

## **The Information Age and Globalisation for the Common Good:**

### **A Cultural, Social, Economic, Political, Spiritual and Moral Reflection on Global Media and Globalisation**

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In this new millennium, the world has entered the information and technology age together with the era of globalisation. As noted by many observers, technology has now created the possibility and even the likelihood of a global culture. The digital age, bringing us internet, fax machines, satellites, cable TV, online publications and more, is sweeping away cultural boundaries. Global entertainment companies shape the perceptions and dreams of ordinary citizens in every corner of the world.

This, mainly Western, and in particular US driven global information system, has spread and is spreading values, norms, and culture which tends to promote Western ideals of capitalism, market economy, democracy and secularism. Will local cultures inevitably fall victim to this global "consumer" culture? What are the consequences of "economic" globalisation for human relationships, aspirations, hopes, and belief systems?

Today, there is a great interest to highlight a growing problem area that has thus far seen too little noticed by globalisation activists: the rapidly accelerating global corporate concentration of media ownership and the grave impacts on democracies and consciousness throughout the world. It is my view that the performance of mass media has recently become so degraded, with rampant commercialization, trivialization, repetition, and homogenization—as well as sharply declining standards for journalistic integrity—that no progressive movement will succeed without addressing media issues, and putting them onto the front burner of their concerns.

To highlight this, let us look at some statistics and ask some fundamental questions. The world now spends \$ 1200 billion per year (with nearly \$700 billion by the US alone) on the military, but only some \$ 60 billion on development assistance. The United Nations and *all* its agencies spend about \$20 billion each year or about \$3 for each of the world's inhabitants.

You see? The military gets 20 times more than the poor and starving millions and 60 times more than the UN, the world's most important peace organization. This clearly shows that there is no balance in our world today. This, surely is unsustainable and at times immoral and unjust. Anyone arguing for more imbalance must be uninformed or deranged or both.

This tragically gives a false idea that peace, genuine peace - must be extremely controversial. Because:

How many peace academies are there, compared to the military academies? Where is the peace education to balance military training, conscription and history books filled with battles and wars? How often do you see peace and

reconciliation journalism and media reporting to balance war reporting? Where are the mainstream media that challenge this imbalance? Where are the funds for studying peace and non-violent conflict-resolution and the common good, where are the funds to promote dialogue, cooperation, service, volunteerism, altruism, and vocation to balance the billions of dollars that go to research on killing, propaganda, brainwashing, torture, strategy, doctrines and war theory? And where are all the experts on peace and conflict and violence whom you never see or hear in the media who could be asked to give other views in the name of pluralism and freedom of expression?

So what's wrong with the news we get, what's wrong with the media, you might justifiably ask? I am sure there are many people in this room, far better qualified than me to answer this question. Therefore, I leave the final analysis to my specialist colleagues from departments of communication and media studies to provide us with some answers.

For the purpose of my presentation, I wish to draw your attention to the answers given to the above questions by FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting). FAIR remarks that:

"Independent, aggressive and critical media are essential to an informed democracy. But mainstream media are increasingly cosy with the economic and political powers they should be watching. Mergers in the news industry have accelerated, further limiting the spectrum of viewpoints that have access to mass media. With U.S. media outlets overwhelmingly owned by for-profit conglomerates and supported by corporate advertisers, independent journalism is compromised".

Ultimately, FAIR believes that structural reform is needed to break up the dominant media conglomerates, establish independent public broadcasting, and promote strong, non-profit alternative sources of information.

FAIR identifies the following areas as the main culprits in what is wrong with the media:

- **Corporate Ownership**
- **Advertiser Influence**
- **Official Agendas**
- **Telecommunications Policy**
- **The PR Industry**
- **Pressure Groups**
- **The Narrow Range of Debate**
- **Censorship**
- **Sensationalism**

Given my observation above, the conference taking place in Oman is extremely timely and significant. In the so-called new world order, the role of the media and its linkages to economics, politics, globalisation, religion, spirituality and cultures are becoming more and more important. It is my firm belief that, an ethical, spiritual and well-informed media can significantly impact the creation of a better world.

If globalisation is to be guided towards the common good, in my view, a necessary pre-requisite is an ethical global media reporting. To achieve this, the roles governing the governance of the media must be changed so that it knows

and serves the common good, rather than the current narrow, self-serving motives and agendas.

**To realise the above, I propose Globalisation for the Common Good in the Information Age. Media and information technology can flourish and achieve their noble mission when working to promote the common good in tandem with the expansion of global communication.**

However, before I try to make my case for the Globalisation for the Common Good, I believe it would be very helpful for us to briefly look at the current economic, neo-liberal inspired globalisation, its roots and consequences, so that we can have a better understanding on why an alternative is desperately and urgently needed and called for.

