt and Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. Captivity was ended under Pharaoh to return under Nebuchadnezzar. It is not surprising that the LORD had something to say about how his people should live now that their nation was no more (Dan. 2:1-49).

Daniel was an exile (2:25) who had been given a place in the king's service and a name to go with it (1:26). He and his people were far from home and learning a totally new life. Until recently, their horizons had been limited to the very small nation state of Judah, with its capital at Jerusalem (1:1). Disaster had struck and now the country was occupied, the city destroyed and he and his friends deported about a thousand miles from home (1:2).

There was panic because Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing dream. Like most of us, he forgot what it was, but not how it had disturbed him. So, he asked all his advisers to tell him the dream and what it meant. Now they were threatened with execution if they could not tell the King what he had dreamed and what it meant (2:5-6).

In fact, they were about to receive a revelation from God that they probably would never have had back home in Jerusalem. Their new circumstances and Daniel's job as a top official in an alien palace made them pray harder and think bigger than they had ever done before (2:17-18). Daniel, like Joseph before him, had started to develop skill in interpreting dreams and visions. 'To these four young men, God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds' (1:17).

Even then, a heathen king was not a likely person to receive a revelation from God. You sense this in the way Daniel asked his friends to pray the God of Heaven for mercy. They were to ask him to explain 'the mystery' so that they and the other advisers would not be killed. It was a desperate prayer. This is often how God works in our lives. Disasters can lead to new discoveries.

Daniel received more than he thought he was asking. It was an unparalleled revelation for a heathen king. It makes Daniel burst out in praise. (2:20-23) There are two notes for us:

- God controls the times and the seasons of history.
- He makes and unmakes all rulers. (2:21)

This was a bigger view of God and a distinct philosophy of history and it was given in a dream through a pagan despot. God was concerned not just with Israel or Judah but with the whole world. Revelation was going global! Daniel is the Biblical writer that first speaks about 'every people nation and language'. This inclusive way of speaking was taken up later by John in the book of Revelation. The Bible does not recognize a distinction between secular and sacred history. They are all one. This comes out very strongly in the king's dream. It talks about God's kingdom and human empires.

3. HOW DOES THE KINGDOM OF GOD RELATE TO EMPIRES? (DANIEL 2:31-45)

I use 'Empires' to mean political units that are made up from a number of territories or nations ruled by a single supreme authority.

The dream was of a Statue and a Stone. The Statue was made from different metals. Each represented successive Empires that were to arise in the period covered by the prophecy, until the Messiah Prince would come (9:25). There are many interpretations of this vision but as our purpose is history rather than prophecy, I accept broadly that: the head of gold was Babylon, (2:32a, 37-38); the chest and arms of silver was Persia (2:32b, 39a); the waist to the knees of bronze was Greece (2:32c, 39b); and the shins and feet, of iron and clay, was Rome (2:33, 40-43). The Stone that became a Mountain that covered the whole earth was the Kingdom of God which would supersede them all. During the time of these Empires that 'the rock cut out of the mountain would itself become a huge mountain and fill the whole earth. The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will endure forever' (2:35).

If we review history in this light, I believe that we can see that it was not just a matter of God's people surviving and growing in a succession of empires. The empires themselves are a part of the tide of the kingdom of God coming in. Every Empire is a wave, a coming further up the shore of God's purpose to bring back the whole world to himself. Each successive empire contributes something to the universalizing purpose of God. We have the feel of that in Daniel's stories of Babylon. Even secular historians name Nebuchadnezzar as the greatest king of any until that time, who saw himself as responsible for assuring the order of the world.

The Persian Empire suddenly pulled many peoples of the world into a common experience. Indians, Medes, Babylonians, Lydians, Greeks, Jews, Phoenicians and Egyptians were for the first time governed by one empire whose eclecticism showed how far civilization had come. They drew from all the cultures they ruled in deciding how to organize and live.

Greek culture replaced the organizing principle of *kinship* with that of locality: local attachment, your city, became more important than the family you belonged to. The Greek philosophers, like Plato, first gave us the idea of 'universals'. These were values and concepts that applied all over the world to all peoples. Alexander the Great introduced this Greek culture to the East. There was a mixing of Greek and Oriental cultures. Greek now became the official language of the whole near East.

