Strategies for Global Cultural Engagement

Part 1 of 2: Training Pastors for Global Service
with Darrell L. Bock and Ramesh P. Richard
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Welcome to the Table, where we discuss issues related to God and culture. Today our topic is "Global Cultural Engagement," and my expert sitting next to me today is Dr. Ramesh Richard who has been here at Dallas Seminary with me, lo these many decades. And I'll let Ramesh tell his story in a second, but it's a pleasure to have him with us. He has an international ministry and is well-known to many around the world for his global perspective on Christianity. Ramesh, welcome to The Table.

Wow, thank you, Darrell. What a joy that God had all these years prepared to be working together and bringing us into some incredible moments of opportunity and impact, and I'm honored to be here.

Well, it's a pleasure to have you. Let me just dive right in and begin by simply asking a little bit about your background – so where you came from, how you came to Dallas to begin with, and then we'll move into the ministry phase in a second.

Great. By my name and my face, they would probably be able to discern that I am South Asian actually. My early years were in Southern India, and I lived there till my college years, came to Dallas Seminary for a few years, then returned to Northern India to be a pastor for a while, and then Dallas Seminary asked me to consider coming back. And so I've been, this time, around about 25 years at the school. But together, I think we graduated about the same time, Darrell. I wanted to catch up to the ones who were really brilliant in the Class of '79 – you and Daniel Wallace and others – so I hastened my studies and sensed urgency there to graduate with you.

Now where exactly in India did you grow up?

I grew up in Chennai, it's in Southern India. We've had a long history of the Christian faith there, 200 years or more, and I had the advantage of my forefather coming to know Christ – a man who was a temple priest, as well as a fanner in the king's court.

Oh, wow.
Ramesh Richard: And because he embraced the Lord Jesus, I had an advantage several generations later. It didn't make me a Christian, but surely gave me an advantage.

Darrell Bock: So this is several generations back in your family?

Ramesh Richard: Yes, about 200-plus – actually 220, 230 years. And the East German looking missionaries brought the Good News to Southern India. And when the wall fell down in 1989, I was there a couple of weeks after the Berlin Wall fell and the Brandenburg Gate, and addressing about 700 young men and women in Eastern Germany, I told them I came to return the compliment of 200 years ago.

Darrell Bock: Oh, wow, that's great. You know, that was a sabbatical year for me in Germany, and I was across the divide, if you will, several times, including a trip to Romania within six weeks after Ceausescu was shot to take relief into orphans and that kind of thing. It's interesting.

Ramesh Richard: It was an amazing moment, that's what, 20 years old now, as the world is still reeling from those decisions, the addition of Eastern Germany to the Western part. There are about three or four areas in the world, Darrell, where the systemic impact of choices are very clear. One is the North Korea/South Korea border. The second is the East German/West German border for those decades when they were divided. Just a few meters across from each other, you had the world's finest cars, Mercedes-Benz, and on the other side of it where the Trabant's put together by chewing gum and rubber bands. Just the systemic impact of choices that people make.

Darrell Bock: You know, the Mercedes-Benz – as I get personal here – but the Mercedes-Benz automobiles are made in Stuttgart, which is just outside of Tubingen where I've done my sabbaticals, and I've been to that museum several times. Not that I'm a big car fan, but it's just hard to pass up when you can get there.

Your father also was a believer. I've met him, a dear, dear man. He had a terrific influence on your life?

Ramesh Richard: Yes, yeah, great influence to us. He and my mother, they were nominal Christians, and did not have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. And then one day going to church they were late, heard some music from another congregation, went in – and that attracted them.
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The pastor visited them in their home later and asked the question if they were Christians. And my mother said she was rather offended, because she had a picture of Jesus, you know, on top of their dining table; and this pastor actually asked them if they knew Christ personally. So in their adult years after I was born is when they welcomed the Lord Jesus personally.

