PIONEERING IN GLOBALIZATION

Charles W. Forman

I had a very romantic early childhood. My father was a missionary under the American Presbyterian Mission Board. During his latter years, he was stationed in the town of Gwalior, in north-central India, a native state about two hours' train ride south of Agra. Under the British rule, a large part of India was governed by native rulers under British overlordship. Gwalior was one of the more important native states and my father got to know the maharaja. An energetic, forward-looking man, the maharaja was concerned about the effete life of the sons of the nobility. He asked my father to be principal of a school that would emphasize character and public spirit. My father accepted the invitation and agreed to say nothing about his own religion in the school, which was located on the Gwalior Fort.

As a servant of the state, my father attended all of the great state functions. I remember my parents coming home after state dinners talking about the golden train that ran around the table carrying condiments for the guests. I was invited to play with the young prince in his playroom, which, in my memory, had toys that extended as far as the eye could see. In the evenings, my mother sometimes took me down to watch the palace elephants being fed their evening meal, which consisted of huge chapatis. When the Prince of Wales came for a visit to Gwalior, a polo match was put on for his entertainment. I was allowed to sit on the ground in front of the prince so that I could have a better view.

When I was seven, in 1924, my father turned sixty-five and had to retire. We came back to the United States and settled in Columbus, Ohio. In those days, Columbus was a very parochial town. It prided itself on having the highest proportion of native-born Americans of any city in the country. Consequently, the people were quite narrow-minded. The adjustment was hard for my father, who had had a cosmopolitan life up to that point, but for me it was quite easy. I went through the Columbus public schools and the Ohio State University. When I was in junior high school, I realized how much I enjoyed history and decided that I wanted to be a history teacher. After

---

Charles W. Forman was born in India in 1916. He was educated at Ohio State University (B.A., M.A.), the University of Wisconsin (Ph.D. in history), and Union Theological Seminary (M.Div., S.T.M.). He taught for five years at the North India United Theological college, Saharanpur, U.P., India, and then for forty-three years at the Yale Divinity School as Professor of Missions. From 1960 to 1962 he served as acting dean of the Divinity School. Later he served as chair of Yale's first committee on town-gown relations and was one of the organizers of the African Studies Council. He lived with his wife and three children in Bethany, Connecticut, where he was a member of the Board of Education. He has served as chairman of the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches, of the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia, and of the Commission on Ecumenical Mission of the Presbyterian Church (USA). He has written five books and numerous articles dealing with world mission and churches, especially in the South Pacific islands.

graduating from Ohio State, I went on to the University of Wisconsin for a doctorate in history. Wisconsin has long been well known for its history department, and at that time it had a specialist professor in the history of the British Empire named Paul Knaplund. Working under his guidance, I wrote my dissertation on the use of scientific research for development in the British Empire.

While I was getting my doctorate, I began to think I'd like to teach history in a theological seminary. So when I finished at Wisconsin, I went for three years to Union Theological Seminary in New York to get a theological degree. There I met my future wife and we got married. After graduation, we decided we'd like to go to India to teach. The Presbyterian Mission Board accepted our application and sent us off. Our trip to India was very slow. World War II was going on, so we had to travel by neutral vessels. We took a Portuguese ship across the Atlantic to Lisbon, where we waited nine weeks before boarding another Portuguese ship that took us around the coast of Africa to Mozambique. That trip alone took five weeks. From Mozambique we went overland to Durban, South Africa. Then we caught another ship going up the east coast of Africa to Mombassa. While we were there, the war ended. Finally, we sailed across the Arabian Sea to India.

