

# Leading in Global-Glocal Missional Contexts: Learning from the Journey of the Wycliffe Global Alliance

Transformation

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**Abstract**

The journey of the Wycliffe Global Alliance (WGA) is an example of how some paradigm shifts are influencing leading in mission. Since Christianity is both an agent and product of globalization, its beliefs have spread from one source to another, crossing religious, linguistic and cultural contexts. As a result, there are polycentric or multiple centres of influence since Christianity has homes within a diversity of contexts. This carries with it various implications including how partnering in mission needs to be deconceptualized through greater emphasis on friendship. In order for this to happen as a missiological principle, third spaces may need to be created. Viewed against the backdrop of church and mission agency leadership, structures may be ‘stuck in the Industrial Era’ (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 298). Therefore, the stage is set for exploring how these and other themes influence leadership in God’s mission.

**Keywords**

Africanization, friendship, glocalization, missio Dei, polycentrism, third spaces

**Introduction**

Historically, the identity of the Wycliffe Global Alliance (WGA) has been anchored in its circa 1930s evangelical roots in the US.<sup>1</sup> It has also been influenced by power and control from Western nations. This is changing because of the globalization of the worldwide church and this development is influencing WGA in a significant way. WGA increasingly understands itself within the realities of the church because it is affected by trends in the global-glocal context.

Examples include: (1) *transitioning from international to global*: The word ‘international’ is semantically tied to a Western concept of territorial expansion. The 21st century church has spread globally, and mission structures may still reflect an older paradigm; (2) *the influence of leaders from global South and East*: A paradigm shift is underway where leaders from the global South and East<sup>2</sup> contribute as equals in global mission. However, as long as the majority of financial resources needed to implement changes and lead new strategies come from the West, mission agencies may not function globally in their leadership and operations. The goal should be for all geographical

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regions to provide financial (and other) resources for mission, locally, regionally and globally; and (3) *theological influences have glocal impact*: The general nature of globalization may affect the church in one part of the world, which in turn may unduly influence or override the church in another local context. This intersection between global and local, according to Turner (2011: 247), gives rise to the notion of ‘glocalization’. This term describes the mixture of the global with local manifestations, regardless of culture, practices, ideologies and so forth. Understanding the concept of glocal may also assist in interpreting how the church of the global South and East has different priorities and expectations concerning mission than its Western counterparts.

Into this environment, consideration must be given to the mission of WGA, which is, ‘In communion with God and within the community of His Church, we encourage and facilitate Bible translation movements that contribute to the holistic transformation of language communities worldwide’ (wycliffe.net).

WGA’s journey is not unique, in the sense that every international Christian mission agency is affected by the same changing global contexts that influence WGA. However, what is unique and what gives WGA insights that others in the global missional community may benefit from is: (1) the transition has been a journey over a lengthy time frame since 1991, rather than a sudden shift; (2) the composition of WGA is already global with nearly 100 organizations coming from more than 70 nations with a majority located in the global South and East; and (3) WGA is willing to openly share with others the lessons it is learning from this journey.

Historically within WGA, its mission focused on the task of Bible translation without any significant understanding of how WGA participates in God’s mission. It is natural that Western influence in mission has given solid focus to the involvement of people in planning and action. After a decade of missiological reflection about the *missio Dei*, we have asked ourselves in WGA if our focus on the task has been naively done without reference to God’s mission being about the triune God and his initiative and activity, where he invites his people to join him in his mission.

A greater appreciation for the *missio Dei* has been permeating the higher levels of leadership in WGA. Eventually, this will enable all levels of leadership in WGA to become missiologically conscious of how to lead in God’s mission as they learn to discern and respond to issues affecting global mission.

## **Mission, *Missio Dei* and Missional**

A theology of mission has been undergoing development for centuries. For example, Kemper (2014: 188) notes that St Augustine (354–430 CE) is credited with using the term *missio Dei* as a description of ‘God’s work in which the church and the faithful participate’. At the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther’s (1483–1546 CE) views of the work of God and the arrival of God’s kingdom could be described as an emerging theology of mission. In the 16th century, Gisbertus Voetius stated that mission flowed from the heart of God. Much later, Bosch (1991: 1) observes how up to the 16th century, the concept of *missio Dei* was associated with the doctrine of the Trinity. Kemper (2014: 188) suggests that it was really only from 1952 onwards that the concept of the mission of God was articulated in a more far-reaching manner.

Even though WGA’s roots go back to the 1930s, it had not until more recently given serious attention to the theological development of the *missio Dei*. Therefore, it was unaware of discussions such as those at the International Missionary Conference (1952) in Willingen, Germany, where Karl Hartenstein built upon Karl Barth’s Trinitarian emphasis of mission. At Willingen, Hartenstein popularized the term *missio Dei* for the first time and positioned mission ‘as the cause of the Trinitarian God’, rather than as the obligation of the church (Oborji, 2006: 134). Hartenstein stated that mission occurred within the triune God’s overall plan for salvation because ‘God is

mission' (Bevans and Schroeder, 2011: 57). Mission originates in and flows from the nature of the triune God (Bosch, 2011: 399; Flett, 2010: 11).

Stetzer and Nation (2015: 8) emphasize the glorification of the triune God in the *missio Dei* thus: 'the Father sent the Son to accomplish this redemption, so He sends the Spirit to apply this redemption to the hearts of men and women'. God enables the church in his mission for 'witness and service'. The redemptive movement originates from the triune God, flows through the church on into the world and 'results in people of every tribe, tongue, and nation responding in lifelong worship of God' (Stetzer and Nation, 2015: 8). The climax of the *missio Dei* occurs when 'God creates a new heaven and new earth' (Stetzer and Nation, 2015: 8).

The difficulty with using the *missio Dei* as a foundational platform for WGA to understand itself and its participation in God's mission is that there has been little theological and missiological consensus on what the term means and how it should be used. Consequently, it is possible to consider the term an unhelpful concept. But rather than simply dismiss it, Whitfield (2011: 19) argues for 'a biblically constructed theology of mission [that] must be based upon the nature and the life of the triune God'.