**Darrell Bock:** Now let's talk about India as a country first. The make-up of India in terms of religious affiliations, how does that break down?

**Ramesh Richard:** India is a secular democracy constitutionally so, but the majority are from the Hindu faith, and inside Hinduism is as much a variety as there is inside the Christian faith and the Islamic faith. But 80-some percent would be from the Hindu faith. And then we have a very large population of Muslims as well, depending on who counts between 12-15 percent. But 12-15 percent of 1.2 billion people is a very large, large people group.

And then we have Christians who have been there from the very beginning of the faith, according to some historical evidence, but often a creation with legend as you are so capable of discerning those, Darrell. They count 2.6 percent Christians, but some think they're much, much higher, because of a vast movement of the Spirit of God on the country of India.

You know, there are lots of places where there was no evidence of the faith, but the last 20-30 years, just powerful presence of Christ – church plants, movements of missionaries inside the nation, which is really about 25 nations in the borders of India. So God is doing some wonderful things there.

**Darrell Bock:** Now is the distribution of Christians concentrated in one part of the country or is it pretty even? I mean I know, I'm aware of, Christian presence in the southern part of India in particular. But is it distributed or is it pretty much concentrated?

**Ramesh Richard:** It is very concentrated in the southwest part where the Apostle Thomas, the doubting apostle – I think India has been doubting ever since he visited India – he established his first congregations. And there's a huge tradition of Christianized cultural convictions in that part, southwest part. And then the northeastern part, which is the highest concentration of Christians in the world – actually, there's one state of India which might be the highest concentration of Christians in the world – 90-some percent, maybe 95 percent.
Darrell Bock: Now one other feature of Indian Christianity that I'm aware of is the movement recently in the last few decades, and maybe less than that, among the Dalits. Can you explain what's happening there?

Ramesh Richard: Yes. It’s a strong sociological strata, which first started in the class system, first started simply as occupational/vocational classifications. Four major castes then became multiplied. We have at least 2,000 castes now.

Darrell Bock: Explain what a caste is for someone who might not know.

Ramesh Richard: A caste is simply a role/task stratification of society – those who are warriors, those who are businesspeople, those who are religious or Hindu temple priests. And then there is a fourth, which are seen as untouchables. Mahatma Gandhi actually attempted to elevate them to see them as the very children of God. The human heart is corrupt and must define themselves over against other people's expectations and at other people's expense.

So the lowest of the lowest caste which is socioeconomically very, very low are considered untouchables. And then there are some who are less than untouchables as well. And because vocation and occupation has categorized them, there is very little social intercourse between the lowest caste and the highest caste.

Darrell Bock: They're almost treated as non-human. Would that be fair to say?

Ramesh Richard: You know, I think it would be fair to say that, as hard as it is for me to describe them. And so our Christian conviction about the image of God in every person – and not that every person has divinity in them – but the dignity that comes from the image of God is a powerful liberating force.

Among those who do, for example, manual scavenging. Manual scavenging is the most horrid of all menial tasks. When people at these lower levels actually have to scavenge the human excrement of the higher caste and then get rid of them, and the result is diseases and stigma across this group.

However, India is at the threshold of massive change, huge economic growth. A recent National Times article says that India is richer than Britain and also poorer than Africa, because we have Indian companies which have now bought Jaguar and Land Rover and so on. But also the poorer than the poor in terms of education and other social needs.
**Darrell Bock:** So the Dalits are part of this untouchables group basically?

**Ramesh Richard:** That is correct. And there is a movement among Christians in order to give them dignity in terms of the entire social caste system. They have made inroads into the Dalits.

**Darrell Bock:** And my understanding is that many of them are becoming Christians, and in effect, the product of that is almost, at a social level, revolutionary because of the affirmation of humanity that is coming to the Dalits in India.

**Ramesh Richard:** And that is both the good and the downside of it. The good side is that they're coming to a faith which gives them dignity. Downside is it could be simply a sociological reality rather than a spiritual conviction.