At our request, we were stationed in the North India United Theological College in Saharanpur, a town one hundred miles north of Delhi. The language of instruction was Urdu, which is now the national language of Pakistan, but was then the common language of most of the cities of northern India. Nowadays, Hindi is India's national language. At the level of ordinary conversation, however, you can hardly tell which of the two languages a person is speaking. When they go to write it down, if they think they're speaking Urdu, they write in Persian script. If they think they're speaking Hindi, they write in Devanagri script. In lectures and orations, the more advanced vocabulary for an Urdu speaker would be drawn from Persian and Arabic roots, whereas the more advanced vocabulary for a Hindi speaker would be drawn from Sanskrit roots. I was given a year and a quarter to master Urdu. My first year of teaching was rather a problem for the students, but happily there were some English-speakers in the classes who helped me over the rough parts.

Language, however, was less of a problem than the social turmoil in which my wife and I were working. India was just coming to independence, and the decision was being made to divide the country in two between Pakistan and India. The line of division was to cut through the Punjab, the province adjacent to Saharanpur. The commission that drew that line was made up of two Hindus, two Muslims, and an Englishman. The Muslims and Hindus canceled each other out on every vote, so the line—which went down the middle of the Punjab—was effectively drawn by the British alone. The boundary was not announced until midnight on Aug. 15, 1947, the point of independence. At that very minute, all the Muslims east of the line starting fleeing westward, and all the Hindus west of the line started fleeing eastward. A million refugees were rushing through the country, many being killed as they fled.

Having been asked to work with the refugees, I put my family up in the Himalayas, where they would be out of harm's way, and proceeded to a mission hospital in the Punjab. One day the doctor and I visited a clinic out in the country. On our way, we met streams of refugees walking down the road and saw the bodies of men who had been killed the previous night. Their skirts had been thrown up to show that they were circumcised, proving that they were Muslims. At the clinic, we found two young Muslim men with deep javelin holes in their backs, which they had received while running for shelter. We helped the man running the clinic to take care of them as best we could. Then we noticed a cluster of Sikh warriors gathering under a nearby tree. We were told that they planned to attack us for helping the Muslims. Reluctantly, we got back in our car and returned to the mission hospital.

I stayed in the city a number of weeks. As soon as the weather began to turn dangerously cold, I brought my family down from the hills to Saharanpur, where we continued to work with refugees through the winter. We also got the school started again and taught there for a couple more years. Then, after five years in India, we returned to the United States in 1950 for a year's furlough.

America was obsessed with the fear of communism. Those were the days when actors and motion picture directors were being forced to testify before congressional committees as to any Communists they had known in their work, and when college professors were being called upon to affirm that they had never been Communists. John Flynn, who later taught at Yale, was working as a research agent in a government office when it was revealed that his wife had left-wing connections. Told that he could either divorce her or lose his job, he chose the latter. Thirteen universities expressed interest in hiring him, but all drew back when they explored the situation. Only Yale, to its honor, went ahead and hired him, and Flynn taught in Yale's School of Medicine the rest of his life.

The mission boards were concerned about communism because the Communists had just taken over China and were throwing all the missionaries out. Some board leaders felt that there was a need for much better understanding of communism on the part of missionaries around the world. They brought together a seminar of missionaries from different countries to study communism for a semester and asked me to direct it. I had had very little experience with communism. At the University of Wisconsin, I had cooperated with the Communists in the peace movement, until it became clear that they were determined that every speaker at every rally or public meeting should be a Communist or a fellow traveler. I was able to assemble enough votes to break their drive for control, whereupon they started their own peace movement and began attacking the one that they had previously been part of. These students threatened to tell the History Department about my peace activities. In retaliation, one of my friends threatened to tell the college newspaper about their Communist Party affiliations. In the end, the two threats canceled each other out and nothing was done.

All of this was a rather poor background for someone charged with making an objective study of communism. Happily, however, I didn't have to do any teaching myself. I only had to assemble the teachers and succeeded in getting scholars from around the New York area to conduct the seminar. It went so well that the mission boards sponsored two more seminars with other groups of missionaries in the succeeding two years.