While *mission* does not originate with or belong to the church, the triune God dispatches the church from where it is located, as his primary instrument – a sent community to carry out his mission to be his witness across the world in a broad spectrum of ministry. Consequently, mission is not restricted to the activity of missionaries sent by the church, who go overseas, crossing various barriers, to bring the message of salvation (with the caveat that *missions* still means this in some circles).

This growing awareness of *missio Dei* undergirds WGA's understanding of its purpose. The composition of WGA is diverse, with nearly 100 organizations, including church denominations that are managing over 1000 Bible translation programs in their local contexts. Therefore, succinctly summarizing WGA's interpretation of *missio Dei* may be premature since WGA's journey is still ongoing. In WGA, we find Flett's (2010: 76) observation helpful that despite 50 years of theological reflection on the *missio Dei*, there is still a 'lack of cohesion' and coordination concerning the three elements that he states make up the *missio Dei*: (1) its Trinitarian basis; (2) its orientation towards the kingdom of God; and (3) its human instrumentality – the 'missionary nature of the church'. Such is this challenge that Flett (2010: 76) refers to it as 'a bog of elasticity' because, despite its Trinitarian basis, *missio Dei* always has 'anthropological grounding'.

*Missional* is an adjective describing the qualities and attributes of something related to mission and/or characterized by the mission of God (Flemming, 2013: 18; Wright, 2006: 2). This can be applied to a church or organizational structure such as WGA, a mission objective, a title, an activity and so forth (Tyra, 2013: 311).

Within WGA, *missional leadership* is a paradigm shift from the Christendom concept of leadership through title and position, to the equipping of all God's people to live and serve in his mission. Missional leadership is transformational because it 'ignites and drives change' that is dependent upon the Holy Spirit. The focus starts with the 'inner transformation of the leader' (Niemandt, 2013: 57). This leads to the release of an innovative spiritual gift of leadership to lead and equip the transformation of God's people so they may effectively participate in God's mission in their particular contexts.

## Globalization and Mission

A well-known description of globalization comes from Giddens (1998: 64): it is 'the intensification of worldwide social relations that link distant communities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'. Globalization has been equated with

the economic interconnectedness of national economies. It can easily become an axiom to explain every conceivable economic activity that is taking place in the world today (Berger, 2000: 419).

The growing interconnected global economy with its accompanying political and social consequences suggests that in reality it is a cliché. Some fear that the globalization of culture is leading to a global 'airport culture' where the multiplicity of societies and cultures gets stripped of its uniqueness and becomes standardized, popularized or even 'vulgarized' (Berger, 2000: 420). Mittelman (2000: 4) suggests that globalization is really a 'syndrome', not in the medical sense of a sign of disease, but because of widespread acceptance of its dominant set of ideas, actions and patterns of behaviour within economic policies that now affects most nations.

Globalization's rapid development has led some to refer to the post-2000 world as being 'flat' (Friedman, 2005). Creators of this levelling state of affairs conceive a world that followed a 'unified form of civilization' that was built upon Western Anglo Saxon cultural values (Castells, 2010: xxxiv). However, globalization is not a 'one-directional ... Western-managed process' (Hanciles, 2008: 23), because Western societies have benefited as well from their interaction with nations of the global South and East, thus reflecting a global phenomenon. New players, not bound to one particular geographic or cultural context, continue to enter the global arena (e.g. China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Turkey, United Arab Emirates), all made possible because of technological innovation and progress.

The very nature of globalization is contradictory – it creates winners and at the same time losers. On the one hand, it offers significant benefits and can be a powerful source for good (such as productivity gains, widespread use of improving technologies, higher standards of living, greater employment, consumer goods that cost less, global philanthropy, etc.) (Mittelman, 2000: 4). On the other hand, and simultaneously, it lessens, disenfranchises or marginalizes the weakest and poorest players in the global economy. It is subject to greed, corruption, exploitation and crime (Hanciles, 2008: 28).

Giddens (2003: 15) notes some of globalization's 'dark side': how it weakens or even destroys local cultures; when it increases the disparity between the rich and the poor; or how it can worsen the situation of the underprivileged because they cannot cope, compete or keep up with the global work force. Aronica and Ramdoo (2006: 17) see a mixed response to globalization: for some it is a new opportunity for prosperity; for others, it only leads to conflict and out-of-control greed and ultimately can result in an indifference to the value of humanity. Goheen (2011: 14) claims that the church, especially in the globalized consumer society, can become 'merely a vendor of religious goods and services', rather than an agent of holistic transformation.

Globalization is not necessarily solving long-held economic inequalities and political and religious differences. Instead, it brings social upheaval because of cultural and religious differences that defy integration or conformity (Smith, 2003: 94). This in turn develops into pluralism on the one hand or tribalism on the other. It also fuels religious fundamentalism (Gaillardetz, 2006: 158). As a result, 'local nationalisms' arise in response to globalizing influences and tendencies, especially when the power of older nation-states fades (Giddens, 2003: 13).

Wuthnow (2009: 91) concludes that globalization enables indirect and direct links between various churches and Christians in different countries. As Escobar (2009: 195) remarks, this enables positive 'transnational and transcontinental partnership' in mission for the sending, training and deployment of missionaries. On the other hand, and as already noted, globalization creates economic and social inequalities that at times make such partnerships seem one-directional – such as from the wealthy nations to the poorer ones.

## Global-Glocal in Ghana

How has globalization affected ministry in a glocal context? This is explored through a case study of the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT), an affiliate of

WGA. The study illustrates how the rapidly changing world, represented globally through WGA, regionally through the African continent and locally through the nation of Ghana, affects a local organization – namely GILLBT. This, and the 50-plus year history of GILLBT, gives insights into arising global-glocal tensions and possible solutions.

When GILLBT was formed in 1961 through the involvement of expatriate leaders of SIL International (a partner of WGA), there were assumptions that GILLBT would become a Ghanaian-led and -owned organization exhibiting the national aspirations of the Ghanaian people. This was in alignment with the view of William Cameron Townsend, the founder of both SIL International and Wycliffe Bible Translators, who did not have a vision of including non-Westerners within his organizations. He stated that if Africans wanted to be part of Bible translation, then they needed to form their own organizations.