**Darrell Bock:** Interesting. Well, that's India in a glimpse, and that gives everybody a sense of kind of your background before you came to the States. As you mentioned, you've been here 25-plus years teaching at the Seminary. Let's talk about what you do now, which is besides teach here at the Seminary, you are the President of RREACH. Explain what RREACH is.

**Ramesh Richard:** When Dallas Seminary invited me back, they made a wonderful gift to me in giving me time to reach into our world. When we were going through the deliberations of my return, the Seminary asked how much time I'd like to be away. I said, "Every other month." And the Seminary said, "We can give you the time to do that, but not the resources to do that."

There's basically six businessmen here in Dallas who said every other month means one trip overseas for each of us to underwrite, and we'll put together an organization called RREACH simply to undergird my global proclamation ministry. The vision of RREACH, Darrell, is to change the way one-thousand-million individuals think and hear about the Lord Jesus.

I come from a people-rich country, so what we just talked about is a great segway. If you open my chest, at the back you'll find the phrase, "Large numbers of individuals." Not large numbers of people, not masses of people, but large numbers of individuals. So I almost have an Aspergian focus on large numbers of individuals who are without knowledge of Christ. We have the highest number in history, and for eternity, living right now.
And so RREACH is guided by a large number of individuals’ vision. The mission is to promote the Word of Jesus worldwide. We do that through evangelizing opinion leaders and strengthening pastoral leaders in order to reach a large number of individuals. So over these last 25 years that RREACH has been in existence, the Seminary in a symbiotic relationship has allowed me to represent the school over the world. But also RREACH undergirds what God has put on my heart to do, both in gifting and calling.

**Darrell Bock:** You know, I think you're the only person who's allowed away more during this semester than I am in terms of our schedule and in terms of our travel. Let's talk about the global proclamation aspect of what you're doing here more recently. Explain what's involved in that.

**Ramesh Richard:** All right. The human situation demands our response. We have exponential population growth. The world just crossed the seven-thousand-million mark, seven billion people, as of October 31, 2011. There is some debate whether it was a Filipino baby or an Indian baby, but we'll let the demographers understand that.

The second reality is that two-thirds of the faith now is in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Some actually say it might be 75 percent of the faith. This is a powerful witness to 200 years of Western missions, when in the late 1700s, William Carey set sail from England all the way to India. Here was this brilliant man, absolutely brilliant, not knowing what was in front of him, huge pain.

This is also the 200th year of Adoniram Judson, the first American missionary setting sail, again, for the same part of the world. The fruit of 200 years of sacrifice and labor and martyrdom is giving huge birth to movements where the Christian faith has now moved to the southern side and the eastern side of the world. In Asia, and Africa, and Latin America is the most robust growth. So we are now looking at large population numbers, large presence of the faith.

The third part of this equation which governs my interpretation of reality is the fact that there are about 2.2 million pastors in the world. This is several dozen times the number of missionaries in the world, but only five percent have formal training. That is, about 2 million pastors in the world would have preached last Sunday, will preach next Sunday, without any formal training; and they're basically winging it. They're undertrained and isolated. If we do not address this, not only do we have the largest numbers in the history of the world, and for eternity, because this is the largest number of people who ever lived and died.
I was in Beijing not long ago and a friend of mine said, "Ramesh, between the countries you and I represent, a third of the future population of hell exists. This dastardly doctrine which we wish we could remove, but the Scripture is pretty convinced, and I have to adjust my sentiment to the truth of Scripture.

And the fact that the exponential growth of the Church and the explosive growth of human population and the large expanding presence of pastoral leaders – if we do not address the Church issue in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, it'll again become sociology rather than theology.

**Darrell Bock:** So you're talking about church leadership in particular here.

**Ramesh Richard:** Yeah. For example, Rwanda. Rwanda in 1994 was the most Christianized country in all of Africa; and then they had this 1-point-some-million people killed of genocide. And the Hindu worlds and the Muslim worlds are saying, "If that's what Christianity means, we don't want anything to do with Christianity," because Rwanda was a Christian country.

