

GLOBALIZATION: A RESPONSE

Delivered to MCC International in Fresno, California as part of a 75th celebration of the founding of MCC. The paper is a response to two other more substantive papers delivered at the event.

The word "Globalization" does not exist in my version of Wordperfect. It is also not listed in my unabridged 2,000 page English dictionary. A quick scan of The World Bank's "World Development Report", Lester Brown's "State of the World" and "The World Competitiveness Report" of the World Economic Forum all failed to locate the word. Is this simply an oversight or does it tell us something about the nature of the word or idea under discussion?

Any meaningful response to the papers of Shenk and Epp seems to require some understanding of the word "Globalization". I happen to be particularly fond of words ending in "tion" since they automatically expand my limited French vocabulary by 2,000 words! Shenk suggests that "in popular parlance global is a synonym for international". Shenk then offers Robertson's definition of Globalization as "a concept which refers to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole". Epp states that "what has entered into everyday speech as Globalization is principally an economic phenomenon, facilitated by communications technology, and secondarily a cultural one...". I would argue that these definitions are helpful but incomplete and this lack of precision of meaning can easily allow us to come to conclusions which may be neither correct nor helpful.

Several parallel words may be Hellenization, or the spread of Greek ideas and culture, democratization or the spread of democratic principles and Christianization or the change to a set of beliefs and practices consistent with a particular faith. These words are usually based on a known and understood set of ideas, values or culture which radiates from a geographic or ideological centre. If you begin with the idea of the "globe", what is the centre of the idea and where does it spread to? My argument is that the idea of Globalization is qualitatively different. It is a word describing the process. Shenk deals with Globalization as outcome by contrasting the reign of God with striving of man. This allows us to judge outcomes within a moral or theological grid and then condemn the concept of Globalization itself. This is unfortunate since it is similar to blaming the process of education for the fact that a person used knowledge for good or evil. Epp's analysis is significantly more helpful since he treats Globalization as phenomenon or as a form of discipline. Our understanding of Globalization in relation to his excellent and thorough analysis of the nature of the state would, however, benefit from a more detailed use of the word as process.

Globalization is a new word because it is based on very recent changes in our technological environment. The word "internet" is also not in my Spell check and there is a connection between their mutual absence. The revolution in information, communication and transportation technologies has profoundly altered traditional power relationships. Epp describes Globalization as principally an economic phenomenon. He is correct insofar as this is the area where we perceive its effects most. Economic activity is the area where the changed nature of the process has been in ideological harmony with the dominant philosophy, that is, the market system. The revolution in information technology has destroyed the traditional basis of market power and has either created new centers of power or in many

other instances has distributed power to the periphery, often on a random basis. Globalization is the word which describes this process. For example, it is correct to speak of the Globalization of production as a rationalization based on wage levels, skills, mobility of capital, effective communication – all with disregard to the claims of national sovereignty or even supra-national governance. The political, educational, cultural and religious sectors of life all operate closer to the medieval guild system with high barriers to entry and change. The increasing importance of market forces in these sectors opens them to global influences driven by technology. The use of the fax in China and the absence of the copier in the old USSR were powerful examples. When we don't like the outcomes, we shoot the messengers. On the other hand, where the results are positive we tend to take the credit.

In the early 1970's I served as MCC Director in Bangladesh. No phone call to Akron was successfully completed in two years, fax did not exist, telegrams were limited to 50 words by virtue of cost and mail required 14 days. Power was reasonably effectively decentralized by the absence of information technology. Does the current MCC Director in Dhaka have more or less authority? On the other hand, have we redesigned the nature of authority to permit staff in Bangladesh to relate to and access information globally?

Globalization is a powerful concept which we should welcome. In many instances it results in a reversal of power relationships from the centre to the periphery. If we moralize on outcomes rather than coming to a full understanding of the new paradigm we will also fail to understand how this new paradigm can be used to create positive results and more importantly we may fail to adjust our own structures and organizations. Most of our mission organizations, including MCC, still operate on the international hub and spoke model, which could just as easily be described as classic colonialism.

What is the relevance of Globalization to MCC? Shenk and Epp address this question only tangentially although Epp's call to re-examine our vision of the state points in the right direction. If our conceptual framework is based on inadequate or out-of-date ideological assumptions, we will tend to shoot the messenger rather than comprehend the message. Allow me to quote from personal correspondence between John Lapp and myself. Lapp states that "my sense is that if we spent too much of our time trumpeting a global vision or solution we might become burnt out. The vision of the Kingdom of God can act as a spur for our action, but we also need to be realistic about what we can accomplish. This doesn't need to paralyze us, but it does guard against global expectations." Lapp also states that "Mennonites have focused on peace as integral to discipleship rather than as the global vision. But there is a "vision". What is the vision? As the pinnacle of the Mennonite institutional universe, MCC presumably also represents our most universal expression of vision. In the last chapter of Matthew we are commended to "go and make disciples of all nations..." At the end of Luke this is expanded to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." As Mennonites we are prone to private triumphalism about the superiority of our ideas and values. If MCC will not or cannot provide a framework to extend our vision into the global arena then who will?

I will conclude by reading from a document. Try to guess which document, who authorized it and where it was first presented.

“The collective power of people to shape the future is greater now than ever before, and the need to exercise it more compelling. Mobilizing that power to make life in the twenty-first century more democratic, more secure, and more sustainable is the foremost challenge of our generation.

Global governance is about a varied case of actors: people acting together in formal and informal ways, in communities and countries, within sectors and across them, in non-governmental bodies and citizen’s movements, and both nationally and internationally, as a global society. Global governance is about putting people at the centre of world affairs.

A new world order must be organized around the notion of diversity, not uniformity; of governance through democracy, not dominion, of governance at all levels within society and not just from above. By definition, global governance implies a decentralized system built on the foundation of a common set of values...foremost of these values must include the duty of care for our neighbour...not only must we care for our neighbours, we must respect them.”

Would MCC agree? If not, do we have an alternate vision?

On the question of the use of force: “International action in situations of conflict does not necessarily mean an immediate resort to force. On the contrary, the use of force should remain the last resort. The international community should improve its capacity to identify, anticipate, and resolve conflicts before they become armed confrontations...”.

On leadership: “to a very particular degree today, the need for leadership is widely felt: leadership that is proactive, not simply reactive, that is inspired, not simply functional, that looks to the longer term and future generations for whom the present is held in trust. A neighbourhood without leadership is a neighbourhood endangered.”

Some of you may recognize the report of the Commission on Global Governance released in January. It was made public not at the UN but at the privately sponsored annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland of the World Economic Forum. Why Davos? Because power is moving beyond the nation state and this kind of gathering is beginning to represent the places where visions are shaped. One of the two authors is Carl Bildt, former Prime Minister of Sweden and an evangelical Christian. This report is certainly not the final word, but it will shape the nature of the discussion for years to come. Would those ideas and values have been at the centre in the absence of a committed Christian author? What does it mean for Mennonites to have a vision if we are so afraid of raising expectations and getting burnt out that we don’t even whisper it to each other, never mind the rest of the world? If we don’t articulate a global vision – who will?

The challenge of globalization is not to resist or embrace but to comprehend. If we understand the process we can engage in the dialogue. If we are part of the dialogue we can shape the vision. But first, we need to be sure that we have an appropriate vision to share. Our grass-roots efforts give us experience and credibility but that is not the same as a global vision. We claim to be agents of change. It is imperative that we recognize that the message of change, the reality of globalization, also speaks to us.

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