

Global trends

by Raineer Chu

There are 3 trends today, globalization, urbanization and marginalization. Thomas Friedman talks only about the first. What is critical with globalization is that jobs are being moved around in a way unimaginable before. You can buy your laptop via the internet from a shop more than 10,000 miles away without leaving your room. The world has grown very small.

Urbanization means there are now more people living in cities than in the rural areas. Cities will double in size every 3 years. Most of those migrating to cities will end up in the slums. The urban poor ministry is now the most cutting edge, pioneering ministry in the history of missiology.

What many do not know is that as the world rapidly changes, marginalization is also growing. As the rich get richer, so the poor also get poorer. The gap between the rich and the poor in China is now the widest in the whole world.

Cities are places to hide, to become anonymous. Cities are also places of freedom specially for the poor. There the lower castes can marry even the upper castes or a muslim and one will mind. Urban migration also means social mobility, specially for women, as there tend to be more jobs for women. Finally, it is a place of spiritual openness, as people become open to the gospel. Statistics show that the most open to the gospel are people in newly built slums.

An expert described during a public lecture in Hongkong what the ideal city should be: it should have excellent centers of learning, universities; centers of art, music, dance; it must be affluent and is undergirded by a strong peace and order' and finally, it must have high tolerance for diversity, specially for gays or homosexuals. Like or not, this is the truth prevailing in all the great cities today and one reason by Singapore has never qualified as a great city.

Two builders of cities

There are two kinds of people building cities today. I call them, the pyramid builders and the relationship builders. Alas, the relationship builders, as many of you already realize, has fallen behind the pyramid builder. They are good in relationships but they are poor businessmen. On their own, they could never launch a Lausanne Congress in Cape Town that costs millions of dollars.

Who are the pyramid builders? They are few but they are wealthy and powerful. They own most of the wealth of the world.

Let us examine what a pyramid implies. It basically has room only for one pharaoh and his family, his consorts, concubines and of course, his attorney (me). There is a lot of room at the bottom of the pyramid but very little room at the top. To build a pyramid, you need one pharaoh and 3 million slaves, plus i guess a few arabs who know their geometry.

The egyptian pyramids are the most graphic, most notorious examples of this, not to mention the pyramids of the incas, aztecs and mayans (also costing 3 million slaves each, safe estimate). Less you think this belongs to a bygone era, you are wrong. India today has this pyramid, requiring no less than 250 million dalits and OBCs to hold it up.

And yet, unrealized by many, the whole world actually operates on the principle of the pyramid. Capitalism is a pyramid, with little room at the top and requiring millions of slaves to produce goods and services to prop up the lifestyle of the few.

Factories are exported to china and bangladesh to take advantage of cheap labor and these labor are held at bay by armed border guards. You can enter the top only with highly selective visas. Regularly, the pharaohs import the top 10% of the brightest in the world to enter.

Cheap labor are sourced all over the world to support the lifestyle of a few, the pharaohs of the world. These pharaohs are religiously guarded by border patrols and entry into their kingdom are gained only by stringent visa requirements and quotas. Only the wealthiest can go in. also the brightest do get in, as they top universities of the pyramid people recruit them zealously from all corners of the globe to study in MIT and Harvard, to learn to become the finest pyramid builders in the world.

Some of those who have gained access though do not always fair well. They can't keep up with the pressure. At times, they turn out to be the wrong people trying to be pyramid builders – they are relationship builders doing a pyramid building job. They get into depression and eventually become part of the homeless group who line up for food daily in the park.

Many of the brokenhearted become like this, they are gentle, sensitive, warm and just not apt for the job of a pyramid builder.

Pyramid builders are leading in mission, planting churches and sharing

the gospel. But all the while, what they are doing is building pyramids. They will promise help for the poor but in truth they cannot for there is room only for a few at the top. Most of the poor will remain at the bottom of the pyramid. The only way to help the poor is to destroy the pyramid.

The pyramid runs on excessive consumption, people are required to buy more than they earn. To maintain their privileged position, borders are guarded carefully.

