

A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation

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Globalization and Technology

When my parents' fathers died in 1948 and 1950, respectively, they received the sad news by telegram in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) where they were serving as missionaries. They didn't speak to any family members by phone, including their mother and stepmother, and certainly didn't entertain for a moment the idea of returning to North America for the funerals. Almost all communication with the rest of the family was by letter, which meant that weeks could pass until they got any answers to questions they had or satisfied their need for more details. In 1955, when they returned to Africa for another six-year missionary term, my older brother remained in North America to finish his high school education and attend college. During those six years, again the only communication between my parents and my brother (and me and my younger brother) was by letter.

This is unheard of today. Forget the fact that families are no longer expected to leave children behind with no physical contact for years at a time while they serve the church in a foreign land; even if they were, they could be in constant contact by e-mail, internet chat rooms, blogs, personal web sites, and computer phone hook-ups—and it doesn't even cost all that much. Extended family

members frequently visit missionaries during their term overseas, and there is often if not always a home leave during the term. Travel and communication even to some of the remotest areas of the world happens relatively easily, thanks to technology and a shrinking world made possible by globalization.

In a paraphrase of John Donne, "no one is an island" anymore; we are all interconnected. The proverbial six degrees of separation really works: it is entirely likely that each person in the world can connect him or herself to everyone else through no more than six people. For example, I live here in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, and I know Mennonite Central Committee workers in Bethlehem, Palestine, who work with a Palestinian organization employing an olive gardener whose family lives in a small village where everyone knows everyone else....and voila, I'm connected to everyone in that small village in only five steps.

This edition of *Shalom!* highlights some of the issues resulting from this interconnectedness of the modern world. It also follows thematically from the Spring edition on immigration. Even as countries are trying to secure and maintain their national borders, those borders are becoming more and more porous, not only because it is difficult to

control the movements of people, but also because with everything being so connected in so many ways by various forms of technology, national boundaries end up not meaning a whole lot anyway. For Christians, globalization and technology present new challenges and opportunities for fulfilling the Great Commission, both at home and in other parts of the world. I invite you to ponder those challenges and opportunities, and your own role in the global village.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Subscription renewals: If your label has "05" on it, that means you have not renewed your subscription for 2006, and therefore this will be your last issue. To make sure you don't miss any issues, send your check for \$15 for one year, made payable to the Brethren in Christ Church, to me (address on page 2). A heartfelt thanks to all who have contributed so far this year; we need your support to be able to continue publishing *Shalom!*

Upcoming topics: The Fall 2006 edition will be on the theme of "Advocating for Peace and Justice." Topics for 2007 have not yet been finalized. If you have ideas for topics, please let me know. ☺

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

Micro-Enterprise as a New Tool for Mission Work

By Vern Hyndman

Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish; and you have fed him for a lifetime.

I come honestly by my interest in microenterprise as a vehicle for Godly endeavor: I come from a family deep in the tradition of acting on the Great Commission. My grandfather has been dead ten years, yet the funds from his foundation still provide Christian literature to people in India each year. My mother is the Canadian executive director of Childcare International, which has provided child sponsorship for 40 years in 32 countries. She loves her kids, those who were human refuse, kids who have grown and become moms and dads, pastors, neurosurgeons, and fellow followers of Jesus. It is a legacy that I'm only starting to understand and embrace. I have struggled to find my place, to contribute in a way that uses those gifts and the experience that God has developed in me, and I have a strong desire that my life be significant, that the net result of my life outlast me. I have embraced the concept that I won't be able to take it with

me but that I can send it on ahead, but I also wish to leave the earth a better place because God granted me life. I wish to continue in the rich tradition passed on to me, to most effectively steward all that God has blessed me with. I have come to know that microenterprise (ME) will be a significant aspect of how this happens in my life.

The world has changed over the years since the missions of my fore bearers. The information age and instant access has made governments, missionaries, and despots all aware of the awesome power of public opinion. Countries are now becoming more skeptical and pay far closer attention to external influences. Money, the power it brings, and the influence it buys is coming under more scrutiny, and there may soon come a time when infusions of money that my mom so carefully administers will become illegal and impossible. As *so* poignantly depicted in the opening scenes of the movie *Blackhawk Down*, food has become an instrument of control, and even external food delivery is being usurped and redirected. Potable water will be to the next few generations what oil is today, but clearly with a higher cost of failure.

Loosely defined by Wikipedia, microenterprise is "a business started with as little capital as possible, or less capital than would be usual for a business."

Russell P. Mask, PhD., in an article published on the web site of the Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organization (AERDO), web site defines ME development:

Microenterprise development is a development strategy that provides a broad package of microfinancial services (savings, credit, and insurance) as well as other business development services (business training, marketing assistance, etc.) to entrepreneurs and the poor to enable them to operate their own productive economic activities.

My experience is that ME development exists in a continuum that encompasses both definitions. The genius of ME development lies in the fact that it unabashedly lifts the best that capitalism has to offer, and places it in a context not likely to germinate such an endeavor

without an initial push. It is employed by giant non-governmental organizations (NGOs), yet scales to the interpersonal.

There will come a time when external help is cut off, when the methods we have used for centuries to fulfill the Great Commission are no longer viable. Foreigners to a country will find it harder to operate in-country. Despots will cut off the money in an attempt to control those we would help. The model of direct wealth transfer is difficult to maintain, and becomes drowned out by competing demands for each dollar. Funds are sometimes donated based on emotional whims of the givers, rather than effective stewardship of all that God gives us. And the help stops short when the cash stream stops. In-country, there is no viral growth; what happens is limited via the tenuous revenue stream. Those waiting for the resources are often unnecessarily tested in their faith that resources will appear, and unpredictability results in missed opportunity. When traditional funding was the only viable model, we did what we could. I believe we can do better.

Borne out of necessity, many have embraced the model that Paul demonstrated, known as tent making. It has been a good model, tested over 2000 years, and suggested in the word of God; and besides who wants to argue with Paul? There are some inherent flaws, one of which is exhausted missionaries who become increasingly less effective in either work or missions. In reality, ME is simply a variant of tent making, a new twist on an old concept, using methodology foreign to the apostles. ME also is designed, as I believe was true of Paul, to ultimately leave the tent factory and the mission to those who have joined him.