Despite the independence movements of colonized Africa, GILLBT did not greatly benefit from progress that spread through globalization, which allowed greater interconnectedness. Instead, GILLBT found itself bound by other influences: (1) the DNA of SIL was firmly engrained in GILLBT from the outset, which is understandable because it is how GILLBT was started – the DNA of the foreign body (SIL) remains in GILLBT and this affects its national aspirations; and (2) over several decades GILLBT isolated itself from the Ghanaian church, especially the churches of influence in the capital Accra. While GILLBT was focused on its work in regional areas, the urban churches began flourishing and developing their own missiology model, one that did not necessarily recognize mother tongue scriptures in the development of modern Ghana.

Such factors limited GILLBT's ability to shift its paradigm to national aspirations within Ghana. However, since 2010, GILLBT's leadership has been deliberately leading a transition from its Western missionary roots to embed the organization into the local Ghanaian context. GILLBT recognizes that a more interconnected continent provides GILLBT with an opportunity to use its influence beyond its geographic boundaries. However, at the same time, it must manage its own nationalistic ambitions. These are summarized as: (1) the Africanization of Bible translation; and (2) a paradigm shift to national aspirations.

### *The Africanization of Bible Translation*

Edusa-Eyison (2006: 96) observes that the African church lacks 'self-authentication' in the global arena because it has not 'attained its own selfhood'. Speckman (2007: 282–283) asks why Africa lags behind other parts of the world, despite the richness of its human and natural resources. The reason he suggests is that Africans think they must have the approval and support of the West in order to succeed economically.

Speckman's focus is economic: Africans need to embrace a concerted effort to develop their continent's economic resources on their own terms. Edusa-Eyison's focus is theological: the African church needs to theologize without undue influence from its Western connections. Both Speckman and Edusa-Eyison are proposing Africanization – one of its economies, the other of its theologizing process.

The matter of the growth of Christianity in Africa is of relevance in defining why the Africanization of Bible translation is an important concept. In describing why Christianity has taken hold of large parts of Africa, Kaplan (1995: 9) suggests that Africanization refers to how African concepts and perspectives have been successfully incorporated into 'normative' Christianity within the church as a whole (Kaplan, 1995: 21).

Edusa-Eyison (2006: 95) uses Ghanaian theologian Kwesi Dickson's perspectives as a model for the African church to be 'authentic' in relating to its own needs. Dickson's views are shaped by his preference for using scripture for theologizing, accompanied by the availability of Bible

translations in Ghana's vernaculars. Consequently, Africans can contribute to theology without having to become European first. The abundant 'wisdom of African life and thought' gives Africa its 'self-authentication' in the global arena (Edusa-Eyison, 2006: 96).

Mojola (2012: 5–8) describes three waves of African Christianity and Bible translation: the first started in ancient Alexandria, Egypt, with the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. The Egyptian Coptic Bible and its various versions, and also the Ethiopian *Ge'ez* Bible, followed this. The second wave was through the European evangelical missionary movement in which evangelism and Bible translation worked together to further the colonization of Africa. It also followed that there were more missionaries from Europe and North America. The third wave is still underway, with African mother tongue translators who live and are active in their communities and local churches. External technical consultants often assist them.

Bediako (2004: 58) sees the strong correlation between a vibrant African church and the availability of mother tongue Scripture. In the same vein, Jenkins (2006: 18) states that the Bible is still read in fresh ways in Africa because its Christian communities are still in a 'love affair with the Scripture'. The ability of the African church to theologize in its mother tongues serves as an indicator of 'the depth of the impact of the Bible and of the Christian faith itself in African life' (Bediako, 2004: 58). Jenkins (2006: 18) sees the growing trend of 'Afrocentrism', as Africans read Scripture from their perspective and are thus freed from any Western bias.

In sum, the Africanization of Bible translation refers to the shift in how African concepts, biases and perspectives have been successfully incorporated into normative Bible translation praxis. And as this happens, it brings African influences to the forefront in the global Bible translation movement. This is important as it illustrates the re-balancing of influence from the West to parts of the global South and East.

### *National Aspirations*

One has to appreciate that GILLBT finds itself in tension with two paradigms – a missionary paradigm and a Christian nationalist (Ghanaian) paradigm. Both have co-existed, but the missionary paradigm has been the dominant factor.

According to Opoku-Mensah (2013: 1), the missionary paradigm is a distinct and powerful international system that controls the transfer of Christian resources (such as personnel, funds, prayer support, frameworks and strategies). The Western church, joined recently by the church in South Korea and Singapore, distributes its resources to the global South and East. In the case of GILLBT, these resources are for language development and Bible translation in Ghana. This paradigm assumes that this task in Ghana is the responsibility of the foreigners who have left their home countries to move to Ghana. While the proponents of this paradigm speak of partnership, the reality is that their own system keeps them in charge because it is their financial resources and academic expertise that they have brought to Ghana.

The negotiation of the use of financial resources from outside of a local context has been a focus of WGA-led missiological consultations on funding God's mission. While acknowledging the important role of external funding, WGA's preferred model of sustainability is to build capacity in the local context first and then to work out what outside funding is appropriate. This reduces the dependency on external funding, at the start suggesting an appropriate sliding scale of funding. As the project increases, there is more funding, but as capacity building increases, external funding is reduced. The practical outcome for this problem is to demonstrate how WGA affiliates, including GILLBT, can work together within a system that was designed for the Western missions era. Relationships are the key – leaders of the global South and East must meet each other and build friendships so that they can have an influential voice. Concepts such as paternalism, dependency,



building capacity, mentoring and organizational development need to be discussed. In other words, the contribution from the global South and East in terms of financial resources and gifts in kind should be encouraged and strengthened so that it is highly valued and not viewed as being of lesser importance than that of the West.