In my third year on the job, the missions professorship at Yale opened up. I gave up my plans to return to India and accepted an appointment as assistant professor of missions at Yale. My family settled in Bethany and stayed there forty-three years. In addition to teaching the usual courses on the history of missions and so forth, I added a course on Christianity and communism. It attracted a lot of attention because I invited Communist leaders from New York and members of the Soviet United Nations delegation to come and speak to the class. There was not much of that going on at Yale at that time. Years later, I discovered that all of my correspondence with those Communists had been copied by spies in their offices and turned over to the FBI. I didn't know it until the Freedom of Information Act came along and revealed all that had been done at that time.

After I had taught the course on Christianity and communism for about five years, a new direction opened up for me. The International Missionary Council, the cooperative agency of all the Protestant mission boards in the world, was concerned about the poor condition of theological education in the Third World. They approached the Rockefellers' Sealantic Foundation, which offered two million dollars if the mission boards would match it. They did and a four-million-dollar Theological Education Fund was set up, with an office and director in New York City. About that time, I happened to go to New York for a meeting on another matter at which the Fund director was present. He must have liked something I said, because after the meeting he called me aside and asked me to be his assistant director. The job consisted mainly of traveling around the world visiting theological seminaries. I discussed the offer with Liston Pope, then dean of the Yale Divinity School, and he realized right away what a wonderful background the experience would provide for my teaching. He generously offered me a year and a half's leave to travel on behalf of the fund.

I was assigned to cover tropical Africa, Latin America, and East Asia, while the director was responsible for India, the Middle East, and southern Africa. The biggest excitement came during my 1960 trip to Latin America, when I tried to make a visit to a newly founded seminary at a Brazilian frontier settlement. Getting there required crossing wide areas of uninhabited forest. I was provided with a small mission plane and a pilot. We got a late start and hadn't reached our destination by nightfall, but the pilot knew about a small airstrip in the middle of the jungle. It had been cut by a wealthy man who kept cows in the vicinity. We decided to put down there and spend the night. Unfortunately, in the darkness the pilot overshot the landing strip and crashed into a great mass of underbrush. The plane was wrecked, but we climbed

out unhurt and made our way to the house where the cowhands lived. They were delighted, never having had such excitement before in their circumscribed lives. The next morning we had to figure how to get out of that place. Using lime supplied by our hosts, we wrote "PARE SECURO" (STOP HELP) on the airstrip in big letters and waited hopefully for somebody to rescue us. Meanwhile, the cowhands fed us well on armadillo and pig and did everything they could to entertain us. On the third day, a pilot spotted our SOS and came down. There was no room for us on his plane, but he took a message to the nearest airport, and later that day another plane flew out to pick us up. Soon I was safely back in Rio de Janeiro—but I never did get to the little seminary on the frontier.

The trip that had the greatest effect on my intellectual trajectory came at the end of my East Asian tour. After visiting seminaries in Japan and Indonesia, I decided to return home via Australia and Fiji. It occurred to me that there might theological schools in the Pacific islands that no outsider knew about. I discovered that there was indeed a theological school in every island group, as well as churches that encompassed the entire populations. Nobody had studied these isolated institutions. It was a wide-open field and I was eager to get to work.

I couldn't do much on that trip, because my schedule was already fixed, but when my next sabbatical year came up at Yale, I applied for a grant to visit major archival collections relating to Pacific island churches. My family and I traveled to London, Paris, Rome, Neuendettelsau in Germany, Sydney and Melbourne in Australia, and Wellington and Auckland in New Zealand. From Sydney, which had by far the richest archival collections, I proceeded to visit the island seminaries. I covered all the island groups from New Guinea in the west to Tahiti in the east, and from Kiribati in the north to Tonga in the south. Although I saw all the seminaries in the islands, I found little in the way of archives, as they were all located in metropolitan areas. Nevertheless, I came home with masses of material that would keep me busy for years to come. Virtually all of my writing about the Pacific dates from that trip. Previously, I had written on more general subjects—a book of readings from old sources on non-western Christianity, a book about the involvement of Christians in mid-twentieth-century independence movements, and so on. From that time on, however, I wrote almost exclusively about the Pacific, publishing two books and a number of articles.

