

Building and Deepening a Movement

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The Challenge to America; photo, Todd Lorentz

The eighth annual international conference series of Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative was held at Loyola University, Chicago, May 31st to June 4th 2009. It attracted 250 delegates and 99 extraordinary presenters from many corners of the world for a lively discussion and a fruitful debate on many different aspects of globalisation. The conference's main theme was: "Globalisation: The Challenge to

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The Eighth Annual International Conference was Co-Convened by the Interreligious Engagement Project, The Center for Ethics (Loyola), The Center for Global Studies (Purdue University Calumet) and Globalisation for the Common Good (UK).

The full text of the Chicago Conference Declaration as well as articles from the Conference will be published in the October 2009 issue of Interreligious Insight.

America". The participants at the conference focused their attention primarily on a critique of the role of the United States in the current dynamic of world affairs and they examined the positive and negative dimensions of America's global stance. They explored some of the very real challenges that America must meet if globalisation is to be guided towards the common good, both within the US and in the wider world. Other thematic areas were also addressed and debated. They included (but were not limited to) the following:

- *The Virtuous Economy: the Role of the Global Business Community*
- *Globalization and the Media: Balanced Representation and the Common Good*
- *Globalization, Civilizational Dialogue, and the Role of the Global Interfaith Movement*
- *The Global Environment: Climate, Habitat, Water, Energy, and All Life*
- *The Struggle for Social and Economic Justice and Universal Human Rights*
- *Global Cultures of Peace*

The Conference provided an excellent forum to analyze, discuss and debate the challenge of globalisation, and to make recommendations for the future, as noted in our "Chicago Declaration", from which I highlight one small part:

Today, we face a daunting transition as our de-centered, post-modern world gives way to an

uncertain world of global governance. It is true that people will only accept change when they face necessity – and that we only face necessity when a crisis has come upon us. Such a moment is upon us now. We must engage these global challenges as opportunities for lasting transformational change. The problems of globalization need to be brought down to human scale. This can only be done by adopting global policies commensurate with the local values of people across the planet through the bottom-up process of grassroots globalization – the infusion of our local values into global decision-making.

The challenge to the United States, and to the world, is to adopt these new global standards and ensure that they become global norms. We believe that the interests of the US and the world are congruent. We ask: is the United States prepared to assist the shift of the destructive global political-economic-environmental order from one of unbridled growth to one that embraces material wealth creation yet also preserves social and ecological well-being, increases human happiness and enhances community life and meaning? We call upon the United States to embrace this new identity and legitimacy in a time fraught with global uncertainty but also rich with opportunity for the global common good.

The conference's respect and sincere gratitude is due to each of the present-

ers for their extraordinary commitment in being a part of this vital effort. Each brought a missing and essential piece that completes the whole, leading to a better understanding of what globalisation is all about. Hopefully, together, we can clearly argue for and insist on social and economic alternatives that address the roots of global injustice and inhumanity, leading to Globalisation for the Common Good. The conference success was also due to the extraordinary efforts of the organisers in Chicago and to the conference delegates themselves. Due recognition should also be given to the conference co-sponsors, amongst them: The International Interreligious Peace Council; Common Ground: A Study Center (Deerfield, IL); Hands of Peace; World Council of Muslims

for Interfaith Relations; Interreligious Insight: a Journal of Dialogue and Engagement; Niagara Foundation; Lake Forest College Interfaith Centre.

This eighth conference proved itself by building on the series thus far. It continued the spirit of previous ventures in so far as they have laid the pattern of being multi-disciplinary, lively and productive affairs, in which scholars, politicians, businessmen and women, NGO leaders, theologians, journalists, peace activists, and students from many diverse faiths and cultural backgrounds have come together from around the world for intense discussions on a spiritual and value-centred vision of globalisation and the common good. Indeed, the momentum has moved from research and discussion to articulate position papers



International Interreligious Peace Council; photo, Todd Lorentz

and an active agenda for change in the international community and its economic and development policies. This was clearly the case in Chicago.

Globalisation is most often thought of within economic and technological structures as a way to denote the massive and dynamic global integration of national economies and markets. Because these economic and technological forces are central to the current and future well-being of the global human family, it is essential that they be discussed within the more general framework of human moral and spiritual experience. It is only within these frameworks that we can fully explore the values and relationships that form our human communities. Central to this discussion are religious institutions and communities which have developed time-honored wisdom arising from the deep encounter of the human person with the mystery of the sacred. The diversity represented by these communities images the profound truth of the transcendent mystery in which we participate.

The Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative is committed to the view that the rich heritages of the world's religions and spiritual traditions have much to offer in the drive to promote global peace, justice, and human well-being. While globalisation is all too often conceived in terms of impersonal economic and the so-called market forces, we believe that in breaking down the barriers between cultures, it also provides the possibility for productive interreligious and intercultural encounters. GCG seeks to celebrate religious diversity,

while striving to overcome ideological divisions, in order to harness the wealth of the world's diverse spiritual and ethical traditions for the creation of a sense of common purpose. Such purpose will enable us to build social and economic policies that are truly humane and life-enhancing.

The GCG Initiative was first established in 2002 at a conference in Oxford. Since then, our International Conference has become an annual event, growing as it traveled across the globe through St. Petersburg, Dubai, Kenya, Hawaii, Istanbul and Melbourne. The 2010 conference will be held at California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks.

Our work over the past few years has given rise to numerous collaborations, several book publications, and academic papers, as well as the establishment of the rapidly developing online Journal of Globalisation for the Common Good. There are also modules on Globalisation for the Common Good offered at different universities around the world, including Fatih University in Istanbul, Trinity College, University of Melbourne and shortly at Loyola University in Chicago.

The Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative believes that the current developments in promoting interfaith relations are a vital step in adapting humanity to the age of globalisation. We look forward to being able to play a part in what we hope is a fruitful period of interreligious dialogue which can see peace, justice, and human well-being furthered across the globe.

Today the globalised world economy, despite many significant achievements

in areas such as science, technology, medicine, transport and communication and more, is facing the three intertwined illnesses that are eating at the heart of the world. They are:

- *an extreme, and worsening, maldistribution of wealth and income*
- *an overwhelming, and worsening, threat to the environment*
- *a collapse of love, compassion, social solidarity, at the levels of family, neighbourhood, workplace, and society as a whole.*

In short, we live in difficult and troubling times, facing unprecedented global challenges in the areas of climate change and ecology, banking, credit and subprime mortgage lending, soaring cost of energy and food, hunger and infectious disease, international relations and cooperation, peace and justice, terrorism and war, armaments and unprecedented violence, crime and insecurity. It is precisely in times like these – unstable and confusing though they may be – that people everywhere need to keep their eyes on the positive side of human nature, the side of love and compassion, rather than hatred and injustice; the side of the common good, rather than selfishness, individualism and greed.

People need to see that there are serious alternatives to the world's present failing policies, rules and institutions, and that there are likeminded global citizens who share a vision of hope and common values that can lift them out of the deep sense of powerlessness and despair that is now affecting so many

parts of the world.

Today, many people, from all walks of life and different parts of the world are asking some pertinent and timely questions. Are there sources from which we can draw meaning and wholeness to our lives? Are there resources of spirituality that would nourish and sustain our lives in this complex, pluralistic and ever changing world? Why, when we humans have such a great capacity for caring, sharing, consciousness, wisdom and creativity, has our world seen so much cruelty, wars, insensitivity, injustice, and destruction?

These questions and many more are being raised in our day not only by those traditionally identified with religious traditions; they are the questions of scientists, politicians, economists, educators, psychologists, people in the business world, working people, and all who experience an emptiness and a lack of purpose and orientation to human life. Young people in particular call for an alternate vision that is centred in values that give meaning to human existence.

There is no doubt in my mind that, we need a new direction, a new economic system, a new path: a globalisation of kindness, compassion and justice. We need a globalisation that understands that sustainability demands that efficiency and equity should go hand-in-hand. We know there must be a convergence of these values, rather than a competition between them.

It was for these very reasons that Globalisation for the Common Good came into being. The mission of Globalisation for the Common Good is

Oxford 2002 • St. Petersburg 2003, Dubai 2004, Kericho, Kenya 2005 • Honolulu 2006 • Istanbul 2007 • Melbourne 2008 • Chicago 2009 • 1000 Oaks 2010



GCG Journeys; original art, Jim Kenney

to promote an ethical, moral and spiritual vision of globalisation and encourage adoption of public policy at all levels that builds the common good of our global community. In this way we nurture personal virtue in our relationships with each other and the planetary environment, while investing our understanding of economics, commerce, trade and international relations with values centered on the universal common good. We will advance understanding and action on major global issues by civil society, private enterprise, the public sector, governments, and national and international institutions. We will promote collaborative policy solutions to the challenges posed by globalisation. We are committed to the idea that the marketplace is not just an economic sphere – “it is a region of the human

spirit”. Reflecting on the sacred dimension of life cannot be divorced from the consideration of economic questions. Economics cannot be effectively practiced without an understanding of the world of heart and spirit. Therefore we view the problem and challenge of globalisation not only from an economic point of view, but also from ethical, spiritual and theological perspectives.

In short, Globalisation for the Common Good provides the opportunity to emphasise that the present globalisation process not only encompasses economic, financial and technological aspects, but must also focus on human cultural, spiritual, moral, ethical and theological dimensions, as well as on the interdependence of humankind and its rich diversity.