Reconstructing Christian Culture Toward the Globalization of Gospel Vision: Identity, Empowerment, and Transformation in an African Context

Thomas G. Grenham, S. P. S., Ph.D Cand., Boston College

Abstract

This essay explores the cultural phenomenon of globalization ushered in through worldwide economic market expansions, international travel, technological advances, and rapid internet communications. These transformations are influencing and changing not only cultures and individual nation-states, but they are also impacting religious meaning and faith everywhere. By examining the case study of the Sakalava people of Madagascar who practice an indigenous religion known as Tromba spirit possession, we can learn how this specific cultural and religious context copes with external economic, political, cultural, and religious forces. Included in the research is the way Christianity needs to interact with the Sakalava religion to reconstruct its own Christian culture to discover gospel values already present and active. This has worldwide implications for Christian evangelization and religious education. The article concludes with outlining some consequences for Christian evangelization that attend to the local and the universal impact of the gospel vision.

Introduction

The evolution of globalization has gripped and continues to grip the economic, cultural, religious, and political imaginations of the world. We are familiar with the adage "Global Village" in which most people find themselves in close proximity with their neighbors from diverse cultures and different religious worldviews (Tomlinson, 1999, 3-10). Every day we are inundated with sound bites and informercials that filter images of the world. We are bombarded with advertising that tells us what we need for happiness. Calculated assumptions are made about who we are, where we live, and what we need. Could it all be part of a globalizing conspiracy to homogenize us into a particular consumer consciousness of being and acting in the world? Is the security of sameness preferred to the contrasts of diversity? Could the prominent presence of a MacDonald's restaurant in different countries or the Coca Cola logo which appears along roads in distant lands indicate there is something fundamentally the same or different about the world?

Now that virtually everywhere is reachable through sophisticated systems of communications and travel, the world is less of an enigma for the adventurer. Such occurrences have changed the meaning of space and time. On the one hand, globalization emerges as a new challenge for persons and communities to live in harmony and total acceptance of diversity and plurality. On the other hand, the complexity of living and interacting on both local and global levels offers individual persons and their communities new opportunities for developing life-giving interpersonal relationships. Perhaps the European Union, which reflects a particular endeavor to enhance the well-being of each of its separate nations, the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA), the role of Non-Government Organizations (NGO's), and the newly conceptualized African Union, manifest opportunities as well as challenges for local and global interconnectedness.

Such worldwide transformations can complicate and infiltrate the space of individual persons and their communities. This process of exposing localized culture to global influences stimulates various groups around the world to respond not only through cultural and political strategies, but also by way of particular religious systems of faith. For the purposes of globalizing the gospel vision, that is, peace, reconciliation, love, compassion, justice, and so on, for "right relationship," I

first describe briefly what the phenomenon of globalization entails. This provides a backdrop for understanding how Christian evangelization needs to engage diverse cultures and religious worldviews in order to proclaim the universal vision of the gospel. Secondly, I draw on the case study of the Sakalava of Madagascar as an example of one cultural and religious context within Africa that appropriates external economic, cultural, political, and religious influences on its own terms. Through the lens of their Sakalava religion, the Sakalava people exhibit as well as establish a means for personal and communal empowerment. Finally, an important aspect of religious reconstruction in an age of globalization is the way in which Christian culture engages the Sakalava religion to actualize, localize, and globalize the gospel vision. Such an encounter provides opportunities and challenges for Christian evangelization and religious education.

I. What is Globalization?

The meaning of globalization is complex. While the terminology of globalization is relatively new for the world, the process is not (Stackhouse & Paris, 2000, 54; Ellwood, 2001,12-23). In fact, globalization has been a reality down through the centuries manifested through the earliest trade practices, frequent territorial invasions, international strategies of colonization, and religious crusades. Today, the phenomenon of globalization means different things to different people depending upon where they stand in relation to the benefits and disadvantages of globalization, especially economically. For example, in the so-called Third World, globalization has meant abject poverty, unimaginable suffering and disease, and political fragmentation particularly in Africa (Mengisteab,1996; Brecher, et. al., 2000, 53ff). Currently, transnational corporations, which have no allegiance to any particular nation-state, have a monopoly on global economic resources that restrict poorer countries from accessing much required resources such as good nutrition, quality education, health facilities, communication networks, and industrial technologies. From the perspective of those who have not benefited or gained from economic globalization, such a trend is feared and intentionally protested. However, globalization embraces much more than economic configurations reflected through the World Trade Organization (WTO) and financial institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund(IMF). The globalizing process includes political, cultural, educational, religious, and social interaction, among other dimensions (Burbules & Torres, 2000). John Tomlinson suggests globalization should be considered as "a multidimensional phenomenon" (1999,13ff).

Defining the Concept

As yet there does not exist a comprehensive definition of globalization that enjoys widespread agreement (Schreiter, 1997, 5-11). Sociologist Roland Robertson defines globalization "simply as the compression of the world. This notion of compression refers both to increasing sociocultural density and to rapidly expanding consciousness"(Stackhouse & Paris, 2000, 53; also, Beck, 2000, 17-21; Giddens, 2000). My sense of globalization reflects a process of economic, political, ecological, technological, social, and religious interculturation. This intercultural coalescence is consciously lived through interpersonal association and appropriated within local communal contexts whereby these contexts are simultaneously connected to a larger universal strategy of collaboration. Such a globalization that I define does not conceive the homogenization of cultures and the dissolution of difference. Rather, the diversity within and among cultures and their religious perspectives can nurture a dynamism that enhances the particular local context with greater universal relevance and authenticity (Roberston: in Stackhouse/Paris, 2000, 53-68).