Their churches proliferate and grow but eventually die. Christianity Today published a study that showed that these churches die after ten years and divide violently after 20 years. Within their DNA these churches carry characteristics that make their group fragment. Pyramid builders are very individualistic, independent, which are traits opposed to community. They are impersonal and the gospel invitation is not to a relationship but to an abstraction, and as Prof. Yamamori noted, in America, nothing is personal.

Pyramid builders grow and expand fast because they are oriented towards conquest, big numbers and efficiency. Efficiency is the byword of globalization – if someone can produce your produce better, faster, cheaper, then you have lost your business. That is what pyramid builders are good at.

Conquest comes from Hegel, one of the founders of pyramid building. Hegel taught that wars are inevitable. Weak nations must die and strong nations must rule. This was the philosophy behind the colonial period when the great Christian pyramid building countries carved territories all over the world. England ravaged the wealth India and Africa.

Pyramid builders are also great scientist and they apply their scientism to their faith. They, following, Descarte, have reduced the gospel to its barest minimum – to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. The social dimension of the gospel is lost. The bible teaches that we are saved not only to Jesus but also to the Body, the church. This is good news to the poor who need the social network of the church to survive. But the reduced gospel throws them back on the street to fend for life alone.

The pyramid builders do not care about the conversion of the slaves at the bottom of the pyramid. They only care about the conversion of pharaohs.

I was in two consultations of evangelists, one in Paris and another in

London, years ago, and the discussion went around and around over how difficult it was to evangelize the city and yet several blocks away was a church overflowing with people but they were not whites. They were blacks, migrant workers, mostly from Africa and Turkey.

To the pyramid builders, the salvation of a poor soul does not count. The angels of heaven only celebrate when a pharaoh is saved.

The center of worship of pyramid churches is the sermon. The point of the exercise is how the members can learn, it is very cognitive, cartesian. In other traditions, the center of worship is the eucharist, and the purpose is to connect with the presence of God.

The pyramid builders love their privacy but it is not solitude; it is isolation, a form of self imposed solitary confinement.

They hold on to their value of private ownership as higher than scripture. Thus they have land titles while long before that, people knew that lands were owned in common. Of course Jeronimo suffered for that. So did the Inuits (although Canada finally returned their land).

They know how to give but they do not know how to share. They read the bible from the top to the bottom and think that the problem is poverty when in fact is it greed.

They cant see that there is more than enough people and resources for all the world, but only if we destroy the pyramid.

They think that the story of the widow's mite is about the rich giving more instead of the fact that the poor give so much more, ever more sacrificially than anyone and that fact God can see which is what the story is all about – God can see you when you give even a small amount when you give 100%. And the poor give more than that all the time.

They say the poor need us when it is us who need the poor. This is obvious in 1 John 3.17

he who has a surplus of the world's goods and finds a brother (in church, a member, a christian) and does not provide for him, does the love of Christ abide in him?

This is not about salvation, it is about spirituality. Our spirituality is authenticated by the way we treat the poor. We need the poor to authenticate our spirituality.

What the pyramid builders have done though is separate the church of the rich from the poor, so that the tension of 1 John 3.17 is removed. Now, if all the people in church are rich, then there is no need to share. What we need to do is bring back this unity into the church.

The church was the greatest good news at the beginning. When Paul said there was no more male or female, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, slave or free, alien or citizen, etc., here he was instituting social equality, a revolutionary idea that broke the back of the Roman empire.

Coupled with this was economic equality found in 2 Corinthians 8 when Paul said, he who gathered much did not have too much and he who gathered little did not lack anything.

These two must be in the church. If we cannot do this then we cannot do any kingdom or transformation work outside. How can we convert people and then when they come to church we tell them it is impossible to practice kingdom life. If it is impossible inside the church, then it will not work outside. We of all people are the most qualified to share, to give up material wealth having been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. How can we expect the world to share when we won't?

God has not set an agenda for eliminating poverty in the world. This is a lie. But God certainly expects in among and in the midst of his people, the church, the new Israel (Deut 15.4 God told Israel there shall be no poor among you.).

In this Wilberforce was a mistake. By legislation we have damned the slaves who all their lives were dependent on their masters, their masters food, land and home, and now we have thrown them out on the street, alone, in the cold, to fend for themselves.