Now of the pastors, they're undertrained and isolated. If we don't address them, the pastors will continue to do this. I have been in parts of the world where a pastor has preached like, you know, people need to climb trees to meet Jesus because Zacchaeus climbed a tree to meet Jesus.

I've actually been among pastors in the world who didn't know Jesus was coming back. I was in Bangladesh some time ago. We had 616 pastors from 19 denominations, first time in the history of that great Muslim land. I saw a pastor whose name was Pastor Islam. Pastor Islam. I said, "Tell me your story." He said, "Eight months ago, I was in the majority faith in Bangladesh and now I'm a pastor." I do not know what he's doing.

Now if we address this, we can actually correct the creedal and cultural misperceptions of the faith, which is where you're going in this whole podcast I think, Darrell. The misperception of the faith as belonging to one geographical historical part of the world is needing to be completely changed, for empirical research tells us that the West does not represent the Christian faith.

We can also undergird church growth with church health. Church growth is good, but if church growth is not accompanied by church health, it becomes extremely superficial, easily turnable from where we want the faith to be. So I like to usually say, "Church growth can be the result, but let's not have church growth as the purpose. Let's have church health as the purpose and then church growth will be the result."
We can also strengthen pastors by peer-level nourishment, and then we can unleash them, because the pastor's health is the key to the church's health, anywhere in the world. If the church is to be healthy, the pastor has to be healthy, and the pastoral staff needs to be healthy. And if the church is healthy, deriving itself from the pastor's health, it has community impact, and there's health in the community. There are actually economists who are working on the Christian version of corporate social responsibility – which they come to issues of how drug addiction, and prostitution, and alcohol abuse, and crime comes down in places where the church is healthy inside a community.

So the global proclamation ministry has a very large project we are engaged in at the moment. It's a 10-year human capital campaign to connect, unite, and strengthen pastors all across our world. We're looking at the next five percent of the faith's leadership – 100,000 pastors from 200 countries in 10 years, where we're trying to build them into groups of 25 – at least 4,000 groups of 25 – so that young pastors who are the future of the faith – they are the future of the faith in history and geography – what can we do to place them, train them, connect them, and unite them? And that's called our "Global Proclamation Commission".

Now Dallas Seminary has wonderfully cooperated in a powerful project. And when Dr. Mark Bailey became the President of Dallas Seminary about 11-12 years ago, I went to him with an idea, an idea that was drawn from the lawyer world. I found out that SMU had a program running on its campus which was not an SMU program. It's just a bunch of young lawyers who were being brought from all across the world to teach them American democracy principles. They were there on the campus for three weeks.

The host group which rented the campus said, "We found out that not only could we teach them democracy principles, we found out that they became the best of friends so that the Supreme Court Justice of Pakistan – which is the most dangerous country in the world right now – and the Supreme Court Justice of Peru, became the thickest of friends; not because they went to law school together, but because they went to these weeks together."

And so I went to visit them. I said, "Tell me about your program." Well, they had been doing it for 48 years. That's a long time. They gave me the speech I needed to give to Dr. Bailey at Dallas Seminary. They said, "Tell him we want to rent out the campus of Dallas Seminary and Dallas Seminary will give us academic credibility and we'll give them international intentional visibility for 25 countries of pastors."
Dr. Bailey took it to the Board of Dallas Seminary, and the Board after a couple of years of discussion approved it. So every year, on the campus of Dallas Seminary, RREACH rents out the campus and the Seminary has been so gracious of that. We bring 25 countries of pastors – one per country – and they all are selected extremely carefully. We don't actually select the pastors, we select referees who will nominate pastors – including you Darrell – and then we feed them through a filter.