ME can be used to delineate between the engine creating the resources, and the delivery mechanism of the resources. A specific ME, say a woodworking shop, might be purposed to fund an orphanage, a case in which the ME has no direct tie to the mission that its resources are funding.

Some are seeing a more holistic role for specific ME implementations. Take for example a water purification and distribution business, set up in the ME

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model. A target area and partners are selected, and a business is formed. An American partner supplies the equipment and installation, and indigenous partners are trained to maintain, manage and grow the enterprise. The enterprise includes purification, various modes of containers from individual bottling to bulk, logistics and payment. This enterprise is labor intensive, requiring a significant workforce.

Imagine using the cash assets generated by this business to purchase back 8-10-year-old girls sold into sexual slavery. In many parts of the world, loans are collateralized on a family's daughters. Often the loan is predestined to default, but however it happens, the net result of default is a daughter sold into prostitution. There are organizations currently buying these girls back, but finite limits exist to how many. Truly the purchase price presents a problem, but after that, what does one do with that many broken girls, who desperately need healing and a safe environment? Through a holistic implementation of an ME business, the treatment facility and a safe environment including a job are provided, in an environment where generally the poor struggle to find work, and poor women don't fare well.

I have been astounded by the sheer simplicity and elegance of some of the ME implementations. In one ex-Russian satellite, a six-foot cubic crate is received regularly that is packed *full* of shoes discarded by Los Angeles area thrift stores. The shoes are often garish or outdated by LA standards, but are welcomed because they have been manufactured to American standards, and bring over \$20 American per pair.

Another elegant yet simple idea is a dental cooperative. In cities that are more than one day's travel from a dentist, it is common that a person requiring dental attention loses two days of work, but pays the equivalent of another day in travel expenses. In such an environment, one can collect 10 cents per month as dues for maintaining membership in a dental cooperative from each of a thousand families. The 10 cents guarantees them the ability to schedule an appointment with a dentist once a month. The dentist travels between four cities, and works a schedule packed by those in the co-op. The coordinator of the co-op collects 10 cents a month from 4000 families, as well as 20% of the gross billing of the dentist.

ME is a radical departure from much of the methodology and thinking that has characterized missions in the past. It is almost always accomplished in partnership. It would be possible for a group to buy water purification infrastructure and donate it, lock, stock, and barrel, to a ME group in-country. If the needs of the recipient group are \$1500 per month US, the enterprise will approach that goal, and will reach a steady state of profitability: \$1,500 becomes the magic number. The equipment might well be designed to support an operation that generates \$10,000 a month, and in a setting where this is possible, but experience says that the plant will produce at \$1500 a month. Consider the alternative, in which a partner funds the infrastructure and maintains an interest in the business. Such a partner might demand productivity that results in a more appropriate \$10,000 per month, and in doing so, assuming

an equal partnership, actually receives \$5,000 per month. The net effect for the operator group in-country is that their payday is \$5,000 as well, far more than the \$1,500 they would have experienced. Presenting this to a group who has for years been pushing money into a country often initially seems obscene. This model is based on principles even despots understand, it passes the smell test because it follows the model of all other foreign investment and it is under the radar.

A significant possibility exists that future generations of Christians will become personally involved in developing a single ME, much the same as many of our contemporaries experience a single lifetime mission trip. The world is changed one person at a time. ☺

References:

Russel Mask, "Christian Microenterprise Development: Counting the Cost and Building the Kingdom ." Available online at http://www.aerdo.org/pdf/christian_microenterprise.pdf.

Childcare International: <http://www.childcareministries.net>

Vern Hyndman is a radical follower of Jesus, husband to Shelley, a RN and trauma nurse, and father to Zachary, Lauren, Kaitlin and Elijah. He has been a full-time stay at home dad, entrepreneur, CIO, biomedical research engineer, and will generally do the dishes. He is currently a full-time instructor at Harrisburg Area Community College, and with Shelley is a lay counselor in the county prison and with those who struggle mightily with addiction. He attends New Life Community Church, a Brethren in Christ church plant in Carlisle, PA.

No More Third World

By Allen Graybill Brubaker

In the ongoing controversy about "Guest Workers" or "Illegal Aliens," by whatever name they are called, there is the repeated statement that they are doing jobs American workers are unwilling to do. In rebuttal one union spokesperson was reported to say, "Americans are willing to do those jobs but not for third world wages!"

In spite of massive opposition—for example, riots at World Trade meetings—globalization is putting an end to "the

third world." It will continue to move by fits and starts and may well take another century but it is happening. Like it or not we are competing with Third World wages. The day is over when the West determines the shape of the world. As Bryan Walsh says of culture: "Pop Culture no longer moves simply in a single direction, from the West to the rest of the world. Instead it's a global swirl, no more constrained by borders than the weather."¹

There are two significant viewpoints on

this phenomenon. On the one hand the massive movement of both manufacturing and information technology jobs overseas is seen as the beginning of a leveling of the economic playing field. As production is increasingly in the hand of multi-national companies it is going where labor costs are low.² Not only are hourly wages very high in North America but the added levels of benefits keep driving the costs of production higher and higher, making the pastures of the rest of the world look ever

greener to producers.

The reaction to the loss of jobs somewhat resembles what has been called the lifeboat syndrome. Those few in the lifeboat, dry and safe, see the masses struggling in the water trying to get into the lifeboat as a mortal threat. The fear is that they will sink the lifeboat and everyone will drown. So ever higher boundary fences are built to keep them out. As the differences between those in the boat and those in the water grow - the rich getting richer and the poor poorer - those in the water increase in number and in desperation to climb aboard.

Moving the jobs to the people in the sea gradually increases their economic level which relieves the desperation to get into the boat. However, the people in the sea then produce goods for consumption by the people in the lifeboat. The underlying objection of those in the boat is that the move makes the lifeboat leak. Gradually they fear that they will become less dry and less safe. As the situation becomes more severe, increased measures must be taken to repair the leaks.

The first of these is to insist that the goods produced by the world's poor must be kept out of the lifeboat because the poor are being exploited by not being paid living wages. But the poor are flocking to the new industries in their own lands because those poor wages are much better than "homesteading on a mountain of garbage"³ where they can salvage recyclables worth \$10.00 per day - plus some scraps of decaying food. If the "safe" people are able to enforce "living wages," there is a two-fold result: a wealthy elite grows in the poor country and only a select few of the poor in the wider world have any hope of a better life than working a garbage heap, which, in itself, is better than any available alternative. It also reduces the incentive of the multi-national to set up more job opportunities in the poor country. Whether the "moral" objection to the use of goods produced by underpaid workers is a greater motivator than the threat of a leaky boat is a matter of conjecture. At least it helps salve consciences.