By legislation the church has avoided her responsibility to care for their poor.

The Bible does not advocate for abolition of slavery. When Paul told Philemon to take back Onesimus, not only as a slave but also as a brother, Paul removed the stigma and malignancy of slavery. What is wrong with slavery when I treat my slaves like my own brother, eating from my table, sleeping in the same comfortable bed, eating the same food?

they cannot find the balance

The emerging churches, a book published in Fuller recently is very interesting. These churches have reacted to the past generation of

pyramid builders. They don't want programs anymore, they don't want big budget, big building, paid pastors, . What they seek is intimacy, small groups, spontaneous activities, etc. But the pyramid builders are caught in a dilemma. No matter what they do, they cannot attain the balance. They are ever in a deepening dialectical cycle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis (Hegel). They end up throwing the baby with the bathwater.

There is nothing wrong with the past practices, what is needed is simply how to balance it, the left hand with the right hand. But this reactionary response is typical of the pyramid builders. Merton had to leave America to find this balance. Within the pyramid system, that balance cannot be found. Merton went to Japan and Thailand to find that balance. In the end, Merton wrote: spirituality is finding the complementarity of opposites.

We seek balance. Spirituality is all about balance. The opposite of balance is concreteness, fixedness. It happens when we put a handle on things, people, and issues. There is no need for soul searching, discernment of the movement of the Holy Spirit. Decisions are predetermined by some laws or order and life follows a mechanical process. It's just like driving in America, you just follow the road signs and you will get there. Nothing is spontaneous. This approach is perfect for management but does not always work well with relationships. Balance means things are always tenuous, almost falling. It's hard work. All of faith is about balance: balance between grace and work, rules and freedom, human will and sovereignty, justice and mercy.

Those who hate balance want to know beforehand how things should be decided. We will allow the poor to come to our house and eat for free but then there is the fear that they will abuse us. This is very common. Rule based people will put a sign: come eat only on Wednesday night, and stay only until 9 pm. Those who live with balance struggle always with the what if, what if it's an angel who has come in the night in disguise? What if the man needs help now or else he will die? What if God is asking us to share the gospel to the man and it's Tuesday?

Balance also requires embracing tension as often, what are balanced are opposites, contradictory truths. The Psalmist says in his whole life he has never seen the righteous forsaken, or their children begging bread. But many poor go hungry, many starve, many die as a result. God has forsaken many righteous poor and statistics can prove it. The poor live with much contradiction. They worship a mighty God and that

day a bulldozer will evict them violently from their home. They worship a God who is loving and their son die slowly before their eyes because they cannot afford to buy medicines. They worship a God who is rich and who provides for his children, and they go home after worship to go to bed without their meal for that night.

Pyramid builders hate tension and will always resolve contradictions. They are bad news to the poor because they cannot embrace the spirituality of the poor which is full of contradiction. They want to sort things out for them, make all poor middle class or wealthy, but they know that even beyond their lifetime, many of those they seek to help will still remain poor.

The emerging churches are on the path of death and fragmentation. They cannot live without the pyramid builders. And the pyramid builders will not die until the end of time. They may self destruct but others will quickly take their place. They need only to be balanced.

We need both progress and community. The pyramid builders, being cartesian will give us science, and cellphones and rockets. They are the only ones who can pull off a US\$10 million dollar Lausanne Congress.

A Tibetan Monk wrote years ago about this pyramid builders, he said: they have mastered the art of selling fantasies and illusions.

Advertisements, marketing gimmicks, stock exchange, fame, cars – these are all the things we seek and they are empty.

But the relationship builders are enamored by the success of the pyramid builders, I would be too whenever I see a pyramid, its grandness and majesty.

But they can offer the relationship builders nothing, their way will lead to dehumanization. When we think of urban mission, we must not be inadvertently promoting pyramids. We need pyramid builders but they cannot do it alone. They need a balance and they are balanced by the relationship builders.

There are only two mentions of church in the gospels: Matthew 16 and 18. in chapter 16, the church is described as a strong army – not even the gates of hell will prevail. In chapter 18 she is described as a strong family, where not even the knottiest relationship problems will not be solved.