The Roman Empire was never an exclusive racial entity whose leadership was closed to non-Italians. And it made the whole world physically

accessible by the roads it built. It did more than any previous culture to establish the principle of rule by law and move it towards being universal. Now this divine strategy did not stop with the Roman Empire. Acts 17:26 says that God determined the limits of the territory and the eras of the history of every nation, in order that they might seek after God and find him.

There have been several empires since the Roman Empire and we need to try and discern how they were part of the purpose of the Lord of History. It is not easy. It is like the tide coming in. Sometimes the water recedes very far before it comes in again in a big wave further up the shore. I cannot help feeling that some empires were like a very great undertow. These incoming waves of God's historical purpose include the fifth century invasions of the Northern and Eastern peoples that conquered the Roman Empire only to be converted by the faith of those whom they conquered. Some of the receding waves can be seen in the Islamic Empires, The Umayyad, the Abbasids, the Saracen and then the Ottoman Empires, which resulted in what we are now beginning to see as the European Captivity of the Gospel.

In Asia, there had been Empires too. China had become one nation in the Ch'in dynasty around 400 BC. Successive dynasties followed with some astonishing achievements and reversals. During the Ming Dynasty, China was the most technically advanced nation in the world. Almost inexplicably, an Imperial decree of 1436 halted Chinese exploration and prompted the scuttling of Cheng Ho's warships. It urged China to turn inward in order to protect her cultural heritage against contamination by foreign barbarians. So successful was this campaign that China experienced almost 500 years of scientific, technological and cultural stagnation.

The period of the European maritime Empires started with the Portuguese within about ten years of the Imperial edict recalling China's navy. These empires were a major means of the gospel going global. World history might have been very different if the Imperial edict had not been issued and it is these things that make me believe that it is Jesus Christ who is the Lord of History. I am not saying that each empire was progressively more like the kingdom of God. There was good and bad in them all. They usually ended badly. I am suggesting that something was achieved or finished off that moved the world in the long term to a place where the impact of the kingdom of God could be felt in all the world in every people and nation and language.

What the achievement or change or negative purpose of each empire was, will, I think, need to be discerned by the inheritors of these empires. People like me can only very dimly discern what the Lord of History

was working in the Mongol empire in Asia, the Mogul Empire in India, the Aztecs and the Incas in South America, the Ottoman Empire in the Middle east and North Africa, the successive dynasties in China, the Russian and Soviet Empires in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and the short lived Japanese Empire in the 20th. Century.

Acts 17:26-7 and Matthew 24:7, 14 both indicate that this is the way to understand history from God's point of view. We have traveled a long way from Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue and the stone. We are still talking about the same thing. As the hymn says,

So be it Lord, thy throne shall never
Like earths proud empires pass away.
Thy kingdom stands and grows forever,
Till all thy creatures own thy sway.

4. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

There are few Empires left in the world. The Chinese, perhaps the Russian and the Indonesian. What we do have is the process of *globalization*. This is a subtle economic and cultural empire that transcends political boundaries. It is the new imperialism within which the gospel has to survive and grow. In broad terms the imperialism described in Revelation 13, is an economic imperialism where only those who had the mark of the Beast could buy and sell. Globalization is breaking down economic, demographic, cultural and ethnic walls faster and more effectively than anything else in history. That is surely an opening for God to bless *all* the families of the earth with the gospel and not just some.

If we go back to Daniel receiving this preview of history, we should not be surprised or afraid. He and his people were still first generation forced migrants in Babylon with all the upheaval that forced deportation causes to the spirit of the people. The message, delivered to the people through their pagan King was that Judah may be conquered, but God is still on the throne and his kingdom will never end. We ourselves are evidence that the message through Daniel is true as is the whole church of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

So, our task is that we like them, remain steadfast and grow in likeness to Jesus, and not sell out and continue our decline. I will look at each of our heads in turn.

The progress of the gospel in the South.

We are beyond numbers in this matter by now. I have them, but I will not weary you with them. It is time to learn the detail. For this I recommend

the recent books by Philip Jenkins starting from *The Next Christendom*.² Friends, we in the West are a side show and need to start behaving as a side show. Let me tell you of my visit in January 2010 to my old Church in Nairobi. When we started in 1959, we had a Sunday attendance of 40 including children. When I returned 50 years later, on the first Sunday I preached to 2,000 at the family service in a building that seats 3,000. They opened it in 2005 at a cost of \$1.5m which they raised themselves without foreign money – a beautiful but very functional building. The next Sunday I preached at the two other morning services. Young Adults = 600, Youth Church = teenagers 700. Total 3,300 worshippers.