Today, this so-called globalisation, which has by-and-large brought us a global bitter harvest, is powered by the values of the so-called "Boys from Chicago". The so-called famous school of economics at the University of Chicago led by the late Milton Friedman spread its market fundamentalism worldwide. Greed, selfishness, individualism and short-termism were conflated with freedom and democracy and elevated to the status of moral philosophy. The fatal flaws of this ideology fuelled the reckless risk-taking, greed and arrogance that have led to Wall Street's downfall, turning it into the Fraud Street.

The Chicago Boys and their clones stormed through Latin America in the 1950s, led the triumphant forces of capitalism to victory in the Cold War and sparked the Reagan and Thatcher era and the Washington Consensus of deregulation, liberalisation, market forces, privatisation, driving today's form of economic globalisation. The roots of market fundamentalism stem from Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* while ignoring his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* ([more on this later](#)) and from the influential Austrian economist, Friedrich Hayek, who brought out the central text of neo-liberalism, *The Road to Serfdom*. Hayek became the founding father of the economic management and the ideological basis of US libertarianism and the neoconservatives' revival in the George W. Bush administration, which has brought us the current calamity.

Elevating individual freedom and free markets to a higher moral status than community responsibility and the role of government helped destroy the excesses of communism and Stalinism. Yet, this lure of "rugged individualism," making money in markets free of regulation, also drove the narrow calculus of Milton Friedman's famous single bottom line: the only purpose of private enterprise and corporations is to make as much money as possible for shareholders. Academics created "free market" curricula, and business schools reaped grants from corporations and from conservative and gullible liberal foundations, dishing out MBAs to the CEOs of the companies and the banks who have practiced what they were taught so disgracefully, so unethically. Media joined in promoting the "animal spirits" of individual entrepreneurs, the glorification of business leaders and the "wealth" of Wall Street raiders, hedge fund titans and private equity kings. Money was seen as the only form of wealth.

In all, it is my intention to argue that, neo-liberalism is at the heart of inhumanity, injustice, unhappiness and more in the world today. Nowhere this can be observed better than in the works and writings of the great scholar Karl Polanyi and his master work, *The Great Transformation*; which was published in 1944. Polanyi wrote that, "To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment...Would result in the demolition of society". In short as has been noted, the whole point of neo-

liberalism is that the market mechanism should be allowed to direct the fate of human beings. The economy should dictate its rules to society, not the other way around. And just as Polanyi foresaw, this doctrine has now pushed us directly towards the "demolition of society".

So what happened? Why have we reached this point half a century after the end of the Second World War?

How did neo-liberalism ever emerge to become the dominant doctrine in the world today? Why can the IMF and the Bank intervene at will and force countries to participate in the world economy on basically unfavourable terms. Why is the Welfare State under threat in all the countries where it was established? Why is the environment on the edge of collapse and why are there so many poor people in both the rich and the poor countries at a time when there has never existed such great wealth? Those are the questions that need to be answered from an historical perspective. One explanation for this triumph of neo-liberalism and the economic, political, social and ecological disasters that go with it is that neo-liberals have bought and paid for their own vicious and regressive "Great Transformation".

The neo-liberals and those who finance them have created a huge international network of foundations, institutes, research centres, publications, scholars, writers and public relations hacks to develop, package and push their ideas and doctrine relentlessly. They have also created a neo-liberal inspired media, supporting them all the way, telling the masses that there is no alternative to neo-liberalism. They have spent hundreds of millions of dollars, but the result has been worth every penny to them because they have made neo-liberalism seem as if it were the natural and normal condition of humankind. No matter how many disasters of all kinds the neo-liberal system has visibly created, no matter what financial crises it may engender, no matter how many losers and outcasts it may create, it is still made to seem inevitable, like an act of God, the only possible economic and social order available to us. So, from a small, unpopular sect with virtually no influence, neo-liberalism has become the major world religion with its dogmatic doctrine, its priesthood, its law-giving institutions and perhaps most important of all, its hell for heathen and sinners who dare to contest the revealed truth.

Neo-liberalism itself is the notion of competition--competition between nations, regions, firms and of course between individuals. Competition is central because it separates the sheep from the goats, the men from the boys, and the fit from the unfit. It is supposed to allocate all resources, whether physical, natural, human or financial with the greatest possible efficiency. For the neo-liberal, the market is so wise and so good that like God, the "Invisible Hand" can bring good out of apparent evil. Another implication of competition as the central value of neo-liberalism is that the public sector must be brutally downsized because it does not and cannot obey the basic law of competing for profits or for market share.