The second perspective is that the illegal workers keep the wages in the rich country low. If they were all sent home industry would find ways to mechanize and produce

the goods at or near present levels. When I was in the hospital in 1960, the union man in the next bed was clamoring for higher wages. I warned him that it would only cause mechanization. He replied that there are jobs machines cannot do. How surprised he would be today.

But why should it take another century to level the playing field? There is the resistance of the boat people. But a far greater delay is in the poor countries themselves. There is the story of a Rubber Baron, in a previous century, who needed workers for his rubber plantation in South America. As soon as the people had their first pay they did not come to work because their needs were supplied. In an illuminative moment the Baron

distributed Sears and Roebuck catalogues. When the women saw the nice clothes, they drove their men to work to get the pictured finery.

I witnessed a similar incident in Zambia. When the Kariba Lake filled, the colonial government stocked it with bream, a very marketable fish. An ice-making plant was established on the shores and the local people were trained in fishing and advanced boats, motors and nets. Huge amounts of fish were caught and traders came in droves from the cities. They loaded up the fish packed in the ice and established a brisk trade. When they came back for more fish there were none. The local villagers explained that they still had money left from the earlier sales. They were enjoying their leisure and would not go out to fish until they needed more money. The ice plant was abandoned and dismantled.

But there are videos. A dealer in Blantyre, Malawi buys the stuff that is produced in the West. He copies it and rents out the degrading videos which entrepreneurs show in townships. The consequences of that were identified by a student at the Evangelical Bible College of Malawi as a main reason for the enormous moral problems in the country.

Besides validating sexual immorality and feeding the AIDS pandemic which is killing off the productive segment of the population,⁴ the hope of living at the standards projected in the videos stimulates the corruption which makes

possible the purchase of condominiums in London. Greed causes governments to put limitations on international investment which discourages job creation and even results in disinvestment.

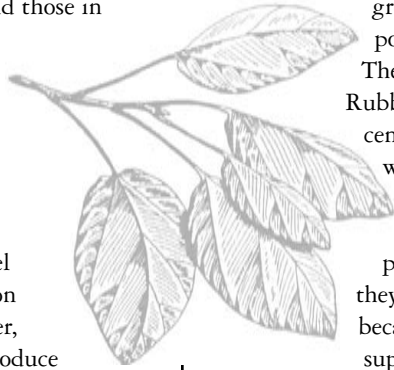
Another factor is the lack of loyalty to the company a person works for. While this is becoming a common feature in America, we still live, somewhat, on the hidden moral capital of the days when a person's word was his or her bond. In spite of the fact that "the leadership, influence, growth and center of gravity in Christianity is shifting from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern Hemisphere,"⁵ the moral foundations are not there. It will take as long for them to develop as it is taking America to lose them.

America's solution to problems is to throw money at them. Is foreign aid the answer? We have so very much in contrast to what the poor people have. Perhaps we should bundle it all up and send it to the poor. After all, is that not what Jesus taught us? We have been doing that for generations now. What are the results?

Much is being said of forgiving the huge debts of the countries of Africa. It has been reported that there is more money owed to Africa by Europe than is owed by Africa to Europe. The difference is that the money owed to Africa is in personal accounts while governments in Africa owe money to Europe. The report goes on to say that 80% of the money donated to Africa for development projects went back to Europe in personal accounts and the purchase of properties by individuals.

Even the donation of food supplies is often counter-productive. The donated grains compete with the work of the local farmer who is unable to match the give-away and loses his income. Huge containers of used clothing are donated and flood the country. Meanwhile the once vast cotton industry with a renowned manufacturing plant is devastated and almost totally lost.

Perhaps the greatest curse of aid is the dependency it perpetuates. This relates to human nature, not just to a segment of it. "The historical record of regions like southern Italy suggest that such aid has a tendency to promote perpetual dependence." A Kenyan economics expert, James Shikwati, was much more blunt. In an interview in the German SPIEGEL ONLINE he says: "If (Germans) really want to fight poverty, they should completely halt development aid and give Africa the



opportunity to ensure its own survival. Currently, Africa is like a child that immediately cries for its babysitter when something goes wrong. Africa should stand on its own two feet.”⁶

Added to low expectations, immorality and corruption, must be civil wars, both tribal and religious. With all of this is there any hope for a level playing field—ever? Yes, there is. Having personally witnessed the progress of Africa over a period of more than a half century I have seen the beginnings of what the future likely holds. I have seen businessmen who understand management, but not very many. Preventive maintenance is foreign to the culture.⁷

I was teaching management to my junior college class of excellent students. They were expressing their Afro-pessimism: we Africans cannot do anything; only the Asians and Europeans can do these things. I

objected. I declared that I had a lot of hope for Africa. Where was my hope? I pointed to them one by one. You are my hope. You can do something about it. My regret is that I am not twenty years younger so I could give those years to Africa all over again. 🙏

Graybill Brubaker is retired from many years of service with Brethren in Christ World Missions in Africa and from the pastorate. He and his wife live at Messiah Village, Mechanicsburg, PA.