The missionary paradigm creates obstacles for GILLBT because: (1) it brought its own human resources and financial resources. It focused on the work to be done in individual language projects, which were financed by the expatriate missionaries through their own networks or from the WGA organizations they came from. Consequently, little attention was given to developing local financial resources to sustain GILLBT. As expatriate numbers are reduced through natural attrition, GILLBT is left with a dwindling income stream; (2) Ghanaians have not yet been educated and trained at high levels as consultants for GILLBT. This is somewhat astonishing given the high levels of education in Ghanaian society. For example, Ghana's own Akrofi-Christaller Institute, founded by Prof Kwame Bediako, is considered a global leader in theologizing in the local vernaculars of Africa and beyond. Ghana has global theological and missiological expertise to offer, but GILLBT does not yet seem to have engaged with this expertise to develop its own pool of highly educated consultants; and (3) there has been no clear vision or mandate for GILLBT to become a sending body to other parts of Africa. Instead, all of its resources and personnel are focused on Ghana. This is unfortunate given the long history GILLBT has and the good work it has achieved in Ghana. It has much to offer surrounding nations where Bible translation and language development are needed, but human resources are lacking.

The missionary paradigm has had tremendous influence and impact on what GILLBT has been able to achieve over the past 50 years. To reiterate, without the involvement of expatriate missionaries who came from Europe and North America, GILLBT would not have achieved all that it has so far in Bible translation and language development.

As long as GILLBT feels trapped in its missionary paradigm, it continues to be influenced by a set of beliefs, organizing principles and rules from that paradigm that ensnare it. GILLBT's dependence on the missionary paradigm with its overseas resources contributes to a missiological misalignment instead of enabling full ownership by the Ghanaian church of GILLBT's ministry. This happens despite the historic intentions of GILLBT to have ownership from within Ghana.

GILLBT's current trajectory is to redefine itself within the Christian nationalist identity of its church and nation. This sees greater partnership by Ghanaians who take responsibility for their own development. This is a return to the original aspiration of GILLBT's founders. GILLBT's current Director, Dr Paul Opoku-Mensah's (2011: 1) motivation to lead this paradigm shift stems from the long line of Ghanaian Christian leaders who have preceded him. Their vision has been for GILLBT to become an organization whose ministry is owned and supported by the Ghanaian church.

Nationalist aspirations in Ghana include having Ghanaians take the lead in completing the Bible translation work in Ghana and then take this beyond its borders. This idea was expressed in the original documents signed between Ghanaian statesman, the late John Agama, and leaders of SIL. Agama's intention was that they were creating an organization that would implement a national vision.

This binary choice of either having Westerners or seeking a nationalistic vision is not helpful to the creation of a viable national organization. Rather, an indigenization with inclusion of Western missionaries is preferred. This is not a call for an all-African workforce because a self-assured African organization should have space for people from around the world. However, a sustainable national organization has to have its impetus and direction determined from within Africa. It needs to develop strong relationships with local institutions, including the church.

## Friendship in God's Mission

The GILLBT context, with the backdrop of the interconnectedness of globalization and the notion of global-glocal tension, creates a context for exploring friendship in God's mission. 'Why?', you may ask. First, it was through the friendship of John Agama and SIL leaders that GILLBT became a reality. Second, three years ago, WGA started exploring how to strengthen the notion of friendship in God's mission through its missiological consultations on community. Since WGA is an alliance of nearly 100 self-governing and self-directing organizations, the ties that bind the alliance together have to transcend essential factors such as doctrinal compatibility, commitment to the same shared mission and vision and so forth. Creating community and friendships based upon trust adds a greater relational emphasis that helps navigate within the complexities of global mission. This is now explored in these areas: (1) theological foundations; (2) missiological observations; and (3) implications.

### Theological Foundations

Bedford (2006: 35) notes that the Gospel of John is rich in 'the vocabulary of friendship', citing instances such as John the Baptist portrayed as the 'friend' of the bridegroom (Jn 3: 29), and Martha, Lazarus and Mary as Jesus' friends (Jn 11). In John 15:13, Jesus states that when a person gives his or her life for a friend, this is the ultimate expression of love. He then says (15:14–15), 'You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants ... Instead, I have called you friends ...' (NIV). Bedford (2006: 35) states that Jesus addresses a 'community of friends', who for the apostle John are all in the 'community of faith'.

Jesus demonstrated the greatest form of love – being prepared to die for the sake of a friend. Jesus not only gave his life so that his friends would benefit from his death, but he actually took their place. In the same way, his friends are committed to him and show this by their resolve to walk in his ways. Those who keep Jesus' commandments are called his friends. The implications for us should be that our 'gratitude for God's friendship [is] carried out in friendship with others' (Bedford, 2006: 36).

Bedford (2006: 36) points out that this is where Jesus' language is Trinitarian: 'I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you' (Jn 15:15, NIV). Furthermore, Bedford (2006: 36) translates (from the German) Moltmann's (1991: 52) Trinitarian grounds for friendship in John 17:21 – 'God's friends ... no longer live "under" God, but rather with God and in God. They participate in God's pain and in God's joy. They have become "one" with God'. Bedford (2006: 36) suggests, therefore, that friendship with the triune God is a relationship that transcends 'that of servant ... and even ... children of God'. The implication is 'gratitude for God's friendship' lived through friendship with others (Bedford, 2006: 36).

Jesus' willingness to give his life for his friends (Jn 15:13) demonstrated an incarnational purpose. The notion of biblical *koinonia*, which Hastings (2012: 216) defines as 'sharing in the love and life of the triune God', means that knowing Christ 'more intimately' in community and friendship is foundational for mission. Chua (2010: 5) emphasizes this because the triune God sets the example of friendship through his invitation for his followers to participate with him in his 'relational life' by his calling people to a friendship, first with him and then with others. This invitation to friendship, divine and human, forms what Chua claims is the most fundamental or 'primordial missiological principle'.

Glasser et al. (2003: 206) note that Jesus believed that friendship was the 'best way' to gain the confidence of and solidarity with all people: 'He sought to love and befriend them in order to win



them'. It was the event of Christ coming and 'reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor 5:19, NIV) that created the opportunity for a new and permanent relationship with the triune God and humanity since all are 'invited into God's presence and friendship' (Glasser et al., 2003: 369).