The institution of the United Nations is a powerful symbol for the meaning of globalization. The universal declaration of human rights in 1948 gave impetus to the prospect of shared ideals and values. Such a declaration on human rights has challenged every nation not only to subscribe to but also to organize and defend them. Wallerstein notes, in relation to universal human rights, that "...many (even most) national governments as well as world institutions have asserted the validity and even the enforceability of such values or truths..." (King, 1997, 92). Consequent of this consciousness, a fresh reality of internationalism and interculturalism is being fashioned. The expectation and meaning of citizenship is expanded beyond the prescriptions and limits of a particular ethnic culture or nation-state (Beck, 2000,113, 136).

Though the reality of globalization has inspired new thinking in relation to political and economic structures, cultural and religious worldviews are also being impacted and reshaped (Giddens, 2000, 54-68; Goudzwaard, 2001). In relation to religion, a sense of religious globalization percolates the consciousness of people as they begin to understand the influence and impression of some world religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and even some indigenous religions, upon local cultures and upon the religions themselves. Perhaps, such an awareness of the globalization of Christianity can be reflected in the extensive travels of Pope John Paul II. On the one hand, within this form of religious and spiritual globalization, the gospel vision is perceived as having universal relevance for every culture. On the other hand, however, such globalizing of the gospel vision by pope John Paul runs the risk of reinforcing a Roman European expression of the gospel. Such a reinforcement can inadvertently suggest a homogenizing tendency for the world church which, at the same time, seeks to and desires to promote diversity.

Uniformity-Homogenization-Particularization

Similar to economic strategies and political decisions that gather diverse ethnic groups into an arrangement of cultural assimilation (melts down differences), world religions can find themselves practicing religious strategies to effect uniform faith expression. Such strategies obfuscate diverse expressions within particular local cultures as well as undermine the presence of gospel vision reflected through contrasted religious visions. Uniformity can dissolve important differences. Contrasts are inoculated and sedated within political and religious procedures and practices that encourage conformity to a particular center of authority.

Religious homogenization may be real for some who experience the imposition of religious beliefs in countries like the Sudan, Algeria, Nigeria, and Afghanistan regarding an extreme interpretation of Islam. Such a stance may be augmented because of perceived changes in global economic practices as well as other cultural influences that threaten religious orthodoxy and identity. Nevertheless, the process of an authentic global interdependence should not impose a unilateral uniformity that ignores particularities. Rather, the process can enhance a diversity and an inclusivity which respects both the particular and the global. Robertson suggests that the globalizing formation is "a massive, twofold process involving the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism" (King, 1997, 73).

Nevertheless, globalization can threaten some cultures and religious worldviews which cannot, or do not want to, adjust their way of life to different influences. These simply fade or succumb to extreme syncretism (Schreiter, 1985,144-158; 1997, 72). This ominous profile of globalization "as survival of the fittest" casts a foreboding shadow upon the integrity and the specificity of identity manifested within the context of a local culture and an indigenous religious perspective. A form

of subtle "cultural invasion," as Paulo Freire describes it, pervades in relation to dominant cultures or religious viewpoints imposing their worldviews upon perceived "weaker" cultures or religions (1995,133). Such a "cultural invasion" can be reflected within specific economic, political, and even religious maneuvers which offer special incentives in return for compliance and commitment to governing agendas (Antonio; in Hopkins & Davaney, 1996, 235-240). A method of critical reflection is crucial for diverse cultures and religious perspectives to maintain their integrity and identity amidst global schemes of cultural and religious reconstruction.

I turn to the case study of the Sakalava people of Madagascar as an example of a local critical religious and cultural reflection which deals with external influential forces on their own terms. This social and religious context challenges Christian evangelizers, like myself, who ministered in different African contexts, to reconstruct Christian culture toward local and global gospel vision. For the Sakalava, like many African cultures, homogenization is resisted because of an indigenous religious worldview which specifically articulates who they are and how they belong. I draw upon the work of anthropologist Lesley Sharp for a "thick" description (Geertz,1973, 27-28.) of the Sakalava context. In my view, she provides a unique, systematic, and the most comprehensive analysis of the Sakalava cosmos.

II. The Sakalava Worldview

The Sakalava, who inhabit the northwest of Madagascar, draw on spirit possession to negotiate problems and crisis affecting their lives as a result of economic restructuring, polyculturism, and developing political and religious networks. For the Sakalava people, Tromba spirit possession is the means by which they define and reveal "good news"(Hillman, 1993, 50).

The town of Ambanja in the Sambirano Valley is the focus of how the Sakalava religious sensibility interacts, critiques, and redefines itself in relationship to migration, economics, and foreign religious influences. Migration is the result of people from other parts of Madagascar moving into Ambanja in search of work on the plantations and education in the schools. The plantations, controlled by large companies, grow coffee, sugar cane, cocoa, and perfume plants like ylang-ylang. These companies combined with the education that the schools provide shape the local economic, political, social, and cultural order of the region (Sharp, 1993, 27-28). The Sakalava are also influenced by the presence of Christianity and Islam that are perceived as outside religions vying for converts in the area.