¹ TIME Vol 167 No. 19 May 8 2006 Page 160

² These jobs are now being outsourced from India as their wages are losing their competitive edge. “Sudip Banerjee, President of Enterprise Solutions at Wipro ...says: “The jobs will go to those who can do them best, in the most cost effective manner. Geography is irrelevant” TIME Vol 167, No. 26 June 26 2006

³ The un-attributed quotations and some background for this article comes from a writing of Paul Krugman, who is a professor of economics at MIT. His books include *The Age of Diminished Expectations and Peddling Prosperity*. Posted Friday, March 21, 1997, In *Praise of Cheap Labor on The Dismal Science*; <http://www.slate.com/id/1918>

⁴ “This has led his ministry to have a deficit of 800 people in its workforce. ... Parliamentary Speaker Sam Mpasu shocked the nation when he disclosed that Parliament had lost 28 MPs to AIDS in four years alone.” BBC News 2003/02/18

⁵ TIME Vol. 167 No. 19 May 8 2006 Page 61

⁶ Interview conducted by Thilo Thielke Translated from the German. www.spiegel.de/flash/content/0,5532,11615,00

⁷ Africa’s leading Philosopher, John S Mbiti writes: “African ideas of time concern mainly the past and the present and have little to say about the future.” Introduction to African Religion Hinemann Publishers 1991 Edition Page 37

Globalization and Missions

By Daryl Climenhaga

July 2006 saw the most recent edition of soccer’s World Cup. In the final game between France and Italy, one player lost his temper with another (France’s Zidane with Italy’s Materazzi), illustrating the global minefield within which we live. Zidane is a nominal Muslim with roots in North Africa. Internet discussions and news reports flew around the world, with accusations that the Italian had used racial insults. This particular global conversation is just one example of how thoroughly interconnected our world is, in which an insult on a soccer field in Germany is debated and reacted to around the world.

The fact is that, in the interconnected world in which we live, our words and actions in North America can be as easily misunderstood as the action on the soccer field. How does that influence our missionary task overseas? Living in Canada, I know I can’t really answer the question; those who live and work overseas can tell you better than I can how our actions at home might affect their situation. I can give some hunches—guesses waiting for corroboration or correction from those who know better.

Hunch #1: People overseas don't think what we expect them to think.

We (in our context this usually means

Americans) don’t realize what our actions look like to the rest of the world. When our family was traveling through southern Africa and Europe in 2003 during my sabbatical, we realized that whatever we think of the American occupation of Iraq, most people in Europe and Africa see it as an unjustified invasion of another sovereign state. Many do not perceive it as a part of the war on terror, but rather as American aggression.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq is the most dramatic example of the way that American actions influence the work of American missionaries. I use it as a handy illustration: I do not intend to say anything about what the United States (or any other country) should be doing there.

Hunch #2: These different perceptions (misunderstandings) may hinder the gospel.

If people see us as representatives of our country, they may project dislike of our country onto our preaching of the gospel. North American missionaries overseas can challenge me or corroborate my hunch, but I expect that our lifestyle in North America hinders the preaching of the gospel.

Thirty years ago I served a three-year

term with Brethren in Christ World Missions in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia). I thought that as missionaries we had remained politically neutral. It was only in later years I realized that people assumed we sided with the White minority government of Ian Smith. That assumption (whether fair or not) hindered our ministry with the people.

Similar perceptions today are part of the impact of Brethren in Christ work among Muslims in England, whether at Speaker’s Corner or in debates in the universities. That effect may remain, even though our personnel in England have made their own position about the invasion of Iraq quite clear. (Note again, I am not speaking for our personnel; if they say that there is no effect in their work from America’s actions, you can take their word for it.)

Hunch #3: It is worth listening to other people's interpretations.

Our first impulse is to explain to people how wrong they are about us. I have been in enough conversations with other people (both students where I teach, as well as my peers) to know that we do not listen well to people from other countries when they criticize us. We quickly explain what the

correct interpretation is, and get back to what we were doing in the first place.

I used to be a pastor. When a couple has a marital problem, the first step often is simply to help them hear each other. When divorce threatens, we observe the truth that both parties are responsible to some extent. As Americans we may think of ourselves as in a similar conflict with other parts of the world. Like the aggrieved spouse, we are ready to tell our side of the story. But a good counselor will help us hear the other person's side of the story, because we need to know their story too if we want to reconcile and grow together.

In a thoroughly interconnected world, we need the rest of the world just as much as they need us. That means we have to learn to hear the rest of the world respond to what we do. Missionaries are usually pretty good at this; they know enough to

listen more than explain when people in the host country talk about America. The greater task belongs to the supporting church in North America.

A possible response for North Americans

I don't have advice here for our missionaries. They know we live in an interconnected world in which re-broadcasts of American television and movies persuades people that "Christian" America is a pretty corrupt place. I do have a suggestion for us.

When we make our political and economic and entertainment choices here, think about how our choices might look to people elsewhere. If you would be embarrassed by their perception, it may be worth reconsidering your choice. You may

end up doing the same thing anyway, but it's worth making the effort to hear other people around the world. It's especially good if we have some international friends who share our Christian faith and can help us filter our actions through their broader perspective. What kind of car do you drive? What kind of house do you live in? What movies do you watch? How do you act when you're playing baseball or basketball? It is not just other people in your town who may be turned off to the church by your choices; just as the world watched Zidane thrust his head into Materazzi's chest, so the world is watching what we do. And they measure our Christian witness by our American actions. 🙏

Daryl Climenbaga is associate professor of global studies at Providence College and Seminary, Otterburne, Manitoba.

A Global Classroom

By Ray Bailey

There are 40 students in my World Religions class. They range from active military personnel, spouses of military personnel, to ex-cons, to students who recently received their general education diploma (GED). Two are in Korea, one in Japan, one in Germany, another is a military courier moving back and forth between the Pentagon and Guantanamo, and the rest are scattered around the eastern United States from Brooklyn to rural Ohio. All are enrolled in Axia College, which is part of University of Phoenix (U of P), a for-profit online university owned by The Apollo Group, Inc.

The advantages of a virtual classroom appear evident from the type of students and its global reach. Axia students are in associate's degree programs, with University of Phoenix offering bachelor degrees up to a few specialty doctorates. Without the need to attend a "brick and mortar" institution, students who are bereft of other options have the educational world opened up to them.

In 2005, federal law cancelled a previous limit of two on-line students per every brick and mortar student. This has freed the Apollo Group to expand its on-line capacity without investing further in "hard" classrooms. They initiated a major

hiring blitz to fill the faculty roster to match student demand. As of June 2006, there are over 40,000 Axia students and over 220,000 U of P students.

According to Axia faculty sources, the student drop rate is about 40%, which is about average for non-profit and for-profit on-line schools alike. The drop rate is less high for brick and mortar schools where students have face-to-face contact with instructors, which says something about accountability in the on-line world.

In addition, there are ongoing issues with accreditation. Many traditional institutions will not accept credits from on-line schools. By its very nature the stringent requirements of brick and mortar schools cannot be met by an on-line school. Yet there is a middle ground where on-line students can work toward intermediate goals that satisfy industry. The focus of an on-line school is centered on the "professional" aspects of a working person. Business-valued accreditation is a new concept to traditional accreditation and is a political minefield.