Privatisation is one of the major economic transformations of the past thirty years. The trend began in Britain and has spread throughout the world. From the results, one can easily see that the whole point of privatisation, as we have witnessed in the UK for example, is not really to achieve economic efficiency or improved services to the consumers, but simply to transfer wealth from the public purse--which could redistribute it to even out social inequalities--to private hands.

Another structural feature of neo-liberalism consists in remunerating capital to the detriment of labour and thus moving wealth from the bottom of society to the top. If you are, roughly, in the top 20 percent of the income scale, you are likely to gain something from neo-liberalism and the higher you are up the ladder, the more you gain. Conversely, the bottom 80 percent all lose and the lower they are to begin with, the more they lose proportionally.

There is nothing mysterious about this trend towards greater inequality. Policies are specifically designed to give the already rich more disposable income, particularly through tax cuts and by pushing down wages. The theory and ideological justification for such measures is that higher incomes for the rich and higher profits will lead to more investment, better allocation of resources and therefore more jobs and welfare for everyone. In reality, as was perfectly predictable, moving money up the economic ladder has led to stock market bubbles, untold paper wealth for the few, and the kind of financial crises we shall be hearing a lot about in the course of this conference. If income is redistributed towards the bottom 80 percent of society, it will be used for consumption and consequently benefit employment. If wealth is redistributed towards the top, where people already have most of the things they need, it will go not into the local or national economy but to international stock markets. And as you know by now, this is exactly what has happened.

**In the face of this calamity, I believe that, the people of the developing countries of the "South" including the Middle East, by reflecting on, and promoting their time-honoured true human values, such as "Adl", "Ensaniyat", "Adab", "Rohaniyat", "Maslaha", "Zakat", "Doosty, Esheq, Safa, Mohabat" and "Mehman Navazy", to name but a few, can show a path to a different process of globalisation, which is sustainable, efficient and equitable all the same time.**

**Here I am reminded of the wise words of Muhammad Iqbal that we should always endeavour to wed intellect and love. Iqbal remarked that through love, intellect grows acquainted with reality and intellect gives stability to the work of love. This in turn will lay the foundations of a new world.**

People everywhere, given a chance prefer to be compassionate, spiritual and caring. They want to be able to practice their religions freely. More and more, they also want to see that their religious values have a bearing on their economic systems and structures. This philosophy is nowhere stronger than in the Middle-East, whose people by and large are very spiritual, religious, hospitable, informed and cultural.

They largely do not reject the pivotal values behind a well regulated, accountable market economy. Indeed, the Middle-East region throughout the history has been the major area of, and for, business, trade and commerce. They do know that, under the right conditions, a market economy can drive development, decrease poverty, encourage productivity, and reward entrepreneurial energy. Moreover, great many Muslims everywhere want their societies to be economically and politically compatible with the West, while remaining in social and spiritual terms true to their religious heritage. They want to trigger both the equivalent of a renaissance and a rationalist enlightened movement in the Islamic world. Based on our commonly shared values of love, compassion, justice and progress for the common good, we should be able to formulate a partnership for mutual benefit and development.

The ethical and spiritual teachings of all religions and cultures and their striving for the common good can provide a clear and focused model of moral behaviour in what has been termed “the market place”. The religious and business values and sentiments, such as human dignity, communal solidarity, humility, patience, service, compassion, reciprocity, social justice, equity, efficiency, growth and profit should go together, hand-in-hand, leading to Globalisation for the Common Good, where every one is a winner. We should acknowledge that, the marketplace is not just an economic sphere, but, it is a region of the human spirit, compassion and dignity.

The call for this dialogue is an appeal to the deep instinctive understanding of the common good that all people share. It is an appeal to our essential humanity to deal with some of the most pressing concerns of peoples the world over. Religion has always been a major factor in the growth of human civilisation. Business and wealth creation when they are for a noble reason are blessed and vital for human survival.

As a global citizen, with a deep understanding of both Eastern and Western traditions and values, as well as an economist who has promoted sacred, spiritual economics and economics of hope & compassion, I would like to present- Globalisation for the Common Good- as a possible model of engaging with the Middle East, as I believe it to be in great harmony with the tradition of the people of the region.