Insiders and Outsiders

According to Sharp, "Tromba possession is the quintessence of Sakalava religious experience" (1993,115; Jaovelo-Dzao,1996a, 235-243). Tromba spirit possession within the *fomba-gasy*, known also as the Malagasy Religion, is dominant throughout Madagascar and defines the Sakalava's specific ethnic identity, history, and tradition. This religion is even more dominant among the Sakalava in Ambanja (80%) compared to other parts of Madagascar (59%) (Sharp, 1993, 75). Tromba spirit possession constructs a space whereby there is a sense of belonging, "a social cohesiveness that is unmatched by other local institutions" (Sharp, 1993, 171). Undergirding this religious experience are the roles of women who are the mediums of the tromba spirits. Women provide leadership and are considered healers. Personal and communal power is manifested within the symbolism of tromba possession.

Sharp contends that the "involvement in tromba in Ambanja is simultaneously evidence of an individual's integration into the local community and a means to achieve this end" (1993, 180).

This specific identity is negotiated between insiders known as *Tera-Tany* and outsiders referred to as *Vahiny*. The *Tera-Tany* are the native Bemazava-Sakalava and the *Vahiny* referr to "other Malagasy speakers who have come to this region as wage laborers searching for work" (Sharp, 1993, 1). Tromba is an intricate network that controls the pace of integration within the culture and religious experience. As Sharp clearly indicates, "to give up tromba and other local practices would, from a Sakalava point of view, require denouncing one's ethnic identity" (1993, 75).

Sharp observes that social and economic changes are reflected within the context of tromba possession in manifold ways. First, she explains how historical knowledge is essential to the Sakalava sensibility. This knowledge enables them to reflect on and reinterpret who they are in relation to themselves as insiders and to migrants as outsiders. Because power and historical knowledge are intrinsically linked within the context of tromba, the Sakalava *tera-tany* are enabled to manipulate social and economic forces that shape their world. Second, healing rituals are an important domain for mediating meaning through invoking tromba spirits in relation to affliction for both the *tera-tany* and the *vahiny*. Third, Sharp contends that "land , work, and identity are important local themes that are shaped or redefined through the logic of tromba" (1993, 13). Thus, Sakalava manage, interpret, and appropriate external globalizing influences through the reality of their local, particular context. Their identity and integrity as a people remains grounded in the narrative of the spirit world.

Ancestral Spirits

The Tromba are spirits of dead Sakalava royalty and these ancestral spirits represent the essential lineaments of contemporary Sakalava culture and society. According to Sharp,

> "For the Sakalava, the spirit world is inhabited by royal and common ancestors, lost souls, nature spirits, and malicious, evil spirits. Tromba, as the spirits of dead Sakalava royalty, are the most significant and influential in terms of daily interactions that occur between the living and the dead" (1993, 115).

There are two major descent groups: the *Zafin 'i'mena* ("Grandchildren of Gold") and *Zafin'i'fotsy* ("Grandchildren of Silver"). They are symbolized by the color of dress worn by the spirits (Sharp, 1993, 120). Sharp states "Thus, Zafin 'i'mena tromba spirits dress in red and Zafin 'i'fotsy dress in white" (Sharp, 120). These main groups can be broken down into varieties of lineages in which each ancestry can be traced to its own royal tomb. Tromba spirits emanate from different lineages, e.g., Bemazava, Bemihisatra, and Antakarana, etc. These are regarded as the greatest tromba spirits (Sharp,1993, 72). Sharp suggests that "within each lineage, tromba spirits can be divided into three generational groups: the oldest are the Grandparents (dadilahy; grandmothers: dady), of whom the tromba *maventibe* ("very big" or "biggest tromba") are the most powerful (and the ones that are generally only found at the royal tombs)" (Sharp,120; also, Feeley-Harnik,1991, 26-27). Since this organization is hierarchical, it follows that the "Children" spirits known as (zanaka) and "Grandchildren" known as (zafy) are relegated below the Grandparents. However, the Parents are also a significant component to the spirits lineage within the three generational hierarchical structure. Because each spirit can be traced to a royal tomb, there is designated sacred ground in which the ancestors have a context from which to act and be present to the living. Each spirit can be distinguished by the location of its tomb within a specific ancestral land. For example, among the *Zafin 'i'mena* descent there are *baka atsimo* spirits which, according to Sharp, suggest the spirits "come from the south." These are distinguished

from a category of *Zafin 'i' fotsy* tromba referred to as *baka andrano* spirits that "come from the water"[1] (1993, 121).

Invoking the Spirits

By tracing the descent and lineage of a spirit, through genealogical, generational, and geographical categories, knowledge of Sakalava history and tradition can be known and understood. According to Sharp, to invoke a spirit "one must cite its genealogy in descending order, calling first upon the ancestors on high, the Zanahary" (1993,121; Jaovelo,1996a, 249). This process constitutes calling on the more significant spirits within the Zafin 'i'mena or the Zafin 'i'fotsy to find the correct descent. Then, within the major descent group, the specific lineage has to be sifted until one can address the specific spirit. When the spirit arrives it will be known when it states its history and genealogy by naming its Grandparent (s) and Parent (s) and how it died. The spirit will have a name. For example, a well-known spirit will be called "Ndramivery" or "Zaman 'i' Bao" ("Bao's uncle") (Sharp, 1993, 121).