My classroom is a web page discussion engine (similar to the web-enabled version of BIC-Talk or www.bic-forum.org) that can be accessed from anywhere in the world. The curriculum is a downloadable

set of weekly chapters of text in Adobe PDF file format, with Word documents, video segments, PowerPoint presentations, and Axia College electronic library access. There are three main web pages for each student. The main classroom is where I post assignments, discussion questions, and general instructions for each week. For socialization, there is a chat room where the students are free to discuss anything with each other. Then each student has a private individual page, where I can discuss privately with each student and post his or her graded papers.

The classroom is asynchronous, which means students can access it any time, 24/7 as long as they post assignments by due date at midnight their local time zone. Each student reads assignments, then takes quizzes and tests on the material, which I grade and return via the web page. As the instructor, I keep "office hours" which are posted, and I answer questions, post assignments and generally run the class during these hours. If a student needs to contact me by phone, they can do it during my office hours. However, the student's individual web page is the primary means of communication. I can usually respond to a student's question within 24 hours.

The classes are nine weeks long. One

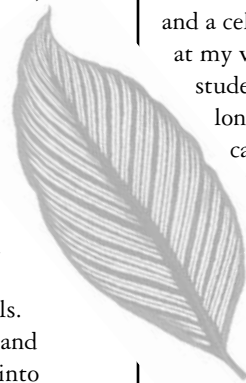
week is a “work week” where students read class material, and take “Check-Point” quizzes so I can assess how they are absorbing the material. There is one major assignment due at the end of a work week, which is a paper or a PowerPoint presentation on the material. The next week is a “discussion week” where I post “Discussion Questions” from the syllabus and students discuss aspects of it between themselves. I watch and guide this discussion by posting leading questions and observing the responses. This is much like a real classroom discussion, just not face-to-face or at the same time.

The class web server automatically counts attendance. Students are required to login or “attend” three days out of seven. On participation weeks, they must post a minimum of two “substantive” messages to the ongoing discussion for three days out of the week. As the Instructor, I am the judge of what “substantive” means and give points accordingly. If a student does not attend for 22 consecutive days, the server will automatically drop them from class.

The two biggest issues facing an instructor are accountability and plagiarism. As mentioned before, without direct face-to-face contact, and the fact a student is not bound to attend at any

particular time and place, the tendency to let assignments and class work slide is formidable. Many students do not have the internal discipline to maintain attendance. Part of my job is to keep in contact with them and motivate them to keep working. Since this is a “for-profit” enterprise, there is pressure on me to keep the paying customer in class. On the other hand, the student is paying their own hard-earned money for the course, and reminding them of that sometimes helps motivate them.

Plagiarism is a major problem for the on-line setting just as it is for the brick and mortar schools. It is simple for a student to “cut and paste” text from an internet site into an assignment. Some spend more time creatively cutting and pasting than if they had written it in the first place. To help faculty identify plagiarism an on-site utility is available. I can post a paper and have it analyzed. It will report on any text that matches internet or previously submitted papers. An instructor’s judgment and intuition are paramount to sniff out possible plagiarism. At the least, I can flunk the paper and ask for a rewrite. At the worst, I initiate an Axia review with



possible expulsion. Axia and U of P have Plagiarism tutorials and interactive guides available to all students, and we take violations seriously.

As an instructor, I likewise teach my class from anywhere. I have broadband connection at home for busy class days, and a cell phone PC card for when I am at my vacation trailer in Canada. For my students, it matters not where I am. As long as I can log into the web page, I can instruct, just as they can learn.

The freedom to teach without driving to a brick and mortar school is just as freeing to me as it is for the students. I have held my office hours sitting on the banks of the Niagara River!

For the person who is looking for educational options the on-line school is certainly a viable choice. Within its limits, it can provide the student with a chance to make a move up. 🍀

Ray Bailey is in the apprentice writer program of the Christian Writers' Guild, and a proud grandpa. He and his wife live in Clarence, New York, where they attend the Ransom Creek Brethren in Christ Church.

From Hollywood to Cairo

By Andrea Saylor

A four-hour train ride south of Cairo, Egypt’s capital city, lies a town called Al-Minya. Like most inhabited places in Egypt, Minya kisses the Nile. Once last November I ate lunch along the river, and saw across the water the famous “MINYA” sign. Set upon a hill and made of five separate tall, white, block letters, the sign garnered the attention, laughter, and cameras of my North American friends, because it seemed to mimic the “HOLLYWOOD” sign in California.

And of course, we laughed because Minya and Hollywood are so incongruous. In our minds, Hollywood stands for glamour, money, fame, scandal, talent, shows and spectacles, the cream of the crop, secularism, beautiful people, making it in the U.S.A. And to us, Minya seems dusty, conservative, inexpensive, not famous, religious, family-oriented, partly

agricultural. What had Minya to do with Hollywood?

The question arose many times during my year in Cairo, and not just when I saw the Minya sign. Because, though Hollywood knows little of Minya, many people from Minya know something of Hollywood. While Cairo produces Arabic movies, and billboards of Arab pop stars line its bustling overpasses, American movies and music are also prevalent. A number of theaters in Cairo play American films with Arabic subtitles. Cable channels (and those who cannot afford cable can often splice cable) show both Arabic and American music videos, TV shows, and films. An Egyptian friend of mine used to ask me about my favorite actors; she finds Tom Cruise and Antonio Banderas beautiful.

What should one make of this media

proliferation? Well, I faced an unpleasant facet of it almost immediately upon arriving in Egypt. I took an Arabic class with several other young American women, and we discovered that harassment—from sometimes innocent whispers of “honey” to grabbing in crowded buses to the occasional indecent exposure—would shape our experience of Cairo’s streets. In a city where most women cover their hair and wear long sleeves even in scorching heat, we knew we stuck out, though we dressed more modestly than we did at home. But did being foreigners really merit this level of attention? We peppered our teachers with questions.