The notion of friendship in mission as a fundamental principle deepens the relational dimension of being the people of God, living as the people of God and being missional as the people of God. Interwoven together, community, partnership and friendship are not just about accomplishing a task, but are an expression of the unity of believers. Being a community is not optional because as God's people it is our reality. However, the extension of this to becoming a community of trust and friendship may be overlooked. Giving intentional space for the strengthening of friendship in mission leads to greater collaboration, partnership and generosity because the value of each of partner is recognized and affirmed.

### *Missiological Observations*

Keum (2013: 35) suggests that faithful mission takes place in the interchange of 'life and action' through an approach of 'respect and friendship' that involves a deeper 'listening to others'. An emphasis on developing cross-cultural friendships, according to Robert (2011: 106), may create the context where developing 'interracial and intercultural relationships [are] both a means of mission and an end in itself'.

Following on with this idea of dialogue, Balia and Kim (2010: 47) contend that interaction with others from different backgrounds (e.g. religious, socio-economic, cultural) is of paramount importance in developing relationships in mission. It is the pathway to creating friendships across all types of barriers.

Looking back over 100 years ago to the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, one is reminded of the importance of friendship. Through the close friendship with the Western leaders Sherwood Eddy and John Mott, a young Anglican minister from India named Samuel Azariah (1874–1945) was invited to participate in the conference. He was one of only about 20 representatives from the global South and East (Kim, 2009: 23), and speaking to the conference, Azariah said:

Missionaries, except for a few of the very best, seem ... to fail very largely in getting rid of an air of patronage and condescension, and in establishing a genuinely brotherly and happy relation as between equals with their Indian flocks ... You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for *love*. Give us FRIENDS!'. (Robert, 2011: 100)

The call for friendship in mission from Azariah has been remembered as one of the most noteworthy statements from the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference. And yet, a century later during the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Edinburgh, Balia and Kim (2010: 133) observe how the church is still burdened with 'friendships strained by postcolonialism, dependency, paternalism and poverty'.

How we work together in God's mission has often been described as partners, partnering and partnerships. We may try to make a binary choice: we will work in partnership or we will not. If we do not, we work independently. Or, we may say we work in partnership, but the partnership is not equal. One party has more power and or funds. However, we should want to focus on what each partner has to bring into the partnership so that it is interdependent.

Considering interdependency, Samuel Azariah was committed to cross-cultural friendship because he personally observed its power. In his second address at the conference, Azariah pleaded his case for a visible demonstration of the Christian vision of God's kingdom to his fractured

Indian society, divided by caste and structural injustice. His country needed to witness how the church was bound 'together across the dividing lines of caste, ethnicity, culture and empire' by a unique quality of friendship that 'derived from the knowledge ... of the exceeding riches of the glory of Christ' (Stanley, 2009: 129–130).

Racism and missionary paternalism has been a barrier to Christian life in some contexts. In these situations, this requires 'all races working together' so that the full glory of Christ is achieved because 'cross-racial friendships ... reveal the image of the Lord' (Robert, 2011: 100). Since economic polarities and social inequalities still exist within the global church, Azariah's fervent plea is still relevant (Bonk, 2006: 170). By identifying failures in human relationships as the most fundamental of all missionary failures, Azariah hit upon a 'raw nerve' in global Christianity (Stanley, 2009: 130).

Robert (2011: 102) notes that friendship was an important philosophy that came out of the 1910 Conference. However, in order for this to be credible, some documentation of cross-cultural friendships between indigenous Christians and Westerners was required. However, many such examples are found in stories buried in mission organization archives. Therefore, they must be recovered from the masses of mission agency memoirs and provided as inspirational examples to today's missional movements.

An example of the emergence of the theme of friendship in mission is what occurred with over 100 Papua New Guinean staff of the Bible Translation Association in 2015. I facilitated a discussion on the question of, 'What unique values of friendship do Melanesians bring to the regional and global Bible translation movements?'. The participants gave over 25 ideas. I then asked them to agree on just five gifts that they would offer to the regional and global church and missional movements. They decided to offer: (1) gift-giving without an expectation of something in return so that friendship is strengthened; (2) friendly greetings first before anything else; (3) developing relationships first before task and time; (4) visiting friends so to be available to listen and support; and (5) giving trained Papua New Guineans to contribute to the Bible translation movement in the region and beyond (they specifically were giving their former leaders, the Gelas, to a leadership role within WGA that would serve the wider region as 'ambassadors of Melanesia'). While these examples may not actually be unique to Melanesian culture, it is good to note how participants of this culture wanted to emphasize these attributes as their gifts to share within the context of mission.

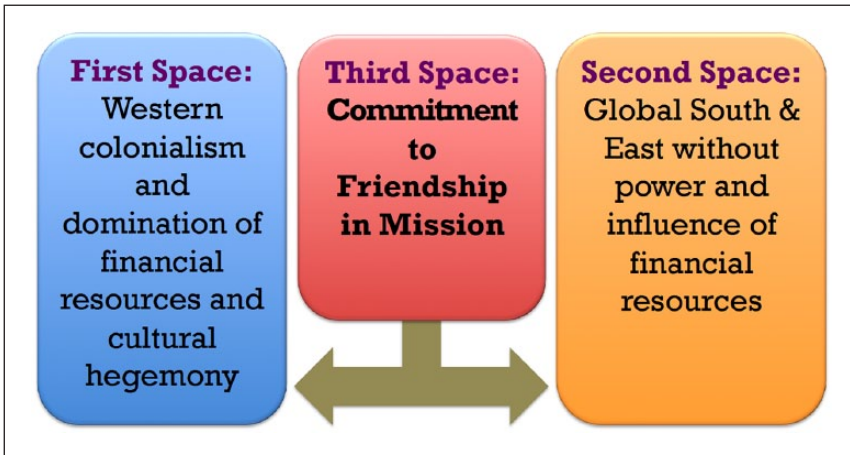
### Implications

The theme of friendship has a number of implications that include: (1) Jesus models friendship to us in his relationships within the community of his disciples; (2) inter-cultural friendships have missional implications, because they demonstrate Christ's love that may overcome inequalities; (3) friendship makes Christian community possible and; (4) a missiology of friendship creates a greater openness to walking and serving humbly as friends with Christ and with each other.