Tromba ceremonies are colorful affairs. Sharp notes that "Tromba cermonies are lively drama where the spirits of the dead royalty come to life and interact with the living" (1993, 122). The mediums for these spirits are usually women between the ages of eighteen and thirty. Men, too, can be mediums, but this is rare. The spirits have personalities, histories, and specific ways of behaving. Sharp contends, "Tromba unlike other Sakalava spirits have elaborate histories and highly developed personalities, and each spirit has its own style of dress, behavior, and body of fady (taboos), making it easy for the trained observer to identify the spirit once the medium has entered trance" (1993, 122). The body of fady refers to particular "taboo months" and, according to Sharp, "These taboo months are associated with times when royal work is being performed at their respective tombs" (1993, 301). July to mid-August is fady for the Bemazava spirits.

Though tromba spirits tend to be male, female mediums are transformed into the form of a male spirit. There is music and dance to facilitate the spirit possession of the mediums. The music and dance empowers as well as mediates meaning for the clients, the neighbors, and the mediums. It provides entertainment as well as articulating what it means to be human for the Sakalava community. The tromba spirits, embodied within female mediums and interpreted by men (*rangahy*), communicate and interact with the living. Tromba strengthens kinship among the Sakalava and provides a source of solidarity in times of need and when organizing economic and political power in relation to the plantation land of the Sambirano Valley.

Solidarity among the Mediums

Sharp notes there is a special kinship that develops between mediums. She contends that, "special bonds defined through fictive kinship are established between mediums who share the same spirits or whose spirits are members of the same genealogies" (1993, 124). In addition, a medium's identity is shifting as she moves in and out of trance. First, the individual's sense of self and personhood is transformed as she acts within the world. Second, the social context in

[1] In relation to spirits who inhabit the water, David Graeber discusses the impact of these spirits known as *Vazimba,* closely related to the Merina population and who were subjected to slavery. Some Merina people who refused to be taken into slavery drowned themselves and their spirits now live in the water. These "lost" spirits provide a source of meaning and power for defining and redefining identity for the descendents of slavery. The Sakalava, too, experienced slavery and have spirits who inhabit the water. See David Graeber, "Painful memories" *Journal of Religion in Africa* Vol. xxvii-Fasc.4., 1997, 374-400. See also, Sharp, 1993,121.

which the individual medium acts projects upon a woman a new social status when she becomes a healer. Third, there is a shift in ethnic identity as the past is re-negotiated to reveal resolution of conflict and to provide images for self-definition in the future. The physical body of the medium is the domain for the spirit beings to interact with and influence the living in their search for continued human well-being and wholeness. A tromba spirit can remain active within a medium for the medium's life-time and the spirit only departs after the woman has died.

It is important that a person does not resist possession by a spirit as the spirit may become angry and cause illness to the person. But when possession becomes pathological, certain symptoms become obvious that indicate possession sickness involving evil spirits. These baneful spirits are called *njarinintsy*. They can cause grave illness and generally affect adolescent girls between the ages of thirteen and seventeen. Sharp posits that "Malicious spirits generally do not possess their victims through a will of their own but have been sent by an adversary, who has used magical substances or bad medicine (fanafody raty/ratsy) to harm someone" (1993, 141). The condition might be the preliminary phase of tromba known as possession sickness. However, when it becomes prolonged causing the person to have uncontrollable fits, the person is brought to a local healer. The healer tries to "strike a bargain with the spirit, making arrangements to give gifts to it or later to leave certain goods in strategic locations-by a sacred tree, for example..." (Sharp, 1993, 142). It is hoped that the spirit will be content with these gifts and leave the person unharmed. Sometimes if a local healer fails in trying to establish healing for the person, the afflicted person is brought by the community to a Muslim or Christian (Protestant or Catholic) exorcist who tries to cure the victim. In the end, if the sickness is not resolved it may be because the person is mad and has lost her mind (Sharp, 1993, 246).

Healing and Transformation

A sick person among the Sakalava is not isolated but is accepted as part of the community. When an individual experiences such affliction, the whole community is afflicted and experiences a lack of wholeness. Healing is not only for the individual who suffers, but its effectiveness constitutes healing the group who bring the individual for the restoration of health. Healing involves addressing not only the specific illness of the individual, but also the illness as it is related to the particular family, clan, and wider community. For wholeness to be a reality for both the individual and the group, rituals of healing are designed to include the whole assembly.

Even though the *Njarinintsy* (viewed as foreign spirits, outsiders) disrupt social order particularly in the schools, these spirits can be a paradigm for critiquing changes within the society. According to Sharp, "Njarinintsy possession communicates marginality, as young, displaced migrants are seized by foreign entities whose erratic behavior operates as an expression of their fragmented world" (1993, 243). Taking a positive view, *njarinintsy* possession is a means whereby students can critique their educational and social environment so that it may reflect more justice and equality within the changing economic and political contexts. For example, if children are displaced from other areas of Madagascar in order to go to school, these children can be confused and homesick. They are subjected to a French European education that is foreign to their ethnic human experience. *Njarinintsy* possession can provide a context in which children can resist oppressive school policies while simultaneously asserting Sakalava power to protect them from marginality. Sharp documents how the attempt to institutionalize the process of malagasization within Ambanja prompted *njarinintsy* outbreaks (1993, 241-243). Such a process sought to bring together the various ethnic groups that constitute Madagascar under an ideology

for national identity. This is not unlike a process of globalization that seeks an ideology for international identity.