### **Globalisation for the Common Good**

We at the Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative fully believe that the rich heritages of the world’s religions 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 inter-religious and inter-cultural encounters. We at GCG seek to celebrate religious diversity while seeking to overcome ideological divisions to harness the wealth of the world’s diverse spiritual and ethical traditions to create a sense of common purpose that can enable us to build social and economic policies that are truly humane and life-enhancing.

The Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative was first established in 2002 at a conference in Oxford. Since then, the GCG International Conference has become an annual event growing as it has traveled across the globe through St. Petersburg, Dubai, Kenya, Hawaii, and Istanbul. The 2008 conference was just held at Trinity College, University of Melbourne, and the 2009 conference will take place at Loyola University, Chicago.

These multi-disciplinary conferences have been 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, we have now moved from research and discussion to articulate position papers and an active agenda for change in the international community and its economic and development policies.

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 soon at Loyola University in Chicago.

We at the Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative believe that the current developments in promoting inter-faith 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 inter-religious dialogue which can see peace, justice, and human well-being furthered across the globe.

In short, it seems that the moral crises of global economic and political injustice today are integrally spiritual: they signal something terribly amiss in the relationship between creator and the creation. While economics and politics are based on a partial or wrong image of humanity and human reality, they will not produce the results we need.

Globalisation for the Common Good, by addressing the crises that face us all, empowers us with humanity, spirituality and love. It engages people of different races, cultures and languages, from a wide variety of backgrounds, all of them committed to bringing about a world in which there is more solidarity and greater harmony.

Indeed, 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; and 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 better 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.

What matters most today, it seems more than ever before, are money and economics, the "loads of money" culture, the greed is good mentality. This philosophy of materialism and consumerism has brought us a bitter harvest. Indeed, the ecological degradation and environmental vandalism that we are witnessing in the interest of profit maximisation and the highest return to the shareholders, has prompted many respectable scholars to ask if life as we know it can continue under present conditions. For example, Lord Rees, Prof. of Cosmology and Astrophysics, and Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, gives present human civilisation no more than a 50 per cent chance of surviving the current century, in his recent book ***Our Final Century***. Are we closer to the beginning of history, or to its end?

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.

As it has been noted by many saints and sages throughout history, fostering peace by overcoming evil with good requires careful reflection *on the* common good and on its social and political implications. When the common good is encouraged at every level, the conditions for peace are promoted. Can an individual find complete fulfilment without taking account of his/her social nature, that is, our being "with" and "for" others? The common good closely concerns us. It closely concerns every expression of our social nature: the family, groups, associations, cities, regions, states, the community of peoples and nations.

### ***Genealogy of the Common Good: A Bird's Eye Summary***

The theological and philosophical origins and sources of the common good is indeed very well documented. As it has been observed, the common good is an old idea with new-found vitality in the global public discourse. Debates about the common good allow participation by diverse schools of thought and provide a unique opportunity to build the broad political will necessary to meet today's international moral obligations. The global common good challenges individual traditions to work across boundaries of faith and geography to arrive at a shared moral vision for our highly interconnected world.

Aristotle was the philosophical father of the common good. In his quest to set out the ethical precepts for developing virtuous citizens and building just societies, he developed the idea that both individuals and governments ought to work for the same virtuous goals. By bringing humanity back to its shared common good, he developed an ethical system that attempts to address the shared interests of diverse societies.

St. Thomas Aquinas played a critical role in wedding Aristotle's concept to the Christian tradition. Aquinas makes the important point that the common good and



the good of individuals are not in opposition. In fact, "He that seeks the good of the many seeks in consequence his own good."

Contemporary Christian sources, both Catholic and Protestant, have built on this long tradition of advocating government for the common good. Vatican II speaks of "the increasingly universal complexion" of the common good, given our growing human interdependence, and argues that we have duties not just to our countrymen but "with respect to the whole human race."

In Protestant traditions the concept of the common good rests on similar foundations of universal human dignity and a shared responsibility to build just political systems.

The common good resonates beyond Christian traditions as well. The term has rich resonance in the history of Jewish thought and in contemporary Jewish practice. The Jewish tradition of working for justice and the common good is extensive:

Among the 613 commandments laid out in the covenant with Moses are injunctions to protect the disempowered, especially the poor, widows, orphans, and children. The related concept of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) is also prominent within the contemporary Jewish community.

Like its two Abrahamic cousins, Islam is rich in ethical injunctions grounded in the idea of the common good. The presence of *zakat* (almsgiving) as one of the five pillars of Islam makes it clear that an ethic of mutual support is at the core of the Islamic faith. There is a strong sense that good government is one that can provide for the poor and needy. The idea of *maslaha*, translated as either "public interest" or "common good," guides governmental responsibility to provide for public needs. It has featured heavily in the writings of modern Muslim reformers throughout the Islamic world.