In the process, I made some surprising new contacts. Once, while trying to look up a reference in the Yale library, I found that the book I needed was out on interlibrary loan. I asked the librarian to give me the name and address of the borrower so that I could write and ask them to check the reference for me. It turned out that the person who had the book was a professor at a university in British Columbia. He sent me not only the reference but an invitation to the next meeting of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, a group I had never heard of before. He also asked me to give a paper for a session they were planning to hold on mission, church, and sect in Oceania. This was a wonderful opportunity for me, because up to then I had

found nobody to talk with about the Pacific, the subject being beyond the horizon of the mission study groups in the United States.

After that unexpected introduction, I attended the association's meetings year after year. The anthropologists I met there had all done field work in the Pacific and were full of interest in everything having to do with the region. Anthropologists of an earlier generation, such as Bronislaw Malinowski, had understandably felt considerable hostility toward missions, which were changing the cultures they wanted to study in an unchanged form. But that era had passed and the younger anthropologists were interested in every aspect of the Pacific islanders' culture, including their churches. I remember a speech given by Margaret Mead's daughter to this group of anthropologists. She said that in her mother's day, anthropology was a salvage operation, an attempt to save cultures that were disappearing before it was too late. But that approach, she said, didn't do justice to the people themselves. They should be studied as they were and as they wished to change. This new generation of anthropologists was very hospitable to studying the churches as part of the culture.

Not only were anthropologists changing, missions were too. They were becoming interested in interreligious dialogue in which each partner would respect the integrity of the other and be willing to listen as well as speak, to learn as well as teach. Departments of interreligious dialogue were formed in the World Council of Churches for Protestants and in the Vatican for Catholics. In addition to the promotion of dialogue, there was a new interest in studying and adapting to the cultures of the world. I started a course on Christianity and non-Western cultures in which we explored whether any cultural norms are inevitably associated with Christianity. This forced us to consider some very tough questions concerning attitudes toward time, the place for history, and the relationship between humanity and nature. At the same time, the word *missions* was falling out of favor and being replaced by words that had more to do with globalization. Missionaries, for example, were being called "fraternal workers." I was the last professor of missions at Yale. My successor, Lamin Sanneh, was called professor of world Christianity. Lamin comes from west Africa and speaks to groups like the World Economic Forum in Davos. It's a different world and he fits into it very well.

I tried to introduce a course on Pacific island Christianity at Yale, but found almost no takers. The part of the world that everybody was interested in during the 1960s and '70s was Africa. This was a time when universities all across the country were opening departments of African studies. Yale started a Council on African Studies, which I joined from the beginning. I started a course on African Christianity that was well attended and continued teaching it until I retired.

My interest in Africa was accompanied by a growing commitment to the civil rights of African-Americans. I made several trips to Washington to lobby and picket on behalf of the civil rights bill. In those days, a car went every night from Union Theological Seminary in New York to Washington, and another car from Washington

to New York, making it easy to go for the day and return the following night. In 1963, an entire train load of us went down from New Haven for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s big march on Washington. Bob Johnson, the dean of the Divinity School, and I also took part in one of Dr. King's marches in Selma, Alabama. Before the march began, we took a little walk around the town to see what it was like. As we passed a garage, several men jumped out, grabbed me, and tried to drag me into the garage. I wrested myself free and ran to Bob, but they didn't chase me. The next day I realized how serious the incident might have been: one of the other marchers, a student from Princeton Theological Seminary, had been dragged into a garage, hit over the head with a pipe, and killed. I was glad to get home safe and sound from that particular trip.