Every pastor fits five criteria. One: They're under the age of 38 – actually in their mid-30s. Second: They're the main pastor of the church, regardless of the size of the church. A church in Jordan will be much smaller than a church in Brazil. Third: They are the main pastor of the church. That means they have main shepherding responsibilities. Fourth: They have a documented interest in pastoral training, so that when we invest in them, they are investing in others. And, fifth: They have ten pastoral relationships with any age of pastor anywhere.

So we call that Dallas GPA, the Global Proclamation Academy, which meets on the campus of Dallas Seminary. And we bring in master coaches from all over the country. Usually presidents and deans of Bible colleges and seminaries, and they're very grateful to be getting one day away as a master coach away from administrative and bureaucratic responsibilities. They're thrilled to be getting away.

And so the Dallas GPA meets every year on the campus of Dallas Seminary for three weeks. The Seminary has been just upstanding. And, of course, now these 25 pastors become voices and ambassadors for not only the Gospel and RREACH, but for Dallas Seminary across the world.

**Darrell Bock:** And they also get a level of training that encourages them in their own growth and the way they lead a church.

**Ramesh Richard:** That is correct. We say it's not a leadership institute, but it'll affect their leadership. They focus on three areas – biblical spirituality, because that's where everything gets broken. Second – in theological discernment. Where places see the massive growth of the Church, there's not enough discernment there. There is great breadth, but no depth. Third – we focus on effective preaching.

The number one fear of a pastor and felt need of a pastor is the challenge of having to get up and preach next Sunday. So we talk about effective preaching undergirded by theological discernment, which is undergirded by a biblical spirituality.
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**Darrell Bock:** Okay. So you have this program that's been going on at Dallas for several summers now; and I take it that the global proclamation effort is transferring that principle to other locations and in other structures. Is that basically what's happening?

**Ramesh Richard:** Great question; yes. So we have the Dallas GPA. The second part of the Global Proclamation Commission of the 10-year project is what we call national versions of the Global Proclamation Academy.

So for ten days, we bring the 25 best young pastors inside a country, across regions and denominations – Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Baptist, Methodist – but they focus on two of the three areas that we teach at Dallas: biblical spirituality undergirding effective preaching.

They come over ten days usually. The first weekend, they get together and break down, because they finally realize they're human beings, they are ministers of the Gospel, and they have much more in common than what separates them, especially in a social environment, maybe an oppressive environment where they have to be united together to make a statement for the faith. And they go through five days of master coaches – their own Dallas Seminary grads from the Dallas GPA, and local national leaders. They inform them and they teach them. But most importantly, both the Dallas versions and the national versions, we build them into cohorts of 25.

And these cohort groups are very critical. We want them to be friends for the next 20 years, because now when they're 55 and 58 and 60, they're going to be the heads of the denominations and abominations, and heads of organizations and institutions. And so we are setting them up for the future leadership of the faith if the Lord Jesus doesn't come back. This Generation 1 is the one that's come to Dallas. Generation 2 is the one which happens in their country.

But right in the middle of the decade, Darrell, RREACH is looking at sponsoring what we call the Global Proclamation Congress for up to 5,000 pastoral trainers. Pastoral trainers – these are trainers of pastors all across the world, both in the formal sectors and the non-formal sectors. And I very much want you to be there and I want Dallas Seminary to be represented strongly there. These pastoral trainers, they are found in churches, they're found in institutions, they're found in organizations.
In fact, we have just commissioned the Center of the Study of Global Christianity of Gordon-Conwell to identify every confirmed pastoral training initiative in the world. It's a one-year project and they're discovering thousands of individuals, churches, organizations, and institutions.

**Darrell Bock:** Now is Todd Johnson working on this?

**Ramesh Richard:** Todd Johnson is working on it, and his group is working on this, and you know them very well as well. And so we want to choose the formal sector, 100 top training schools – we usually include Dallas Seminary – and about 300 non-formal organizations as the core of these 5,000 who will come. We're asking every one of the 5,000, every entity, to commit to 25 pastors a year for the following five years. So we will have between 500,000 to 625,000 pastors.