We need both.

What we should beware is how we work with the pyramid builders. They will talk like everybody else. They have the same words, church, fellowship, love, etc. but really, they mean another thing.

The concentration guard nazis watched millions of jews gased to death but religious attended church on sundays. We have to always ask the pyramid builders when they talk about God, who that God is?

Apartheid existed side by side the church in south africa while thousands of blacks, considered not human, were beaten and murdered brutally. When they talk about church, ask who are in that church?

The American Declaration of Independence says all men are created equal but it only actually referred to white male landed gentries. It did not even include white women. The women got their right of suffrage decades later. And only in recent history were the blacks recognized as human beings, and this right was won only after so much beating, imprisonment, and murder.

The pyramid builders will not easily give up without a fight.

Operationalizing scripture is a useful exercise when working with pyramid builders. Dietrich bonhoeffer is tops in this. He went around europe and america to try to unite the church in order to somehow stop the outbreak of WWII. He knew what church meant, that it was supposed to be united. Bonhoeffer said, the closer we are to one another the clearer Christ gets.

We need to be united against a common enemy like unfair trade (americans should stop subsidizing agriculture and cancel debts of the poor countries). Instead of just a development millenium goals program which is putting pressure on the poor to shape up, we need a counter part among the rich, a consumption development goal – to regulate carbon emission and preserve our fast depleting resources.

CS lewis is another who is tops at operationalizing scripture. Love must be operationalized and one way to do that is to say that when we do not love, we sin, we break the greatest commandment. Sin is not just killing or stealing, it is also not minding those who are in need, ignoring those who are suffering, and not pursuing with our hearts those who are lonely.

The greatest poverty is loneliness, isolation. Relationship builders can solve this.

There is a conspiracy between hegel, descartes and adam smith inside

the pyramid system. Before one can even do any decent contextualization, one needs to do drastic lobotomy to remove these conspirators. Otherwise contextualization in the hand of the pyramid builders is just hyper marketing, to make the self more effective, saleable and profitable.

Conclusion:

we need to look at the evolution of the word sustainability to see how we can work hand in hand, the pyramid builders and the relationship builders and how the two can ultimately succeed.

Sustainability which began in wallstreet originally meant financial sustainability, or the wise use of finances with profitability as the highest consideration. Loans had to be paid back and the cost of money had to be factored in. dole outs were wrong. A 97% repayment for microfinance was held as industry standard.

sustainability eventually evolved into financial sustainability as well as ecological sustainability. Wanton exploitation of natural resources in the name of profit was not wise nor sustainable. Carbon emission needs to be controlled.

Factories built on the river side polluted the waters and destroyed more than it helped the people.

Another side to sustainability evolved after that, social sustainability meant the poor had to be empowered, they should be given access to capital since the service providers were getting richer and richer and the poor remained perpetual borrowers.

Then political sustainability evolved also and demanded that profit and progress must be coupled with human rights. After that, gender sustainability followed, so women who held up half of the sky were recognized. Land titles given to families often were in the name of the husband and when he went philandering, the wife and kids were made desperate.

The end of the evolution is what will work, what will endure, what will be balanced? We know the answer. What will work, will succeed is what is in accord with Scripture, operationalized scripture. The goal of progress is shalom, peace with God, with people, and with creation.

This is where the two builders must go, seek shalom. It will take lots of turns and detours but God will make sure it gets there. God will not be satisfied with less than shalom.

This is also the new fundamentalism we can use to pit against the fundamentalism of Islam and other violent religions. Our fundamentalism is that nothing will work, nothing will succeed unless it is in accord with the Word of God. The only difference is found in a very old movie, cool hand luke. We will not fight for it with arms or with violence. We will enter the ring with our hands down, we will get beaten up, we will fall but we will always get up like cool hand luke until the enemy boxer gets tired of punching us in the face. This is how the gospel fights Satan. We are the only army that can bring the battle to the doorstep of the enemy and then throw our arms to the ground and get killed. There is no other way and the relationship builders know this in their hearts.

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