In the meantime they have planted four other churches in Greater Nairobi all of which are thriving and one of which has more attending than the mother church and is embarked on a wide ranging programme of church planting in a very responsible manner. It was very humbling, but wonderful to be there. I recalled to them that in 1967 I came to the conviction that they could be ten times more effective if they were under African leadership and set about finding an African and leaving, as I did in 1971. Now I was able to say, 'You are ten times larger than you were then and it has all been under African leadership under God.'

We need to come to terms with the fact that very often the growth of the church arises in situations of persecution. We trip out the quote, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,' but do we ask why. It seems to me that the reason is that believers under persecution behave like Christians and it is attractive. They have no trappings of power struggles. They are not in it for what they can get. They are not rice Christians a major stumbling block where they are seen to be.

China has been the main field of church growth in the world for the last forty years. I was in Nanjing in 1996 meeting with the leadership of the registered churches (TSPM). They told me why the churches both registered and unregistered had grown. They said the believers pulled their weight in the factories and delivered on their five year plan quotas. They were reliable. Many others had mental illness under the strain. It was the Christians that showed care and concern and prayed for their healing which often took place. The churches in China are still persecuted and they are still growing.

Or take the church planted by the Mennonites in Ethiopia. They grew from 5,000 to 50,000 between 1975 and 1985, when all their pastors were put in prison and their buildings were closed. They had to meet as small

² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

mutually caring groups in homes and have quiet meetings in case the Communist committees would hear and detect them.

Nepal is another kind of growth in the last 40 years, from few to over half a million now through Communist coups and place revolutions. In October 2009, there was a meeting in Katmandu of representatives of all eight South Asian countries. It was the first time this coalition of their Diasporas had actually met in South Asia. The local believers wanted to involve their government officials in the opening of their meeting. The visitors were not so sure. But the Prime Minister sent the Minister for Tourism and Aviation to attend and he spoke to them. He said, 'I do not like Christianity, but I love Jesus.' And gave then permission to quote him that. Later they had an audience with the Prime Minister.

Now, it is not all sweetness and light. The same Kenya that is 80% Christian is the leading country in the world for its culture of impunity in the face of corruption. In fact the structures and ethos of the churches reflect the culture of the society. Even the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches that are growing so spectacularly have imbibed the culture of the big man who is the autocratic pastor and they cut little ice in influencing society.

We should keep informed and rejoice and draw inspiration from it. God is not dead! We should get to know about it, not just in our papers and missionary magazines but through having in our homes their people who are here as students, refugees and economic migrants. The major gift needed in the world today may be hospitality. With limitations, if we are able to travel we should also go on mission trips and see for ourselves.

We can contribute financially but we ought to do it with caution. There is a lot of Christian work done and the only reason is that there is money to pay for it. It is not all or always valuable. The emphasis needs to be to let nationals lead and do work that is within their means. If they are financed, let them set and monitor the accounting standards that you can agree to. We need to avoid reverse cultural dominance, where the national slips into an autocratic role.

The retreat of the gospel in the West.

There is no doubt we are in trouble everywhere in the West, though not always in the same ways and for the same reason. I do not need to rub it in. I am not sure anyone has accurately discerned the reason for this or we would be on the way out of it by now. I cannot come to you with any prescriptions of my own. My best guess is that it has to do with the degree to which we have been seduced by the secular emphasis that is so valuable in other respects. We have edited God out. This takes different forms in different parts of the West. It is clearest in the places that have

been most under Marxist control. Next probably comes the French type of secularization that made such a clean sweep at the French Revolution and was fostered in mainly Roman Catholic areas that Napoleon overran. The Slavic Orthodox areas have been greatly infected. In the Anglo Saxon West, we and the Commonwealth countries are worst affected and USA probably comes off best for the acknowledgement of God.

It is my own belief that we need to rediscover the LORD with capital letters, but I will defer treatment of this until we get to our last section.

The shape of the churches in multi ethnic societies.

It is not just that everything is everywhere. Everyone is everywhere. The scale of migration is as great as the enormous migrations from Europe to America, Australia New Zealand and South Africa in the 19th and 20th. Centuries. The scope of migrations in the last 60 years is wider than it has ever been in recorded history. It is from everywhere to everywhere!