At that time, the idea was gaining currency in missions that if you wanted to help the poor, you shouldn't reach down from above and try to give them a helping hand. You should live among them and join their efforts to help themselves. So in 1975, when our last child graduated from high school, my wife and I moved to the Hill area of New Haven, which had—and still has—the greatest concentration of poverty in the city. My wife was already teaching in an inner-city public school. We found an apartment in the home of a black family and I looked forward to becoming involved in neighborhood activities. Early on, we tried to form a block club under the leadership of our landlord. We held a very fine block party, with a cookout in the middle of the street, but the neighbors began to feel that our landlord was too dominating. Soon they stopped coming to meetings and the block club disappeared.

My wife hoped to get a parent-teacher organization going in her school. After a few years, she found a couple of parents who were very interested in the idea and ready to work on it. The trouble was that the principal of the school viewed any parental involvement as parental interference. He thwarted the parents in every way he could until they finally gave up.

I made my first attempt to join a neighborhood organization when I went to a meeting of the Hill Neighborhood Corporation. This was the first neighborhood corporation in the country to be set up as part of President Lyndon Johnson's "war on poverty." Unfortunately, it had not been well run and was on its last legs: the meeting I attended turned out to be its last. Every second person who came to that meeting received a turkey, which I understood had been bought for extravagant prices from the local grocer. That was one example of how poorly the corporation was managed. No wonder it collapsed shortly thereafter.

Then another organization sprang up called People Acting for Change. It started out very well, with Hill residents working alongside a number of Yale undergraduates. The Catholic Archdiocese in Hartford learned about the initiative and gave it some funds. That proved to be the organization's undoing. As the participants competed for control of funds, all their energies went into the power struggle rather than into the work they were supposed to be doing. When the archdiocese heard about the situation, they cut off the funding, and when the money stopped, the group collapsed.

In the mid-1970s, Yale asked me to head up a faculty-student committee on town-gown relations. We met for the greater part of a year and came out with a long list of recommendations, which the university administration took very seriously. I think that was the beginning of the better relationship between Yale and New Haven, which has developed so much in recent years. Yale also asked me to serve as its representative to New Haven's new antipoverty agency, the Community Action Agency. I sat on the board and eventually became treasurer. We had a million-dollar budget with which I thought we could do great things. In fact, we did do some things, such as providing heating oil and medical transportation to poor families, but it was nothing like what I thought a million dollars would accomplish. I came to believe that the problem, in part, was too much red tape. The agency staff was spending so much time studying regulations and going to conferences that little else got done. The regulations weren't even effective in preventing corruption. Some years after I left the board, the staff person in charge of finances, under whose direction I had signed all the checks, was arrested for taking kickbacks from the oil companies to whom she awarded contracts. She was tried, convicted, and put in jail. I began to wonder whether the authorities would come for me next, but the problems were long past by then.

After twelve years of living on the Hill, the time came for my retirement from Yale. My wife decided to retire from the public schools at the same time, and she and I moved back to our old home in Bethany. One thing we wanted to do was to go to the Pacific and teach. Although I had made many trips to the region, for conferences and research, I had never stayed and worked in the Pacific islands over an extended period. We decided to spend a semester at the theological school in Fiji. I taught history, while my wife taught music to the children of the students. A short time after that, we spent a semester teaching together in American Samoa, and later I went alone to Western Samoa, as it was then called, to do the same thing. Western Samoa has now become just Samoa—fairly, I think, because four-fifths of the land mass of the Samoan Islands is in the west, and all the high titles of Samoan society are in the west.

In recent years, I have continued to write about the Pacific. My latest article, on the new theology coming out of the region, was published in 2005. It has been astonishing to me to see theological books and articles produced by Pacific islanders. When I first went to the Pacific, there was no education which brought people anywhere near the level where they could produce books and articles. Now there is quite a flourishing field, with islanders writing all the time. The main emphasis in their theology seems to be on reviving ancient Pacific island values in Christianity or expressing Christianity with Pacific island values attached—values such as community life and the sacredness of the land and the sea, in contrast to western individualism and exploitation of nature. These native writers feel that the Pacific islands have a real contribution to make to the rest of the world in this respect, and I'm rather inclined to agree with them.