

What Values Will Guide Our Future in an Era of Globalization?

Finding a common human unity is a long road…

{mosgoogle}by Craig Runde While globalization is seen as one of the most serious threats to human freedom, to economic democracy, ecological health and much more, it may not be all bad. It may, in fact, depend on who’s doing it, and why. In his book, *Predatory Globalization*, Princeton Professor Richard Falk, writes, “The phenomenon of globalization represents mainly material developments that reflect the expansion of technological capabilities to a global scale, as well as the de-territorialization of these capabilities due to informatics and the Internet.” Major problems arise because this process is largely guided by neo-liberal ideology which stresses, “privatization, minimizing economic regulation, rolling back welfare, (and) reducing expenditures on public goods…” Falk sees the net effects of this kind of “globalization from above” as social and economic injustice, environmental degradation, and heightened materialism leading to cultural and spiritual decay. Others have also noted these problems. In *The Post Corporate World: Life After Capitalism*, David Korten highlights the increasing problems of the dominant form of globalization where the principle of ‘profit’ is more important than that of ‘life’. Pope John Paul II, meeting with President George W. Bush, also noted our predicament: “The Church cannot but express profound concern that our world continues to be divided, no longer by the former political and military blocks, but by a tragic fault line between those who can benefit from these opportunities and those who seem cut off from them.” Although the economics of globalization appear dominant at the moment, they are not uncontested. The sustained protests against the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and other ‘globalizing’ institutions, demonstrate a broad-based, international backlash, part of what Falk refers to as ‘globalization from below.’ This form of globalization involves grassroots efforts from environmentalists, human rights activists, indigenous peoples movements, labor unionists, women’s movements, and others. While these groups have varied agendas, they are united in opposition to the undemocratic process of globalization from above, which is guided by financial elites. As time passes it becomes more essential that ‘globalization from below’ groups develop common goals beyond their current anti-exploitation sentiment. A thread of unity Korten’s vision puts ‘life’ before ‘profits’. Variations on this theme can be found in the campaigns associated with globalization from below. They stress different elements of the movement’s vision, be they environmental sustainability or human rights. Korten notes: “More than 1,000 civil-society organizations in seventy-seven countries … have launched a new global campaign to demand ‘an alternative, humane, democratically accountable and sustainable system of commerce that benefits all of us…’ The movement faces many potential pitfalls, and given the power of those it opposes, there is no guarantee that it can actually modify globalization enough to preserve people and the environment, let alone build a decent world order. But this is more likely to be achieved by means of a movement that is unified across the boundaries of countries, issues and constituencies than by any other approach.” At present, the main unifying thread is opposition to the values and effects associated with globalization from above. This is both good and bad. It is susceptible to fracture if the movement becomes successful and there is less of a clear-cut opponent to be united against. At the same time, this sentiment does help bring groups together that might not otherwise cooperate. In the longer term a positive set of principles are required to sustain unity. Many organizations are working on this now, and common issues include: environmental sustainability, democratizing institutions, decentralizing decision-making, equalizing global wealth and power, and others. In addition to these social, economic, and political principles, others are focusing on finding commonality in global ethics and values. The notion here is that if we can adopt common values, this will help inform and shape any particular economic or political agenda. In fact, a number of values, sometimes spoken and sometimes not, lie behind the development of the current principles, but focusing on the values more closely helps clarify the underlying basis for any particular program.

In 1993, the Parliament of World Religions adopted a declaration called *Towards A Global Ethic*, affirming that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the world’s religions and that this core should form the basis of a global ethic. The principles of the global ethic include: · No new global order without a new global ethic, · A fundamental demand: every human being must be treated humanely, · Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life, · Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order, · Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women, · Transformation of consciousness. The final principle is quite interesting and deserves some additional attention. The declaration describes this point as follows: “Historical experience demonstrates the following: Earth cannot be changed for the better unless we achieve a transformation in the consciousness of individuals and in public life. The possibilities for transformation have already been glimpsed in areas such as war and peace, economy, and ecology, where in recent decades fundamental changes have taken place. This transformation must also be achieved in the area of ethics and values. Every individual has intrinsic dignity and inalienable rights, and each also has an inescapable responsibility for what she or he does or does not do. All our decisions and deeds, even our omissions and failures, have consequences.” In a similar spirit, Korten urges personal transformation as an important part of the process of changing the corporate dominated values of current globalization to those of a more humane society. P.R. Sarkar, founder of the Ananda Marga and Renaissance Universal movements, also called for such a transformation in consciousness, which would promote unity. “In the present environment, there are working many… tendencies dividing humanity into mutually belligerent groups. Spirituality must inculcate sense in human psychology and develop natural affinity among this species of the creation.” Sarkar noted the importance of adopting a common philosophy of life in addressing the problems that face us: “Common philosophy of life demands a clear conception… that the development of human personality

means an evolution in the physical, mental and spiritual spheres… Religion in the sense of Dharma is the unifying force in humanity. Moreover, spirituality provides the (individual) and the humanity at large with the subtle and tremendous power with which no other power can be compared. Therefore, with spirituality as the base, a rational philosophy should be evolved to deal with the physical, psychological and socio-philosophical problems of the day.” While there may be a need for developing common ethics or a common philosophy of life, is it realistic? Although there are obviously large differences between people, perhaps our commonalties are greater still. As Sarkar states, “The external differences… cannot alter (our) basic human traits—love and affection, pleasure and pain, hunger and thirst. These biological instincts and mental propensities equally predominate in human beings of all complexions in all countries and in all ages. A mere rustic, unlettered tribal mother… bears deep maternal affection for her young children; in the same way, a well-educated mother in New York pours out of her heart a great love for her own children. The subterranean flow of love and affection exists in all hearts alike. Every person cries out in pain, everyone feels pleasure when there are occasions of joy and happiness. In different geographical, cultural, social, and other environments the lifestyles of different human groups may vary… but fundamentally their mental existence flows along the same channels of ideas and consciousness.” It would benefit those who support the processes associated with globalization from below to explore and make clear the values that inform their efforts. They should also work with others to find the common points among their values so that they can build towards a new future, which will be sustainable even after their current foes are vanquished. References are available from New Renaissance. Craig Runde is a correspondent for New Renaissance. Craig has taught courses on globalization at Wake Forest University. He is currently researching global constitutional measures based on the social philosophy of P.R. Sarkar. Email: crunde@yahoo.com

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