We received similar answers from different sources throughout the year. First, we heard, harassment can happen to all women, even the most conservatively dressed. Secondly, we had to understand

that the young men looking at us may have only ever seen white women in American films, in the soap opera “The Bold and the Beautiful,” and in pornography, all of which, thanks to technology and its opportunistic users, travels to Egypt quickly and abundantly. Cairene men grow up among women who cover themselves, in a culture that separates men and women and gives everyone a religion. Both Muslims and Christians consider sex before marriage a sin. Women do not show their shoulders in public and engaged couples often see each other only in chaperoned situations. Even a mild American sitcom breaks Egyptian cultural boundaries in most episodes. Men here, we heard, usually only see white women in what they consider positions of sexual openness and transgression. Some of them assumed we were loose too.

At first, this seemed naïve. Don't we all know not to believe everything we see on television? Yet the longer I stayed in Egypt—and the more I heard this explanation from people—the more I understood. So many Egyptians had access to images of America through film; why disbelieve those images? An American friend who taught English came to me

frustrated one day and explained that her class knew more about the birth of two unmarried American movie stars' child than she did. “What must they think of our society when these are the American lives they know about?” she asked.

Another American friend found himself bombarded by requests for visas. People often hear that money and comfort exist abundantly in North America. Frustrated by the frequency with which he found Egyptians aspiring to the American Dream, always trying to explain that he didn't know how to get visas and that many poor people live in America too, he grew suspicious of the television. Do films help fuel discontent with Egypt and the belief in a wealthy, classless American society? As he sat chatting with men in coffee shops, glancing at the television in the corner that sometimes played American TV, comparing the homes of sitcom characters to the often-crowded apartments of Cairenes, he was afraid they do.

I don't consider Hollywood some kind of inherent evil. But responding to Hollywood-influenced perceptions of the States and Americans often felt like an uphill battle. On one hand, Egyptian knowledge of American culture through

film opened up discussions for people to ask me questions, and I asked them questions in return. On the other hand, I experienced harassment probably encouraged by the objectifying content of American pornography, and heard the longings of people whose complaints about their own country may have increased when they saw prettied-up images of wealth on American television.

The Nile Valley is far from Beverly Hills. Technology, however, brings images of Beverly Hills to the Nile Valley. Crossing that amount of space and cultural difference so quickly, with so little interpretation or real human interaction, worries me. We should consider our transmission of images a source of power. Many people around the world watch American movies. What are they thinking? ☹

Andrea Saylor recently returned from a year of service with Mennonite Central Committee in Cairo, Egypt, where she worked in an orphanage for girls. For more about her experiences and observations on her year in Cairo, check her blog online at <http://www.mcc.org/eastcoast/andreasblog/index.htm>.

Novelty to Necessity

By Rachel Petersen

Throughout my life, members of my parents' and grandparents' generations have repeatedly observed the vast difference between today's world and the world in which they were raised. Though I never disbelieved them, their words struck me as a timeless adage—certainly no truer today than 70 years ago, when my grandparents undoubtedly heard the same message from their elders. If anything, these persistent reminders of “The Way Things Used To Be” reinforced my gratitude for being born into the age of technology.

And shouldn't I be grateful? My situation within the timeline of human history certainly seems advantageous. I've heard it said that the average American enjoys a higher standard of living than the wealthiest kings of ages past. Of course, the average American also enjoys a higher standard of living than the majority of the world's population today, suggesting an inseparable link between our

technologically advantaged lifestyles and our broader economic privilege.

But even if it were possible to disentangle technology from the unequal distribution of the world's resources, our participation in the “system” of technology would not come without consequence.

It's hard for me to admit this. I want to believe that I'm capable of rationing my dependence on technology, and thereby limiting its influence on me. I want to believe that I can use a computer without relying on it. I want to believe that I can enjoy the benefits of living in this technologically advanced society without suffering the consequences; that through intentionality and will power alone I can successfully combat the risk of succumbing to a technocratic worldview. But my own experience has taught me that this is far easier said than done.

My family has never been one to “keep up with the Joneses” technologically.



We've always been slow to replace outdated computers, cars, appliances, and anything else that works (my mother still uses the same rotary dial phone that's been on her nightstand for the last 25 years). Growing up in this environment, I entered college confident that I could distinguish luxury from necessity. But after just a few weeks of enjoying high-speed internet access, I (rather predictably) found myself unable to tolerate the maddeningly slow pace of my parent's dial-up connection.

This discovery did not come as a

surprise; I had anticipated the challenge of readjusting to my parent's slower computer. While at college, I genuinely attempted to appreciate the "luxury" of high-speed internet every time I used it, so that I wouldn't grow accustomed to the instant gratification that it provided. But as with any other technological upgrade, the novelty turned to necessity right under my nose. My effort to intentionally appreciate this new technology was undercut by the technology itself.

Unlike a hammer or a rake, which we pick up to accomplish a specific task and put back down as soon as we're finished, technology stays with us, shaping our lives in imperceptible ways. Some of its effects are predictable, such as my learned impatience for slow(er) computers. But the influence of technology extends far beyond our desire for convenience and efficiency. It invisibly transforms the way we relate to ourselves and those around us.

During my most recent conversation about *The Way Things Used To Be*, a coworker and two retired volunteers recalled the days of "party line"

telephones. I generally enjoy these sorts of conversations, and—with enough explanation—I'm usually able to imagine what life was like before a certain technology became commonplace. But on this one I was lost. I could imagine several people sharing a single phone, and I could even imagine several phones (within a house) sharing a single line. But multiple households sharing the same telephone line? This was almost beyond comprehension. How could such a system be managed? Would it ever be completely fair? What about privacy?

Looking back on my response, I'm troubled by how unsettling it was for me to imagine a system in which people had to trust each other, rather than trusting technology, for their privacy. I'm disturbed by how negatively I reacted to the concept of sharing, by how suspicious I felt towards the possibility of neighbors cooperating together. Given my response, I have to wonder whether communication technology has really enhanced my own experience of community.

I wonder how much more connected I

would be to my neighbors if we didn't all retreat to our own self-contained worlds at the end of each day. Cell phones, e-mail, online chats, and blogs have certainly helped me to keep in touch with loved ones around the world, and I can't say that I'd happily give up any of these forms of communication. But every hour I spend online or on my phone is an hour that I am absent from those around me. This tension, I suppose, is part of my inheritance as citizen of the 21st century.