For the Sakalava, *njarinintsy* possession may indeed be a major catalyst for transformation providing the people with a powerful symbol to engage changing national and cultural identity. Through this means, the practitioners of spirit possession resist the influence of French educational paradigms imposed upon them. *Njarinintsy* possession forced school officials to come to terms with the "problems of urbanization and state education." School officials who were both *ter-tany* and *vahiny* "came together to honor and recognize the authority of local Sakalava ancestors"(1993, 243-244). Such action establishes Sakalava power and authority. All decisions regarding education, among other social realities, have to seek the approval of the tromba spirits. Thus, globalizing strategies that threaten to dissolve local identity are challenged.

Though I have outlined some aspects of tromba spirit possession contained in the Malagasy Religion or *fomba-gasy*, I believe that this is significant for Christian missionaries engaging this local context in an era of globalization. The Christian world view, for it to be relevant to the Sakalava, needs to take seriously the principles of life contained within the tromba possession. In globalizing the gospel vision locally, Christian evangelizers are challenged to reconstruct Christian culture to embody gospel spirituality in relevant, dialogical, and meaningful ways.

III. Imagining the Reconstruction of Christian Culture

Sharp notes how Catholic Christianity has made great strides in connecting with the Sakalava culture. She gives the example of a Sakalava catholic priest performing a *joro* ceremony for the newly built village churches(Sharp, 308; also, Jaovelo-Dzao,1987, 6-8; 1996a,103-120). *Joro* entails placating and honoring the *njarinintsy* spirits who may bring harm to the people gathered in the churches. Such honoring can include the sacrifice of an ox with the members of the community gathered to sing to and praise the ancestral spirits. The conviction is that the spirits will allow the churches to flourish (Sharp, 228). Healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness can be reflected.

As Christian pastoral agents engage local rituals like *Joro*, they are engaging in a process called inculturation/interculturation whereby the gospel is in constant conversation with cultures and diverse religious perspectives (Estrade, 1996, 26-28; Jaovelo-Dzao,1996b, 34-46).[2] The gospel of God mediated for Christians through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is undergoing a reconstruction of expression within a local context. The gospel, the transforming agent present and active within cultures and religions, is visualized through a cultural embodiment that incorporates specific religious practices. A Christian religious cultural embodiment includes the person of Jesus Christ manifested in scripture, sacraments, worship practices, and symbols such as bread and wine, and so on. These religious symbols reflect particular meanings for communities of faith as they interact with people's lived experience. However, when the Christian vision expressed symbolically interacts with the deep structures of religious meaning among Sakalava, these same Christian symbols undergo fresh interpretation and appropriation. A reshaping of Christian culture, not the gospel, means revisioning religious practices, liturgy, tradition, sacraments, texts, and so on, to reflect genuine Sakalava Christian faith. Such a reinterpretation, that incorporates life-giving aspects of the Sakalava belief system, is needed so as to empower the manifestation of gospel principles already present and active among the Sakalava.

[2] For an analysis of the meaning of interculturation, see Thomas G. Grenham, Interculturation: Exploring changing Religious, Cultural, and Faith Identities in an African Context, *Pacifica* 14, 2 (2001), 191-206.

Since the gospel needs cultural form to embody its values, evangelizers/educators are called upon to respect, understand, and appreciate life-giving elements within every culture and religion which reflect gospel vision. Interculturation is not one way evangelization originating within a dominant French and Roman European culture. Rather, gospel interculturation constitutes mutuality and reciprocity between cultures and religious world views. Not only is the culture of Christianity being revisioned, but the Sakalava themselves are also confronted to articulate and rearticulate new cultural meaning and religious expression for renewed faith and action. Such an intercultural and interreligious encounter envisions that the Sakalava identity will undergo life-giving changes not only within their local context, but also these transformations will have global implications for cultural and religious reconstruction for meaning-making and faith.

For Christians, this means the Christian tradition will be further enriched as well as being a source for life-giving insights for the Sakalava in relation to the way God is in faithful covenant relationship with them. This living Judeo-Christian tradition provides examples of cultural and religious content for the liberation of the human person toward God's intention of "right relationship." Stories such as the Exodus narrative in the Hebrew tradition that offered insights into redemption and hope for the people of Israel may enable the Sakalava to imagine human freedom in partnership with tromba spirit possession. Such narratives from the Hebrew tradition in conjunction with Christian narratives of reconciliation, healing, forgiveness, and so on, inform a global religious intercultural gospel consciousness.