A missiology of friendship in the *missio Dei* creates a greater openness to others by walking and serving humbly as friends with Christ and each other. The theme of friendship draws inspiration from Jesus' willingness to give his life for his friends. Knowing the crucified Christ intimately through friendship provides an essential foundation for mission. Valuing friendship demonstrates Christ's love that overcomes the issues of inequality and racism.

### Third Space in Mission

A missiological understanding of friendship deepens the value of partnering in mission. This may call for a third space that helps navigate through any gaps between the West and the global South and East.



**Figure 1.** The first, second and third space.

Evangelical fervour in the era of modern missions has meant that Christians saw themselves as responsible for bringing the Great Commission to completion, or at least doing their part to accelerate progress in fulfilling the mission mandate. Christians have believed they played a critical role in what God wanted to do. This led to the thinking of a ‘manifest destiny’ – how God had entrusted to North Americans the responsibility of fulfilling God’s mission in the Old Testament understanding of a ‘chosen people’. Bosch (1991: 299) elaborates that as a result, ‘at one point or another in recent history, virtually every white nation regarded itself as being chosen for a particular destiny and as having a unique charisma’. Related to manifest destiny is *pax Americana*, meaning American peace through economic power and military security. Its influence increased since the Second World War with the noticeable wealth of US missionaries and their association with their powerful and influential country. As Schnabel (2008: 444) observes, left unchecked, the ‘power of money readily sets the agenda’ for mission.

Towards the end of the 1950s and coinciding with the ending of European colonialism, a new vocabulary of partners, partnering and partnerships superseded the theme of friendship in mission as the appropriate ‘ethic for a postcolonial age’ (Robert, 2011: 102). Into this milieu, Price (2012: 59) calls for a ‘third space’, one that is between the West’s new colonialism with its ‘domination of resources [and its] cultural hegemony’ and those in the global South and East who may assume they live without the power and influence of financial resources. This third space is the call to make friendship in mission an important commitment. Price’s observation can be illustrated as in Figure 1.

Robert (2011: 106) observes that ‘Azariah’s cry’ was both a protest and a ‘prophecy’. Real friendship across ‘widening economic divides’ is difficult but possible. True cross-cultural friendship requires a long-term commitment between individuals. However, evangelical fervour with its sense of urgency may have lessened any realization that one can learn from others in their context. A focus primarily on the task rather than relationships pushes the practitioner towards making a binary choice about which is of greater importance. Robert (2011: 106) concludes that, ‘despite the dangers of unreflective paternalism, friendship remains the proof and the promise of Christianity as a multicultural, worldwide religion’.

A missiology of friendship creates a greater openness to others by walking and serving humbly as friends with Christ and each other. This has implications for WGA and raises a number of questions: (1) Do organizations in the WGA community believe that all participants in Bible translation

movements are essential? Changes continue to take place in Bible translation movements with new players who are seeking to listen to and discern the movement of the Spirit; (2) Are there ways in which WGA is leading that hamper the participation of others in Bible translation movements? It is possible that WGA's strategies and structure obstruct others who should be involved; (3) Is WGA willing to take a humble attitude and seek to learn and change its perspectives when necessary? WGA must be cautious not to appear as an authority or expert to others in Bible translation movements; (4) Is WGA willing to let God redefine how he wants it to participate in his mission? This will require WGA and its organizations to serve humbly and in community, so that it reflects God's full glory more so than at present.

## **Polycentrism in the *Missio Dei***

A concept that is helpful in discussing the paradigmatic change in WGA is polycentrism, which is an outcome of the tension built within globalization-glocalization. It provides a deliberate movement away from established centres of power, so that leadership takes place among and within a community that learns together. Polycentrism assumes self-regulating centres of influence within a given structure. This occurs when there are many centres of power or importance within a political, cultural or socio-economic system. The multiple centres may be of leadership, power, authority, ideology or importance within a larger political boundary (Dictionary.com, n.d.).

Polycentrism offers inspiration, models and methods for defining and understanding current and future structures within the *missio Dei* and its global mission contexts. In this regard, Woodward (2012: 60) notes 'the vulnerabilities of a centralized leadership structure', especially in regard to many 'megashifts' that affect us today and influence the way an organization does its work: (1) from print and broadcast media to digital; (2) from modernity to postmodernity; (3) from rural to urban and; (4) from Christendom to post-Christendom. In response, leadership methods must move from hierarchical to polycentric so that they may more 'meaningfully connect with the digital generation' (Woodward, 2012: 60).

Polycentrism is now analyzed within four situations: (1) global-glocal socio-cultural situations; (2) missional movements; (3) the global church; and (4) WGA's journey (including its missiological understanding and polycentrism's impact).

### ***Global-Glocal Socio-Cultural Situations***

Polycentrism offers alternative viewpoints to parochialism (the assumption that one's belief or way of operating is superior to others) and ethnocentrism (one's assumed ethnic or cultural superiority). Ahstrom and Bruton (2010: 42) comment that polycentrism is the opposite of ethnocentrism in that people try to do the things 'the way locals do'; or, 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do'. The end result can be that the local culture has the last word on matters such as the status of women or the acceptability of bribery, even if these issues may be in direct conflict with 'the parent firm or even homeland laws'. Caution is required because adopting polycentrism without reflection could lead to 'ethical lapses' for participants (Ahstrom and Bruton, 2010: 42).

According to Morse (1998: 234), effective communities broaden their sphere of leadership to form a polycentric model of numerous leadership centres that interconnect with each other. These centres enable the vision for the community through finding opportunities for its diverse array of people to make decisions, collaborate and to act together on suitable ways to reach the community's goal. This is similar to WGA's concept of a paradigm of leading in community.

Bowen et al. (n.d: 11) suggest that informal and formal networks within a context operate like 'turbines' that are not 'centralized or pyramidal' in how they are governed but, instead, are

polycentric with many interconnected centres of leadership. This provides ‘social energy’ for building capacity in the community. Hustedde (2007: 53) refers to this as an ‘entrepreneurial community’, operating with a number of circles of influence, such as social services, youth, the arts, local government and so forth. The leaders from each circle are enabled to make decisions directed by the mutual vision. Hustedde (2007: 53) states that polycentric leadership works well when it moves beyond team building to ‘team learning’, where leaders think collectively and learn to work in a coordinated way.