We see it here in UK. It will be a major consideration in the election next month.³ It seems to me not to be so pronounced in Scotland, but in many cities in England the number of immigrants is very great. We see it in church life. The largest congregations in UK are immigrant congregations. Kingsway International Christian Church in the East End of London has more than 10,000 members. They are on SKY TV's religious channels practically every day. They are largely West African/Nigerian. Kensington Tabernacle runs a close second. They are mainly from East and Central Africa. Korean Congregations abound and the Chinese are growing significantly. My Iranian friends tell me that they are growing significantly but their numbers are still small. In my view, mega-churches have their origins in migration movements whether from country to country or just from the countryside to the cities or from city to city in the highly mobile USA.

Not surprisingly the main reactions against globalization are from ethnic separatists and religious fundamentalists. Migrants feel at home with their own and feel very protective and defensive about their new young communities and develop fortress mentalities. Their leaders can exploit this.

There is an idealism in white Christians that asks why they could not have just joined our churches and swelled their number. That is a subject for another day. But, as one who has worked at this in Africa, USA and UK, let me give you my present estimates. Only 10% of any normal congregation will ever be given to hospitality and it will be less than half of that who welcome strangers of another tribe or race. This is because

³ The general election was held in the U.K. on 6 May 2010 [ed.].

we have not recognized that one consequence of being born again is that kinship can no longer be our primary value. Until we do there will not be much serious integration.

So what do we do if we are to work within such parameters? We stop beating up people for not doing what is not within their gift. Hospitality in the sense of entertaining strangers is a gift. Not everyone has it. Encourage those who have the gift to use it and acknowledge and support them in it. Work to get people to have fellowship with their own kind in their homes either informally or in fellowship groups. I do believe that hospitality may be the primary evidence of a Christian Lifestyle in our day. It could be the key to handling globalization. If you can let them see what you are at home you let them see what you are. That then becomes the witness.

When Jesus said, 'You shall be witnesses to me,' it was 'you' plural. It is corporate witness. To me the Kingdom of God is where things work. Why do they work? They work because they do the right things and they do them right. Churches are meant to be outposts of the Kingdom. The right things are done in the right way and they work and are seen to work. Do people look at churches here and see them as places where things work? Certainly not in Africa. Very often, nothing seems to work in Africa. The message that we have to get across is that if our churches don't work, we should shut up about the government. We have nothing to say!

The advocacy of the gospel in religiously and philosophically plural societies.

Since Globalization is here to stay, this is possibly the churches' primary challenge. It will take different forms in different places. It is not a philosophical or theological question only although it is seriously both of these. It is a worldview question and it is a lifestyle question. Worldview questions affect what people believe without thinking. Lifestyle question affect how people think, feel, live and behave. We have to go back to the drawing board and challenge all our assumptions.

Let me be frank with you. I am a Modernity man to my back bone. Classically educated at Glasgow University I value all the facets of the enlightenment and I am happiest within that framework. I am intensely proud of the lead that Scotland gave in the development of the enlightenment and of the age-long commitment to higher education in our small country. This is home. Until fairly recently all my Christian apologetics were shot through with Modernity arguments, but what if that is not where the worldview is anymore? The longer I live and go to church, the more I am convinced that many of those who do not darken our doors have not rejected our gospel. They reject what they think the gospel is

that we have been trying to tell them. If I pray for one thing more than another it is that people like that may learn of the true God, The LORD with capital letters, and what he has done for them and all the world in Jesus the Messiah.

In more recent times, I am just as excited by the explosion of globalization. In the providence of God I retired to Oxford and have access to the Bodleian library and use it with great delight. But now I have the Web and the Internet and access to even more than the Bodleian can give me in a much more accessible form. I am beginning to realize what it means to say that God loves the world. Not just my world, but the whole world. I am becoming conscious of great gaps in my knowledge and understanding. That is why I was drawn to mention all the empires down through history and on every continent earlier. God loved and loves those worlds too.

At the moment in my studies in governance I am very interested in the Islamic Empires and their scope and achievements. It gives me a new view of how Muslims think. Bannockburn is important to us Scots. Can you be a Scot and not be proud of Bannockburn and what it stands for? Cordoba in Spain is important to Muslims. What do you know about Cordoba? I am asking, 'Is there another aspect of the gospel that I need to learn that would help me to open it up to those mistaken unbelievers.'

This has to be an unfinished piece, for I do not pretend to have answers and it is late for me. I pray that there may be those here who will take this matter up and show us how to advocate the gospel in religiously and philosophically pluralist cultures. The we shall be part of Daniel's word to Nebuchadnezzar, 'The stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth'.