**Darrell Bock:** So you're building these cohorts in connection with each one of these organizations is basically the idea?

**Ramesh Richard:** That is correct. And the organizations pastor them, the organizations keep them coming. In RREACH, of course, we have our own program happening.

**Darrell Bock:** Right, but you don't have enough people to handle that many, so you've got to do it this way.

**Ramesh Richard:** That is correct. I just wanted something that was large numbers. Because we have large numbers of people and pastors, we wanted something that was long-term up to the middle of the 21st century. Worldwide 200 countries church deep, because we are local church-focused, not para-church focused.

We are pastor-focused so there could be more relevance onsite. But we also wanted something that would be disciplined and execution. Anybody with reasonable intelligence can come up with good ideas and the execution of where it breaks down. It'll be entirely scalable. For example, we just finished GPA in Mozambique the 11th of this year. We only wanted 10; God allowed us to do 11. This is entirely scalable. If all that happened was the 2012 Dallas GPA or the 2012 GPA in Mozambique, it'll be worth it on its own. Now if God provides life and breath in everything, we'll do everything. If he provides more, we'll do more; if he provides less, we'll do less – entirely scalable. But at the end of it, it is low cost per pastor, low cost per unit.
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The thing is, the formal training sector provides the backbone and the depth for the non-formal training initiatives. In fact, I do not know of any non-formal training initiative which is not led by a formally trained guy. So a person like our students at Dallas Seminary – if we can unleash them into the world so that they can multiply it in non-formal training sectors, we can address both the depth and quality issue, and the breadth on the quantity issue.

*Darrell Bock:* Okay, so just to put this all together, because you've been taking about 15 minutes to explain this – we really have three levels of things that are going on. We've got the Global Proclamation Academy here at Dallas that works with the very carefully selected leaders; we've got the national elements; and I take it that one of the goals is to produce as many national meetings across the globe as can be generated.

*Ramesh Richard:* We're looking at 136 countries, yes.

*Darrell Bock:* Okay. And then the third thing is this congress, which you know, when I hear you describe it, it's like a variation of the Cape Town/Lausanne effort, which had 4,000 people in attendance, and also was quite global; and a lot of planning went into that before people got together – only now the focus on this meeting of 5,000 is to build these individual cohort units that are tied to these organizations so that there's an ongoing life to the training and support of these pastors. Is that it?

*Ramesh Richard:* Darrell, I knew you were bright, but I didn't know you were this bright. But you're right. There are three streams coming in – the version of Dallas, the version of the nations, and then the Global Proclamation Congress. It's only for pastoral trainers. It's not a generic congress like Cape Town was, it's only for pastoral trainers. It's very niche-focused, it's task focused, but we have learned a lot from Cape Town and from other events.

While in Cape Town, I put out an invitation to all pastoral trainers who were present. It was unbelievable. You were there, Dr. Bailey was there, and I was there, and some others from Dallas Seminary. We could not believe the huge impact Dallas Seminary had had already among trainers in the world, both by alumni, but also our content, our materials across the world. But more importantly, we had a groundswell of pastoral trainers who were present from all across the nations.
There are three kinds of training: Formal training, which leads to a degree at the end of it – that's what we do here. The second is informal training. That is just informal, mutual. Our mentors have had impact on us and we returned the favor.

But the focus here is on non-formal training. Non-formal training provides both speed and breadth to it. And because of the huge needs worldwide, we want to add this component, not just a pragmatic, but as a legitimate delivery system.

**Darrell Bock:** Yeah, because not everyone can come to a seminary and come in residence and stay several years, and extract themselves from their ministry, et cetera.

**Ramesh Richard:** Yes, and the formal theological model, it's all going through a huge revolution – the campus models, their residential models, and we are facing challenges there. So how do we build a model, a ministry architecture, which will allow for us to do both deep and large things.