Balia and Kim (2010: 255) observe that ‘cultural polycentrism is a fact of our time’ since cultural diversity is increasingly a global reality. Polycentrism in inter-cultural situations is an ‘awareness of otherness’, which is an attitude of openness and curiosity that is willing to put aside both doubt about other cultures and acceptance of one’s own (Byram et al., 2001: 5). This is the ability to ‘decentre’ oneself as one takes on the ‘perspective of an outsider’ with their different set of beliefs, values and behaviours (Byram et al., 2001: 5). This point of view is what WGA attempts to do as diverse cultural groups are brought together in consultations.

### *Missional Movements*

In our analysis, Volf (1998: 217) hints at a Trinitarian premise for polycentrism through his description of subordination within the triune God when he says, ‘The structure of Trinitarian relations is characterized neither by a pyramidal dominance of the one ... nor by a hierarchical bipolarity between the one and the many ... but rather by a polycentric and symmetrical reciprocity of the many’.

Woodward (2012: 20) believes that hierarchical forms of leadership create ‘an individualistic approach to spiritual formation’, whereas polycentric leadership provides ‘a community of leaders within the community’. This creates inherent tension with hierarchical views of leadership within the church. For example, Chan (2014: 77) notes a Confucian framework of hierarchical influences in East Asian models of church leadership. This correlates to ‘functional hierarchy’ observed in the triune God (Chan, 2014: 67). The rise of the Millennial (born in the 1980s–1990s) and Digital generations (born after 2000) call hierarchy into question. Their ‘cultural architects’ equip others in the community (Woodward, 2012: 61). The role of the cultural architect is to create a missional culture that enables ‘the priesthood of all believers’ (Woodward, 2012: 60).

The polycentric model of missional leadership gives people ‘equal authority and revolving leadership’ as they pursue community and ‘wholeness together’ (Woodward, 2012: 100). Spiritual maturity is modelled by an interdependent community of leaders with their various strengths and weaknesses, who are open and transparent to others in the community. This is in contrast to the pastor who is expected to function with the same level of authority as the North American business world CEO model where merits and performance are associated with the role (Woodward, 2012: 93).

Polycentric leadership enables more of a communal approach in which leaders operate within an array of interconnected communities. Through polycentrism, there is a deliberate attempt to move away from established centres of power, so that one leads from among others. In this way, there is creative learning in a community, with attentiveness to others in it, especially those at its margins.

Informal organizational structures have been thought to be a limitation. However, in the ‘absence of structure [and] leadership’, there is an advantage: it is ideology rather than structure that is the essential glue that holds the decentralized organization together – the ‘fuel’ that drives the decentralized organization (Brafman and Beckstrom, 2006: 95, 206). While a decentralized structure may tend to appear ‘ambiguous and chaotic’, it still may achieve measurable results (Brafman and



Beckstrom, 2006: 89). The measuring criteria, however, are different: how active are the circles of networks, are they distributed, are they interdependent and do they bring new kinds of connections between them?

This is very similar in concept to Plowman et al.'s (2007: 354) 'Complexity Leadership Theory'. They point out that fast-responding leadership is dynamic, emergent and adaptive and inspires others to be innovative and solve complex situations and problems. This is done through interconnected relational teams of 'distributed intelligence' that do not depend upon the limitations of a few people in top-level leadership positions.

Morse (1998: 234) claims that a structure that is neither centralized nor decentralized is therefore polycentric. This is a hybrid model with a 'bottom-up approach of decentralization', but with at least some degree of control and structure of centralization (Brafman and Beckstrom, 2006: 164). The 'sweet spot' of the decentralized-centralized continuum is the point that 'yields the best competitive position', although this is often in 'a tug-of-war' between the forces of centralization and decentralization (Brafman and Beckstrom, 2006: 164).

Polycentrism recognizes that leadership can come from anyone the Holy Spirit empowers, regardless of age, cultural background and experience. Formal leadership structure does not necessarily guide the relationship between the leader and follower. Instead, it is more likely to be the Holy Spirit who does so (Woodward, 2012: 213). Those who are leaders intentionally rotate with other leaders so as to give breaks and rest to all concerned (Woodward, 2012: 214).

### *The Global Church*

The past 100 years of growth of the global church has birthed, according to Balia and Kim (2010: 166), 'a polycentric world church'. Koschorke (2014: 18) suggests that the various epochs in the history of World Christianity should also be viewed as polycentric movements. Throughout church history have been the plurality of centres of the church, cultural expressions of Christianity, confessional variations and 'indigenous initiatives' of the emerging churches.

Koschorke (2014: 18) cites Ethiopia as an example of polycentrism in church history. The Ethiopian church dates its biblical origins back to King Solomon. Ethiopians have their own biblical Canon, their own liturgical language called *Ge'ez*, differing church customs with their practice of the Sabbath and of circumcision and unique structures of the church. The Ethiopian king resisted the onslaught of missionaries from Europe in 1881, 'on the grounds the Ethiopians were already Christians' (Koschorke, 2014: 18). Ethiopia in colonial times was also the only African country to resist European colonialism when the Italian army attempted an invasion in 1896. Consequently, Ethiopian Christianity had a great impact on the African elite of the 19th century because it inspired them to be 'religiously-modern' (meaning Christian), without desiring to become dependent on Western missionaries. It was as though the word 'Ethiopia' became 'a symbol of political and ecclesial independency' because it was 'black, it was free, and it was Christian'. These matters influenced the churches of African Americans, the Caribbean and parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Koschorke, 2014: 19). This illustrates how polycentrism can be a matter of history and how much we know about Christianity in different times and places.

Another example is with the development of diaspora churches in Western countries that originated from the global South and East. Through extensive migration, Christians from the global South and East may bring new examples of theological education and formation to the West. The outcome is theology that is better suited for the challenge of mission in the West as the Western church learns from the churches from the global South and East.