Conceptions of the common good abound in Eastern traditions as well. In all, these rich traditions of religious and philosophical thought have pervaded societies throughout the world, establishing the foundations for civilizations and governments.

In addition to its religious roots, the concept of the global common good is based in civic values that can unite our troubled world and guide our actions in serving for the common good.

Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant expressed similar truths when developing his cosmopolitan ideal of the international community. "Since the narrower or wider community of the peoples of the earth has developed so far that a violation of rights in one place is felt throughout the world, the idea of a cosmopolitan right is not a fantastical, high-flown or exaggerated notion."

However, discovering common ties amongst various belief systems important as it appears to be is nonetheless only a beginning. The greater challenge is to apply the ideas of the global common good to practical problems and forge common solutions. Translating the contentions of philosophers and religious scholars into agreement between policymakers and nations is the task of statesmen, citizens and policy makers, a challenge to which globalisation for the common good has adhered itself to, the purpose is not simply talking about the common good, or simply to have a dialogue, but the purpose is to take actions, to make the common good and dialogue to work for all of us, benefiting us all, which I will shed more light on later.

In all, from our perspective, the basic philosophical argument that should guide our strategic process and inform our politics is clear: **We should seek to secure the common good.** Securing the common good means putting the public interest above narrow self interest and group demands; working to achieve social and economic conditions that benefit everyone; promoting a personal, governmental and corporate ethic of responsibility and service to others; creating a more open and honest governmental structure that relies upon an engaged and participatory citizenry; and doing more to meet our common responsibilities to aid the disadvantaged, protect our natural resources; and provide opportunities rather than burdens for future generations.

After years of neo-liberalism defined by rampant individualism, materialism and greed, people, everywhere, are ready for a higher national purpose and a greater sense of service and duty to something beyond self-interest alone. The common good represents a clear break with the conservative/neo-liberal vision of the world as an aggregation of individuals pursuing their own needs and interests with little concern for what unites us as people, or for the impacts of our actions on the whole of society.

The goal of the common good in both the secular and faith traditions is a more balanced and considerate populace that seeks to provide the social and economic conditions necessary for all people to lead meaningful and dignified lives.

Given the bitter harvest of neo-liberalism world- wide, today we are all getting a better understanding of what is needed to heal our broken world, a strong notion of sacrifice and duty in service to a greater good.

We should advocate for new and revitalised global leadership in pursuit of a global common good; leadership that is grounded in global engagement and dialogue, expand economic opportunity with justice and equity, and new institutions and networks to deal with intractable problems. Martin Luther King said it so eloquently when he remarked that an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. That is what the global common good is about-working together for a world of justice and peace.

Globalisation, as I noted above, 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.

In recent decades, the role of religion has increased both in Western and non-Western societies. Religion continues to be significant in individual lives, collective identities and political mobilization. Furthermore, religion today is quintessential of identity politics and it functions both as a liberating and a repressing factor.

I believe that, religion is better at fostering peace than at fuelling war. Frequently, the root cause of conflict is economic, social, ethnic, or political, even

though it may be dressed up in religious garb. As Fred Dallmayr of University of Notre Dame in his recent book, ***In Search of the Good Life***, has noted, "It seems to me that religiously motivated violence is a sign of small faith. It is practiced by people who merely dabble in faith or are novices in faith and thus do not hesitate to abuse religion for their own ends".

Thus, for me, religion can often be invaluable in promoting understanding and reconciliation-and the need to exploit that potential has never been greater. Moreover, with so much emphasis on religion as a source of conflict, the role of religion as a force in peacemaking is usually overlooked.

Religion, after all, is a powerful constituent of cultural norms and values, and because it addresses the most profound existential issues of human life (e.g., freedom and inevitability, fear and faith, security and insecurity, right and wrong, sacred and profane), religion is deeply implicated in individual and social conceptions of peace. To transform the conflicts besetting the world today, we need to uncover the conceptions of peace within our diverse religious, spiritual and cultural traditions, while seeking the common ground among them.

The major religions of the world prescribe the unselfish love and service of others. Only when this love extends to all humanity without exception can a dignified and peaceful human future become possible. God is love and love is God. St. Paul wrote, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrongs". Judaism teaches that "those who are kind reward themselves". The Quran reads, "My mercy and compassion embrace all things". In these and other traditions, unselfish love is deemed a Creative Presence underlying and integral to all of reality, participation in which constitutes the fullest experience of spirituality.