Global Gospel Interculturation

The question that comes to mind within an era of globalization in which cultures and religious worldviews interact is: How can the vision of human well-being contained within both the Christian and Sakalava meaning systems be a source for mediating and explaining the vision of the gospel? The vision for the abundance of life contained within the worldview of Christianity is essentially more important than the specific cultural accretions in which it is carried and embodied. If the concept of globalization influencing the current world imagination is going to provide for the inclusivity of all, such a concept needs to undergo reinterpretation. Globalization needs to be understood in such a way that the concept and practice can ensure universal as well as local participation. Providing a space for and understanding the particularity of local cultural and religious worldviews seems key to an inclusive and religiously interdependent world.

Globalizing the gospel vision depends upon religious and cultural interdependence. The case study of the Sakalava illustrated a particular religious and cultural vision for the wholeness of life. Sharp posits that "Tromba is the point at which social, religious, political, and economic forces converge, and so this institution provides a means to explore the dynamic nature of daily life at all levels in this community"(1993, 19). Given this observation, Christians, proclaiming their perspective on the fullness of life through the reign of God revealed by Jesus Christ, are obliged to embrace the deep structures of meaning encompassed within the Tromba. For the Christian vision of faith to embrace the Sakalava imagination, Christian faith needs to address meaningfully human problems, such as suffering, sickness, fear, spirits, healing, life and death, in collaboration with female spirit mediums. Tromba spirit possession is popular because it has a structure in which the healing of persons, the understanding of community tensions, and the management of the local political economy, among other issues, are addressed. Sharp asserts that,

> "Tromba mediums, as the embodiment of royal ancestral power, assist others in their attempts to cope with the problems they encounter while living in this urban community, one that is dominated

> by a plantation economy. Thus, embedded in the symbolic order of tromba are critiques of community life and its tensions, the meaning of work, the local political economy, and the dynamics of local power relations over time" (1993, 3).

Religious and cultural interculturation that globalizes and localizes the gospel requires a form of syncretism that engages the Sakalava imagination. Christianity has generally feared syncretism, though there are distinctions on the denominational level, with regard to alteration of its religious identity and perspective (Schreiter,1985, 144-158). However, if the Christian church, in its evangelizing and educating role, makes exclusive claims in relation to the meaning of God's self-revelation, such a posture could ignore or give a subordinate role to other religious constructions as offering valid ingredients for wholeness/salvation (Knitter,1996, 118-121). Religious global interdependence for sharing gospel vision does not mean taking a superior evangelizing position. Such superiority can be reflected in relegating any diverse religious worldview, particularly an African indigenous religion, as being merely a "preparation" for the gospel. Consequent upon this understanding, Christian pastoral agents may think they are bringing the "real" gospel.

However, within an atmosphere of mutuality and partnership that authentic religious intercultural globalization anticipates, Christian representatives respect diverse indigenous religious symbols. These symbols can be possible receptacles of grace and the reflection of God's self-revelation. When the religious education exchange process is dialogical and respectful, Christianity cannot be viewed as a superior partner. Rather, authentic global cultural and religious interaction envisions the bringing together of heterogeneous elements (MacGaffey, in Blakely et. al.,1994, 241-256). Even though religions appropriate aspects of ritualizing from each other, this does not mean that each religion is reduced from being "pure" in its previous cultural moorings. For Christians, the particularity of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ is embraced within a living scriptural tradition that radiates universal insights for humankind.

As religions interact with different cultural meaning systems they each undergo reconfigurations for self-definition. New cultural identities emerge for religions because of the way they interact with different cultures and religious perspectives around the world. The process of unveiling the gospel constitutes an intercultural interaction that is both theological and anthropological. This means Christian elements such as Jesus Christ, scripture, sacraments, worship practices, and so forth, interact with Sakalava elements such as trance, dance, female mediums, music, *joro* rituals, and so on. Life-giving aspects from both religious viewpoints can be drawn upon to understand and critique the evolving social, economic, religious, and political order impacting the Sakalava community. Evangelization toward God's reign is performed in the conversation and witness between the Christian and Sakalava worldviews. Within this dynamic, formation for gospel faith is a mutual and reciprocal transformational process between the Christian and Sakalava worldviews.

The tromba spirits can redefine Christian culture without compromising the gospel and Christian identity by appropriating and understanding Christian faith and the gospel within the tromba meaning-making schema. This means the tromba way of life accepts and integrates the Christian notion of spirit within the Sakalava belief system. The spirit of Jesus (as *vahiny*-outsider) can become part of the history of the Sakalava. The unique spirit of Jesus participates with the royal ancestral spirits of the Bemazava group of ancestors in revealing the process of

Sakalava humanization and the truth regarding God's relationship with them. The Bemazava ancestors are considered the oldest and the most powerful of the tromba spirits (Sharp, 1993, 117).

According to Sharp, "mediums sometimes call on the Christian God, *Andriamanitra* ("The King of Heaven"), rather than using *Zanahary*, the collective name for ancestors, when they invoke their tromba spirits"(Sharp, 253; also, Jaovelo-Dzao,1996a, 249; 1996b, 32-55). This is evidence that the Sakalava have appropriated the spirits of the Christian God within their rituals for meaning-making generally and healing rituals particularly. If the mediums call on the spirit of the Christian God, the assumption is that they know the history, genealogy, and life of this spirit in order to embody it. The community, too, along with the mediums need to know the history of Jesus' spirit; how it lived, suffered, and died. Then, all are informed to recognize the spirit alive and present through the trance. Representatives of Christian evangelization are challenged to teach the vision and narrative of God's Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ in partnership with the Sakalava religion.