Along with my parents and grandparents, I recognize that we can never fully go back to *The Way Things Used To Be*. But that doesn't mean that we have to accept *The Way Things Are*. ☺

Rachel Petersen, a 2005 graduate of Messiah College, is the housekeeping manager at Paxton Ministries, Harrisburg, PA. She is a member of the Grantham Brethren in Christ Church where she serves on the Missions, Peace and Service Commission, and sings in the choir. She has agreed to be the "Midnight Musings" columnist. Welcome, Rachel!

The World Is Flat: The Church in a New Landscape

By Lois Saylor

Thomas L. Friedman, author and foreign correspondent for the New York Times has already published an updated version of *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*. Friedman's book traces how this "flatness" evolved and what it means for companies, countries, and individuals.

So what is a flat world? Here is Friedman himself in an Amazon.com interview:

"What I mean when I say that the world is flat is that sometime in the late 1990s a whole set of technologies and political events converged—including the fall of the Berlin Wall, the rise of the Internet, the diffusion of the Windows operating system, the creation of a global fiber-optic network, and the creation of interoperable software applications, which made it very easy for people all over the world to work together—that leveled the playing field. It created a global platform that allowed more people to plug and play, collaborate and compete, share knowledge and share work,

than anything we have ever seen in the history of the world.

The world being flat means we are connected in ways that bring down barriers of geography, status, political states, and even religious injunctions. Much like the revolution the Gutenberg press brought to the world when books, and therefore knowledge, were made more readily available, these converging events and technologies are bringing revolution in ways both presently active and still developing that allow for access to information and the ability to produce information that is truly global in scope and available to individuals. Information once available only in libraries and sometimes only particular libraries, or information which was public but was only accessible at a government location, is now available to anyone, anywhere, in their own home. Satellite generated information once the property of governments and big



corporations, is also available through the internet."

Here is an interesting quote regarding religion from the same interview. Friedman: "I do...have a set of e-mail pen pals from around the world whom I have never met, or only met once or twice. Many of them, interestingly, are Muslim women, who use the internet to reach out, communicate, and question in ways that their traditional society would have normally prevented."

In a similar fashion the Gutenberg press brought the Bible to the common person in their own language. This fomented much change in the Christian church including nothing less than the Reformation. What

does this new flat world mean for the church? This is the question posed to Bishop Craig Sider who has read the book and found it intriguing.

Bishop Craig first agreed with Friedman's assessment that the world is now flat and very small, even tiny. Digitized information can be sent anywhere and rather quickly. So whether it is a medical test sent halfway around the world for analysis, or an order for a Big Mac taken by someone two states away and processed 30 seconds quicker from a central calling station, the world has changed and will continue to change in light of this new flatness.

However, Craig was also quick, maybe a nanosecond quick, to point out that the gospel has not changed. Christ and the Bible are central to understanding everything in our world and in understanding God. He believes in "incarnational ministry." The example of the incarnate Christ or "the word become flesh" teaches us to take the gospel into the world. Just as Jesus spoke the word of God in a particular place and time, we today need to speak the truth into our world, and we need to understand our world to do that well. Craig says this is not a new approach; it is indeed what missionaries have done in various cultures for years. "We have viewed this missionary approach as necessary for 'over there,'" he says, "but have not been as quick to see it as necessary for our own neighborhood."

His metaphor to describe this is preaching with "the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in another." He is not equating the importance of the two—the Bible remains central—but rather saying that we need to know the context of our cultures to preach the word effectively. In this he is not substituting cultural knowledge and relevance for the Holy Spirit. He is quite convinced we need the Spirit to work in the lives of people and equally convinced that the Spirit can use the tools of the world including the internet.

Friedman in his book suggests that this new flatness which brings a greater entanglement of nations through corporations being interconnected and dependent on each other could bring about peace. "The Dell Theory of Conflict Prevention" argues that no two countries that are both part of the same global supply chain will ever fight a war as long as they are each part of that supply chain" (from the amazon.com interview). When I asked Craig if the new flatness could bring about

world peace, in less than a nanosecond he responded, "The key to peace remains the transformation of the human heart through the person of Jesus. Not to ignore the complexities of entanglements of our world, but a global supply chain cannot accomplish what Jesus can through the transformation of a human heart."

One area of change for the church Craig does see is in leadership. He says leadership is just as important, maybe more so, in the new context, but it is changing. The old format which worked in its day and context was vertical or "command and control;" the new format is horizontal or "connect and collaborate." This shift recognizes that the leader is not the depository of information. Today's church leader needs to bring connection between other leaders and congregational members. He or she needs to work by encouraging and facilitating collaboration. Today's leaders see their role as empowering others.

Playing a part in this paradigm shift is the virtually equal access to information. The leader no longer holds information that others can not access. For example, Craig talked about a teacher in front of the classroom. In most cases the students can access the same information more quickly on their laptops and even get better and more complete information. So what is the teacher's function? It is not so much the dissemination of information (vertical) as it is to bring the students together in a connected and collaborative setting (horizontal) to increase knowledge and understanding together. Likewise Craig

sees a key aspect of his role as Bishop as facilitating shared knowledge and working through situations together as opposed to simply handing down answers. Experience still has a lot to offer those with less experience, but the approach is collaborative and not commanding.

Lots of this collaboration happens in person. Retaining this face-to-face connectedness in the flat world is still very important both to Craig and to Mr. Friedman. Friedman says, "There is no substitute for face-to-face reporting and research." Craig agreed that in the church there is no substitute for personal relationships to mentor and care for each and to worship as the body of Christ. There are, however, new wrinkles that need addressing. For example Craig received this question from a pastor. "We just started podcasting our Sunday messages and people are listening all across North America – are they a part of our church?"

There are lots of questions the church must be asking and it may need to be consistently reorganizing itself to keep up with the changes in the world. What we don't need to change is the centrality of the gospel and the gospel message. "Human nature has not changed," Bishop Craig asserts. People still need Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. ☺

Lois Saylor faithfully writes these reviews each quarter from her home in Elizabethtown, PA. She and her family attend the Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church.

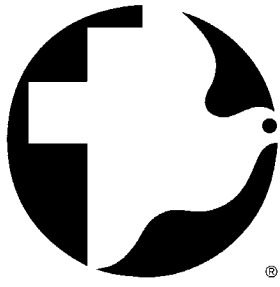
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't lay guilt on us

Some of the articles and comments in the Spring 2006 issue seem to suggest that we should feel guilty for being reluctant to welcome hordes of immigrants. The issue is not immigration. The issue is freeloading. California's finances are strained with millions of illegals taking advantage of our education and medical systems while not paying taxes. Furthermore, the money the illegals earn does not stay in the local economy; it goes back to the countries of the people. In addition to that, the gang problem has increased exponentially due to illegals.