Christianity can be viewed as polycentric because it has many 'cultural homes' within a diversity of contexts and is not permanently attached to any particular one (Tiéno, 2006: 38). With the

centre of gravity of the church shifting from the West, the polycentrism of cultures and languages is one reason that Christianity has spread across the globe, because it is at home in all languages and cultures, and among all races and environments. Diversity in the global church is the reality of 21st century Christianity.

Western influences of the church are transmitted globally for a number of reasons. These may include disparity of power such that the receiving context becomes dependent upon the Western church, a belief that Western ideas are superior or the global South and East needing to negotiate on its own terms rather than unilaterally accepting Western assistance. The Ethiopian example shows why leadership from the global South and East should be enabled to provide a balancing influence on Western mission strategy. This is possible through a polycentric missional leadership that utilizes equal authority and revolving leadership through a community of leaders working together.

Kim (2009: 15) stresses the genuineness of polycentric places of spiritual vitality and missionary expansion of the Christian faith. This occurs in the global South and East where Christianity has many centres of influence, whether in Ibadan, Nigeria; São Paulo, Brazil; or Seoul, South Korea. Kim concludes, such centres are not ‘contained by any human boundary’ but instead appear as a ‘mosaic of churches and communities’ (Kim, 2009: 16, 283). However, this does not assume these centres are dynamic and evolving, or that they are more significant than Western centres that are innovatively finding their way through postmodernism.

The polycentrism of cultures and languages has been a reason that the Bible’s translatability has been a vehicle for the spread of Christianity across the globe, demonstrating that it is ‘at home in all languages and cultures, and among all races and conditions of people’ (Sanneh, 1989: 51). The adaptability of local contexts of culture and language makes the Bible’s translatability viable. Bible translators reject the thought that God speaks only in a special, sacred language in the Scriptures; instead, God speaks in any vernacular. According to Bediako (2004: 32), the Christian faith is ‘the most culturally translatable’ of all religions because it feels ‘at home in every cultural context without injury to its essential character’. Consequently, ‘Christianity has developed as a “vernacular” faith’ to the extent that each person with a Bible in their mother tongue ‘can truly claim to hear God speaking to us in our own language’ (Bediako 2004:32). Sanneh (2003: 97) elaborates:

being the original Scripture of the Christian movement, the New Testament Gospels are a translated version of the message of Jesus, and that means Christianity is a translated religion without a revealed language. The issue is not whether Christians translated their Scripture well or willingly, but that without translation there would be no Christianity or Christians ... the church would be unrecognizable or unsustainable without it.

Throughout church history, Bible translation has enabled Christianity to grow and flourish in every culture. The translatability of the Bible enables people and their societies to be better equipped through their vernaculars to deal with changes brought upon them by outside influences. Such testimonials provide a theological imperative for WGA to continue its commitment to Bible translation within God’s mission.

### *WGA’s Journey*

Within the journey of WGA, the political associations of polycentrism have implications for WGA’s governance and structure. As a global alliance, the 100-plus self-governing organizations that make up the alliance collaborate together as a community, but retain their individual distinctions. As a result, there are four ways that polycentrism (see Table 1 for general summary) affects WGA (see Table 2): (1) transitioning from the ‘West to the rest’; (2) transitioning from a Western

**Table 1.** Polycentrism in general.

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Moves power through decentralization with restricted control from established centres  
 Leads with attentiveness to the others in the community  
 There is a source of social energy through interconnected centres

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**Table 2.** Polycentrism in WGA.

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Balances global spheres of influence, manages dependency from Western resources through influence from the global South and East  
 Creates new opportunities, practices, equal authority and revolving leadership  
 Incorporates new places of influence and spiritual vitality and encourages contributions (or gifts) to be identified and shared from the various centres of influence

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agency, to an international organization, to a global alliance; (3) transitioning from an assortment of self-governing autonomous organizations to an alliance of self-governing organizations behaving and working together as a community; and (4) transitioning from a centralized international institutional structure to a decentralized hybrid alliance structure with a limited degree of control and structure of centralization.

WGA's leadership structure has evolved from what was a highly centralized model to a hybrid that is largely decentralized, but retains a minimal amount of centralization to support the leadership and governance required to ensure WGA remains a trustworthy organization in the global arena.

The point for delving into polycentrism in the context of WGA and developing a paradigm for global mission leadership is this: through polycentrism, there is a movement to lessen the potential autocratic effects of established centres of power, in terms of structure and centralization in the midst of decentralization, by means of a bottom-up approach with some degree of control. The results are: (1) one leads from among and with others; (2) one leads from creatively learning together in community and in attentiveness to the others in it; and (3) one leads within the margins of the global church.

## Conclusion

Some paradigm shifts have been explored using the journey of WGA as an example. How globalization-glocalization is affecting mission in a given context is analysed through a case study from Ghana. A missiological understanding of the theme of friendship in mission draws inspiration from Jesus' willingness to give his life for his friends, and this deepens the value of friendship in partnering in mission. This is an area which has not yet received sufficient attention but which provides a deeper layer of meaning and responsibility for global mission leadership. This may result in creating third spaces, which help overcome gaps because of positive and negative issues. An analysis of polycentrism concerns the deliberate movement away from established centres of power, so that leadership is from among and with others. The journey of WGA has been influenced by themes of polycentrism, such as the evolution from a centralized international institutional structure to a decentralized hybrid one. These paradigm shifts provide inspiration for leading in mission.

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## Notes

1. A primary source for this article is Franklin (2016).
2. It is problematic to make geographical statements about the growth or location of the church worldwide. For example, when referring to the 'Western church' or the 'West' in general it is more appropriate in Latin America to refer to the West as the 'North' since the US and Canada are located in the North, not the West. Another problematic term is the 'global South' or the 'church of the southern continents' (e.g. Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, the Caribbean and Latin America). A more accurate description is to add 'East' since the churches of Korea and China are in the East, not the South. Therefore, for the sake of continuity in this article, when the terms 'West' or 'Western' are used, they include those who prefer 'North' or 'Northern' terminology. Likewise, 'global South and East' is used instead of other variants.

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### Author biography

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