The Challenge For Christian Evangelization

Given that Jesus is accepted within the tromba ancestors, the question of how God's Spirit through Jesus is mediated within the Sakalava culture may be problematic since spirits are generally contacted through female mediums. A male dominated, patriarchal Catholic Church may encounter some difficulties in mediating God's spirit through Jesus in the Sakalava context. The locus of power for the church needs to be centered through female agency within tromba possession. This has Christian missionary implications for localizing and globalizing the gospel. For the Sakalava, the role of women as evangelizers is more significant. For the tromba female emissary to be more incorporated into the culture of Christianity, the church would need to examine its current male dominated structure. In this context, the church is challenged to imagine a self-definition that is deeply connected with tromba tradition. Through various rituals of spirit possession, mediums articulate who they are as a community of believers. Mediums reveal the way in which their culture is transformed in relationship to new incoming spirits and their histories, including Christian spirits. In this way, female mediums educate not only themselves, but also the faith community regarding Sakalava history, beliefs, and their journey toward human freedom in God.

Tromba spirit possession evokes significant meaning as well as embrace the collective and individual memory of the Sakalava. Sharp's conclusions make clear that both the tromba spirit possession and the *njarinintsy* possession are forces for Sakalava ongoing evolution of identity. Some Christians believe that the tromba spirits should be exorcised. They further contend that the Christian Spirit is a better spirit to explain the Sakalava disposition and cultural logic. No distinction is made among the Sakalava spirits. As Sharp observes, "Ironically, exorcists do not deny the existence of spirits; rather, they refuse to distinguish between different categories, relabeling all spirits (tromba, kalanoro, njarinintsy, and so forth) as demons (devoly)"(Sharp, 270). Since conversion to Christianity is the ultimate goal, the exorcist pays no attention to the internal cultural logic of the Sakalava. In an era of globalization, Christian evangelizers are challenged to attend to the reality of the spirit world. For Christians, according to Kabasele Lumbala, this spirit world cannot be reduced to the cult of the saints or to a similarity with Old Testament persons involved in the plan of salvation. Lumbala contends

> "The spirits of the ancestors are not only living beings with whom one must even now have commerce, but they represent the value and force of traditions and the ways in which the energies,

> achievements and sorrows of past history are integral to present and future directions. So particular and important is this communion with ancestors and all that they represent that it is impossible to reduce this cult to the cult of the saints or to the recognition of the place of Old Testament personages in the plan of salvation" (1998, xi).

In the end, the challenge for Christian evangelizers is not to proselytize for conversion to Christianity. Rather, there can be an opportunity for mutual conversation toward understanding and appropriating the gospel of God (Dorr, 2000,16-25).

Opportunities for Christian Evangelization

The Sakalava religious expression offers opportunities for Christian educators to engage in an authentic praxis of conversation for sharing faith (Tracy, 1987; Groome, 1991). Such a conversation within believing communities can initiate a mutual search for truth (Thangaraj,1999, 31-45). It is the prerogative of both the Sakalava and the Christian to respectfully critique and affirm the life-giving as well as the destructive elements of their worldviews. The gospel is uncovered within the mutual dialogue and reciprocal religious participation within the Sakalava context. In this way, both communities are educated for mutual life-giving transformation that advances gospel vision.

Within the tromba tradition, Jesus can be one of the significant royal spirits, or indeed one of the common spirits known as *Razana*. Thus, God's Spirit in Jesus expands the identity as well as mediate life-giving transformation for the Sakalava. Jesus' reputation as a healer and mediator among his own Jewish people possessed by *njarininsty* and other dangerous spirits, can be viewed by the Sakalava as having special healing influence within the spirit world. For the Christian missioner, the tradition of the royal ancestors will be one way that God's self revelation is mediated to humankind. The Sakalava ancestors belong to everyone as they are known as "the national ancestors"(Sharp, 115). They can be a source for empowerment not only for the Sakalava but also for the Christian who shares in the life of the spirit world through the communion of saints.

Within the Sakalava cultural axiom, there is an opportunity for women to identify, embody, and define the spirit of Jesus through his specific history and genealogy among the royal ancestors. The role of men within this model of church would have to be revisioned. Transformation like conversion, according to Hefner, "implies the acceptance of a new locus of self-definition, a new, though not necessarily exclusive, reference point for one's identity"(Hefner, 17). Such a reference point centers around respect for and inclusiveness of difference (Kalu, 1996, 326). Robert Schreiter suggests that a theological concept "suited to developing a theological view of theology between the global and the local in a world Church" is *catholicity* (Schreiter, 1997, 119). This may be the reference point to assist the global theological and anthropological interculturality the Christian church engages everyday.

Conclusion

I have been exploring the meaning of globalization which inspires and envelops the imagination of the world. By reflecting upon the case study of the Sakalava of Madagascar, I have attempted to uncover how a local context appropriates, on its own terms, the impact of globalization, nationalization, and the influences of outside religions. I have looked at the way in which Christian culture needs to reconstruct itself and become relevant to a local religious context. This leads me to conclude that the threat of homogenization pertaining to economic, cultural,

political, and religious globalization, can be resisted through a process of intentional localization. Such a process critiques, interprets, appropriates, and makes decisions for life-giving personal and communal transformation locally and globally.