As I mentioned in my introductory remarks, in order to provide a better understanding of the role of religions in the age of globalisation, in 2002, "Globalisation for the Common Good" came into being at Oxford. This movement is for "Rekindling the Human Spirit and Compassion in Globalisation". We have articulated an alternative to the current dominant models of economic/free trade globalisation and that would make globalisation good for all.

The mission of Globalisation for the Common Good is 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 Divine dimension of life can not be divorced from consideration of economic questions and issues can not be considered. Economics can not 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.

## **The Essential Dimensions of Globalisation for the Common Good**

1. To champion the highest cultural evolutionary values and aspirations of the early 21st century, in full awareness of their strategic interdependence:

- Respect for belief in God, Ultimate Reality, or the One, and the right of each person to religious freedom and practice
- The investment of spiritual capital
- The practice of selfless love
- Deep Interreligious and intercultural dialogue and engagement for the common good
- Cultures of peace and non-violent conflict resolution
- Economic justice, social justice, solidarity, and universal human rights
- Ecological sustainability, stewardship, and commitment to an interspecies ethic
- Global empowerment of women
- The rights of the child
- The elimination of global hunger, thirst, preventable disease, and poverty
- Cosmopolitanism: the harmony of local, national, and global citizenship

2. To seek solutions to the great challenges facing the planetary community:

- The estrangement of global North and South
- The urgent need for a restructured global economy
- The increasing necessity of global public governance
- The elucidation of a global ethic identifying the rights and the responsibilities of Earth's people
- The elimination of the scourges of actual and virtual slavery and torture
- The creation of sustainable energy policies
- The realization of planetary sovereignty by the peoples of the Earth
- Cherishing and protection of the global commons
- Commitment to service

3. To contribute to the creation of a global interdisciplinary agenda for the common good.

## **The Aims of Globalisation for the Common Good are:**

- GCG commits itself to a wide range of activities that are all aimed at promoting and teaching, through cutting-edge scholarly activities, research and education on Globalisation for the Common Good. Our emphasis is on providing progressive perspectives that are increasingly hard to find because of the reliance on, and promotion of, neo-liberalism as the sole philosophy behind the current globalisation process.
- GCG therefore, rather than espousing and defending a single discipline or paradigm, seeks to engage a broad, pluralistic range of viewpoints and models to be represented, compared, and ultimately synthesised into a richer understanding of the inherently complex systems it deals with.
- GCG nurtures a commitment among academics and practitioners to learn from each other, to explore new patterns of thinking together, and to facilitate the derivation and implementation of effective policies for the realisation of Globalisation for the Common Good.
- GCG is committed to the idea of global cooperation and dialogue between scholars, business leaders, policy makers, opinion leaders and leading NGOs. Our aim is that such co-operation will lead to a more informed and balanced understanding of the behaviours, motivations and objectives of

the various forces, agents and policy makers that form the globalisation process.

Among research topics carried out by GCG in fulfilment of its mission are:

- Ethics, Philosophy, Theology and Globalisation
- Eastern and Western spirituality in Dialogue for the Common Good
- Global Governance, Business, Economics and Globalisation
- Ethics and Spirituality in Higher Education
- Global Consciousness and Spirituality
- Faith and Action in the age of Globalisation
- The Virtuous Economy- Business as a Calling: Doing Well by Doing Good
- Environment, Ecology and Globalisation
- Psychology and Globalisation
- Politics, International Relations and Globalisation
- Non-violent Conflict Resolution and Peace building
- Civilisation, Culture and Globalisation
- Media, Global reporting and Globalisation
- Global Activism for the Common Good
- Enabling, Envisioning and Empowering: Young People Leadership Programme in Common Good
- Regions & Globalisation for the Common Good

### **Globalisation for the Common Good:**

#### **How it All Began**

#### **Globalisation for the common Good: In a nutshell**

I was born in Tehran, Iran in 1952. In 1971, after finishing high school, I came to England to further my education. In 1974 I married my English wife, Annie, and two years later we emigrated to Canada. I received my BA and MA in Economics from the University of Windsor in 1980 and 1982 respectively. We returned to England in 1982, and in 1986 I was awarded my PhD in Economics from the University of Birmingham.

From 1980 onwards, for the next twenty years, I taught economics in universities, enthusiastically demonstrating how economic theories provided answers to problems of all sorts. I got quite carried away by the beauty, the sophisticated elegance, of complicated mathematical models and theories. But gradually I started to have an empty feeling.