Come now. Don't try to lay guilt on us. We agree that America has always welcomed immigrants with open arms and should continue to do so. Several Hispanic friends I talked to said this: Our parents came as immigrants. But they went through the proper channels. Let these others do the same.

Doyle Book
Upland, California
continued on page 11



Mennonite Central Committee

Coffee, Corn and the Cost of Globalization: A Video/DVD Resource

“Globalization is pervasive. In our increasingly interconnected world, it is hard to find an isolated corner where Coca-Cola has not already entered, a food market free of fast food or a city that does not depend on internationally imported products. Although globalization directly affects us all, many have a hard time understanding the complex issues, trade agreements and government politics related to globalization. Who profits in an increasingly globalized world, and what is the real cost of our access to products from around the globe? What can we do to advocate for those who are being hurt by globalization?”

This is an excerpt from the study guide for a 17-minute DVD available from Mennonite Central Committee entitled, “Coffee, Corn and the Cost of Globalization.” The DVD focuses on Mexican coffee and corn farmers who need to be able to compete in the global economy, but who struggle because they

can’t always get a fair price that will enable them to feed and educate their families.

In addition to this DVD, MCC has other resources on economic globalization available through their web site at www.mcc.org/economicglobalization/, including a number of articles from a consultation on globalization that feature input from several countries around the world where MCC works. ☺



Letters to the Editor, continued from page 10.

Opening wonderful doors of blessing

My business partner and I own a wholesale plant business, Quality Greenhouses and Perennial Farm Inc, in northern York County, Pennsylvania. We hire lots of Mexicans! I so appreciated the views expressed by the many of the contributors [Spring 2006]. It is easy for us to feel very alone on this issue! This spring season we worked along with 175 people—50 full-time employees and 125 seasonal. Of this group, 80 are Mexican. Forty come to us through a guest worker program. This experience has opened wonderful doors of blessing in our lives. We travel to Mexico each winter and have now visited in most of the homes of our workers. In one town there is an evangelical church which we have attended and have men come from that congregation for several months to help us. This story can go on and on and the great thing is that it is an ongoing story—maybe sometime I’ll get to tell it all!

Gary Lebo
Dillsburg, Pennsylvania

On Technology and Its “Advantages”

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Pennsylvania to be as close to and in touch with someone living in South Africa as they are with someone living a few houses down the road.

I personally make use of the internet to phone and chat with my siblings and parents who live in four different countries and three different continents. I find I have to make a conscious effort, however, to be close to, or even closer to, people in my immediate vicinity. It’s a bit more work but it’s necessary.

My point is that any good thing can be used ill. As an outsider in this culture, I am often most intrigued by the ways in which people become so reliant on these new methods of communicating that they use them inappropriately. For example, I find it sad that often it is easier for people who use e-mail regularly to find themselves connected with someone hundreds or thousands of miles away when they have never spoken to the person living across the street from them. I lived with someone once who was so uncomfortable with confrontation that anytime she had something confrontational to say to anyone else in our house, instead of approaching directly, she would send an e-mail.

Part of what gives us our humanity is the way we interact with one another—the way we touch, and the way we speak. When that is lost, it is possible that part of our own humanity is lost in the name of “progress.”

This dilapidation of our communities in the name of adapting new, “better” ways of communicating may cost us much in the future. We are willingly being taken from our world to other worlds. One must, at some point, pause and wonder whether this world we are creating is the kind of world we want to live in, the kind where the people who are in the closest physical proximity to us are those people we speak to and relate to least. We must not become isolated from ourselves in the name of progress. ☺

Andi Dubé, a recent graduate of Eastern Mennonite University, is a graphic artist and photographer living in Lancaster, PA. He also works for Mennonite Disaster Service. He was born and raised in the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe.

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On Technology and Its "Advantages"

By Andile Dube

I went to the supermarket the other day and bought myself two small bottles of lemonade. I did this on my way to the cinema to see another summer release. Whenever I'm brave enough to venture into that uncomfortable seating and cold environment for two hours of viewing pleasure I do it the cheap way: I bring my own food.

There's nothing so unusual about this. I've never believed in paying excessive amounts for something I could easily find cheaper next door. The unusual thing about this particular purchase was that when I bought my two bottles of lemonade I did so without any human interaction whatsoever, thereby performing my first wordless in-store transaction. I didn't even have to talk to the machine that sold me my items. I just scanned them, put them on a roller and then the clever little machine packed them away into a tidy paper bag for me. "Thank you for shopping with us," the machine said to me as I walked away carrying my two cold bottles of lemonade. I almost replied but then regained my senses and remembered that there was no need for me

to thank the kind machine.

This is modern convenience, I'm told. "Designed to make your shopping experience simpler and more pleasurable," read the label on the machine. "No," I thought as I shook my head and slid past the automatic sliding doors. Something has been lost in the name of progress.

It's hard to know whether innovations like this can be thought of as globalization or just plain innovations. I suppose in the big scheme of things globalization cannot be completely separate from a change in the way technological processes are used. However, something I wonder about often is this: what happens to us when, in the name of progress, human contact is eliminated from our most basic everyday functions such as paying for something over the counter? It may seem like a meaningless interaction but in a way, it's a good analogy for some of the changes that are taking place today, and the ways we communicate differently with each other than we have in the past.

And for me it's not that I particularly enjoy conversations with retail clerks. It's

just that I dislike the assumption that replacing them with machines makes for a better shopping experience for the shopper. It is better business for the retail store but something is lost.

In the part of the global South I am from, any interaction you have with anyone is the gate to a sacred moment. These moments, tied together, make us who we are. They tie us together with strangers who in the end are just extensions of ourselves and of our families.

It's not all bad though. As has been said many times before, the world is just one big village now. Technologies are taking all of us from our world to other worlds. The technological advances we are making can certainly be used as a means of enhancing and opening up the ways for us to participate in cross cultural exchanges which, in turn, leads to the promotion of dialogue between different groups. In this sense, the opening up of means for us to communicate more easily with each other is an excellent thing. It's remarkably easy for someone living in the middle of

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