Implications for Christian evangelization include commitment to (1) the mutual discovery of gospel truth, (2)the designing of conversational strategies for sharing faith, (3) the development of religious partnerships for shaping contextual theology, and (4) the collaboration of religious traditions toward forming inclusive structures for faith communities. Schreiter concludes " A new catholicity, then, is marked by a wholeness of inclusion and fullness of faith in a pattern of intercultural exchange and communication" (1997, 132). Thus, the gospel can be uncovered and interculturated universally reflecting authentic embodiment within the particularities of cultural and religious experience.

References Cited and Consulted

Antonio, Edward P. (1996). Culture and Politics in Black and African Theologies. In Dwight N. Hopkins and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Eds.), *Changing Conversations: Religious Reflection and Cultural Analysis* (234-254). New York & London: Routledge.

Barnlund, Dean. (1998). Communication in a Global Village. *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication: Selected Readings*. Ed. Milton J. Bennett. Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, Inc.

Beck, Ulrich. (2000). *What is Globalization?* Trans. by Patrick Camiller. Malden: Massachusetts: Polity/Blackwell Publishers Inc.

Bediako, Kwame. (1995).*Christianity in Africa: the Renewal of a Non-Western Religion.* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.

Brecher, Jermey; Costello,Tim; Smith, Brendan. (2000). *Globalization From Below: The Power of Solidarity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press.

Burbules, Nicholas C, & Torres Carlos Alberto. (2000). *Globalization and Education: Critical Perspectives (Social Theory, Education and Cultural Change)*. New York & London: Routledge.

Collier, Mary Jane.(2000). Reconstructing Cultural Diversity in Global Relationships: Negotiating the Borderland. *Communication and Global Society,* Guo-Ming Chen and William J. Starosta, eds. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Dorr, Donal. (2000). *Mission in Today's World,* Marynoll, New York: Orbis Books.

Ellwood, Wayne.(2001). *No-Nonsense Guide to Globalization*. Oxford, UK: New Internationalist Publications.

Estrade, Jean-Marie. (1996). *Religion malgache et christianisme*. Antisiranana, Madagascar: Institut superieur de theologie et de philosophie de Madagascar, Etablissement d'Antsiranana.

Feeley-Harnik, Gillian. (1991). *A Green Estate: Restoring Independence in Madagascar,* Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Geertz, Clifford. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays.* New York: Basic Books.

Giddens, Anthony. (2000). *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping our Lives*. New York: Routledge.

Goudzward, Bob. (2001). *Globalization and the Kingdom of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Grenham, Thomas G. (2001) Interculturation: Exploring Changing Religious, Cultural, and Faith Identities in an African Context. *Pacifica,* 14 (2), 191-206.

Groome, Thomas H. (1991). *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral*

Ministry. San Francisco: HarperCollins.

Hefner, Robert W. (1993). The Rationality of Conversion. In Hefner, Robert W. (Ed.). *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation.* Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

Hillman, Eugene. (1993). *Toward an African Christianity: Inculturation applied.* New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press.

Mengisteab, Kidane. (1996). *Globalization and Autocentricity In Africa's Development in the 21st. Century*. Trenton: NJ & Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc.

Jaovelo-Dzao, Robert. (1987). *Anthropologie religieuse sakalava: essai sur l'inculturation du christianisme `a Madagascar,* Antsiranana, Madagascar: Institut superieur de theologie et de philosophie de Madagascar, Establissement d'Antsiranana.

_____. (1996a). *Mythes, rites et transes `a Madagascar: angano, joro et tromba, Sakalava*. Antananarivo, Madagascar: Editions Ambozontany; Paris: Karthala.

_____. (1996b). *Aspects De La Conception Malgache De Dieu.* Antisiranana, Madagascar: Institut superieur de theologie et de philosophie de Madagascar, Etablissement d'Antsiranana.

Knitter, Paul F. (1996). *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*. Maryknoll, New York.

Kung, Hans. (1991). *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic.* New York: Crossroad.

Lumbala, Francois Kabasele. (1998). *Celebrating Jesus Christ in Africa: Liturgy & Inculturation,* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

MacGaffey, Wyatt.(1994). Kimbanguism & the Question of Syncretism in Zaire. In Thomas D. Blakely et. al. (Eds.) *Religion in Africa* (241-256). London: James Currey Ltd.

Magesa, Laurenti.(1997). *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.

Robertson, Roland. (2000). Globalization and the Future of "Traditional Religion." In Stackhouse, Max L. & Paris, Peter J. (Eds.). *God and Globalization: Religion and the Powers of the Common* Life (53-68). Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International.

Schreiter, Robert J. (1997). *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*. Maryknoll, NewYork: Orbis Books.

_____. (1985). *Constructing Local Theologies*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.

Sharp, Leslie A. (1993). The *Possessed and the Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity, and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Thangaraj, Thomas M. (1999). *The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission,* Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Tomlinson, John. (1999). *Globalization and Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Tracy, David. (1987). *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneitics, Religion, Hope*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. (1997). The National and the Universal: Can There Be Such a Thing as World Culture. In Anthony D. King (Ed.), Culture, *Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions For the Representation of Identity* (91-105). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.