I began to ask fundamental questions of myself. Why did I never talk to my students about compassion, dignity, comradeship, solidarity, happiness, spirituality – about the meaning of life? We never debated the biggest questions. Who are we? Where have we come from? Where are we going to?

I told them to create wealth, but I did not tell them for what reason. I told them about scarcity and competition, but not about abundance and co-operation. I told them about free trade, but not about fair trade; about GNP – Gross National Product – but not about GNH – Gross National Happiness. I told them about profit maximisation and cost minimisation, about the highest returns to the shareholders, but not about social consciousness, accountability to the community, sustainability and respect for creation and the creator. I did not tell

them that, without humanity, economics is a house of cards built on shifting sands.

These conflicts caused me much frustration and alienation, leading to heartache and despair. I needed to rediscover myself and a real-life economics. After a proud twenty-year or so academic career, I became a student all over again. I would study theology and philosophy, disciplines nobody had taught me when I was a student of economics and I did not teach my own students when I became a teacher of economics.

It was at this difficult time that I came to understand that I needed to bring spirituality, compassion, ethics and morality back into economics itself, to make this dismal science once again relevant to and concerned with the common good. It was now that I made the following discoveries:

\* Living happily is "the desire of us all, but our minds is blinded to a clear vision of just what it is that makes life happy". The root of happiness is ethical behaviour, and thus the ancient idea of moral education and cultivation, is essential to ideal of joyfulness.

\* Economics, from the time of Plato right through to Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, was as deeply concerned with issues of social justice, ethics and morality as it was with economic analysis. Most economics students today learn that Adam Smith was the 'father of modern economics' but not that he was also a moral philosopher. In 1759, sixteen years before his famous *Wealth of Nations*, he published *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which explored the self-interested nature of man and his ability nevertheless to make moral decisions based on factors other than selfishness. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith laid the early groundwork for economic analysis, but he embedded it in a broader discussion of social justice and the role of government. Students today know only of his analogy of the 'invisible hand' and refer to him as defending free markets. They ignore his insight that the pursuit of wealth should not take precedence over social and moral obligations, and his belief that a 'divine Being' gives us 'the greatest quantity of happiness'. They are taught that the free market as a 'way of life' appealed to Adam Smith but not that he distrusted the morality of the market as a morality for society at large. He neither envisioned nor prescribed a capitalist society, but rather a 'capitalist economy within society, a society held together by communities of non-capitalist and non-market morality'. As it has been noted, morality for Smith included neighbourly love, an obligation to practice justice, a norm of financial support for the government 'in proportion to [one's] revenue', and a tendency in human nature to derive pleasure from the good fortune and happiness of other people.

\*The leading figure in the establishment of the American Economic Association (AEA) in 1885 was the progressive economist Richard T. Ely. He sought to combine economic theory with Christian ethics, especially the command to love one's neighbour (as did Adam Smith). He declared that the Church, the State and the individual must work together to fulfil the Kingdom of God on earth. Few economists or economics students today know much of this history: that, for example, twenty of the fifty founding members of the AEA were former or practising ministers. Ely himself was a leading member, in the 1880s, of the Social Gospel movement; he was better known to the American public in this capacity than as an economist. He believed that economics departments should be located in schools of theology because 'Christianity is primarily concerned with this world, and it is the mission of Christianity to bring to pass here a kingdom of righteousness.' As a 'religious subject', economics should provide the base for 'a

never-ceasing attack on every wrong institution, until the earth becomes a new earth, and all its cities, cities of God.'

\* The focus of economics should be on the benefit and the bounty that the economy produces, on how to let this bounty increase, and how to share the benefits justly among the people for the common good, removing the evils that hinder this process. Moreover, economic investigation should be accompanied by research into subjects such as anthropology, philosophy, politics and most importantly, theology, to give insight into our own mystery, as no economic theory or no economist can say who we are, where have we come from or where we are going to. Humankind must be respected as the centre of creation and not relegated by more short term economic interests.

\*'Economic rationality' in the shape of neo-liberal globalisation is socially and politically suicidal. Justice and democracy are sacrificed on the altar of a mythical market as forces outside society rather than creations of it. However, free markets do not exist in a vacuum. They require a set of impartiality in government, honesty, justice, and public spiritedness in business. The best safeguard against fraud, theft, and injustice in markets are the cardinal virtues of justice, temperance, fortitude, and prudence, and the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

\*Every apparently economic choice is, in reality, a social choice. We can choose a society of basic rights – education, health, housing, child support and a dignified pension – or greed, pandemic inequality, ecological vandalism, civic chaos and social despair. Modern neo-liberal economics ignores the first and promotes the second path as the way to achieve economic efficiency and growth.

\*The moral crises of global economic injustice today are integrally spiritual: they signal something terribly amiss in the relationship between human beings and God.

\*Where the moral life and the mystery of God's presence are held in one breath – because the moral life is the same as the mystical life – the moral agency may be found for establishing paths towards a more just, compassionate and sustainable way of living. 'Moral agency' is the active love of creation (for oneself as well as for other people and for the non-human creation); it is the will to orient life around the ongoing well-being of communities and of the global community, prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable; it is the will to create social structures and policies that ensure social justice and ecological sustainability.

\*In contrast to this sensibility, which weds spirituality and morality, stands modern economics' persistent tendency to divorce the two, in particular to dissociate the intimate personal experience of a close relationship with God from public moral power.

\*It is the belief in collective responsibility and collective endeavour that allows individual freedom to flourish. This can only be realised when we commit ourselves to the common good and begin to serve it.

\*There are three justifications for the common good which are not commonly discussed in economics:

1 Human beings need human contact, or sociability. The quality of that interaction is important, quite apart from any material benefits it may bring.

2 Human beings are formed in the community – their education and training in virtue (their preferences) are elements of the common good.

3 A healthy love for the common good is a necessary component of a fully developed personality.

\*The marketplace is not just an economic sphere, 'it is a region of the human spirit'. Profound economic questions are divine in nature; in contrast to what is assumed today, they should be concerned with the world of the heart and spirit. Although self-interest is an important source of human motivation, driving the decisions we make in the marketplace every day, those decisions nevertheless have a moral, ethical and spiritual content, because each decision we make affects not only ourselves but others too. We must combine the need for economic efficiency with the need for social justice and environmental sustainability.

\*The greatest achievement of modern globalisation will eventually come to be seen as the opening up of possibilities to build a humane and spiritually enriched globalised world through the universalising and globalising of compassion. But for 'others' to become 'us', for the world to become intimate with itself, we have to get to know each other better than we do now. Prejudices have to disappear: we have to see that the cultural, religious and ethnic differences reflect an ultimate creative principle. For this to happen, the great cultures and religions need to enter into genuine dialogue with each other.

It has been my pleasure and honour to put into practice these discoveries by founding the Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative.

**Endnotes:** The main sources consulted are:

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**Dr Kamran Mofid**, Founder, *Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative* (Oxford, 2002) and Co- founder/Editor, *Journal of Globalisation for the Common Good*, member of the International Coordinating Committee of the WPF Dialogue of Civilisation, holds dual British and Canadian nationality, was born in Tehran, Iran in 1952, received his BA and MA in economics from the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada, in 1980 and 1982 respectively. In 1986 he was awarded his doctorate in economics from the University of Birmingham, UK. In 2001 he received a Certificate in Education in Pastoral Studies at Plater College, Oxford. From 1980 onwards he has been teaching and supervising undergraduate and graduate students in development economics, business studies, international business and the political economy of the Middle East. He has also acted as external examiner for undergraduate and PhD research thesis at different



universities. In recent years Dr. Mofid has developed short courses, seminars and workshops on economics and theology, the economics of the common good, religions & globalisation, altruism & service: Islam and Christianity in dialogue, business ethics & corporate social responsibility, spiritual economics and non-violent conflict resolution and an inter-faith perspective on globalisation.

Dr. Mofid's work is highly interdisciplinary, drawing on Economics, Politics, International Relations, Theology, Culture, Ecology, Ethics and Spirituality. Dr. Mofid's writings have appeared in leading scholarly journals, popular magazines and newspapers. His books include *Development Planning in Iran: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (1987), *The Economic Consequences of the Gulf war* (1990), *Globalisation for the Common Good* (2002) which has been translated into Japanese and was published in May 2003 by Don Bosco-sha, Tokyo, *Business Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility and Globalisation for the Common Good* (March, 2003), *Promoting the Common Good* (with Rev. Marcus Braybrooke, 2005), and *A non-Violent Path to Conflict Resolution and Peace Building* (Co-authored) (2008).

Dr. Mofid has been a frequent speaker at major international conferences in Europe, United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Africa and the Middle East, and has been invited to speak on his research and publications at major international universities.

Dr. Mofid has been a frequent speaker on the BBC World Service, BBC Coventry and BBC Radio Oxford and on occasions he has been interviewed for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and The Voice of America. For more details see [www.globalisationforthecommongood.info](http://www.globalisationforthecommongood.info)  
[www.commongoodjournal.com](http://www.commongoodjournal.com)