

Reflections on the Globalization Conference

Santa Clara University from 7th – 10th Nov 2002.

Thank you for inviting me to share my reflections on the conference. I will take this occasion to hurriedly put out my reflections along with a deep sense of appreciation and gratitude. Jacques Derrida once said that the best guest at a party is the uninvited; take these unprepared reflections from that de-constructionist perspective, as views and impressions as the events of the last three days impacted me.

Let us take this occasion to recall, re-member, and relish all that happened to us during these last three days. Let me with a deep sense of appreciation and a profound feeling of gratitude compliment the meticulous planning right from the invitation letters (not to speak of the conceiving the very idea of the conference), the prompt and continuous correspondence with the future participants were really praise worthy. I thank specially Paul Woolley, and Paul Fitzgerald in this regard. We were warmly received at Nobili Hall and Louis Calero, s.j. made us feel at home in the house. We admire Jane Najour for being on her feet at 11 p.m. waiting for Chryso Pieris to arrive from the airport and take him to his room. With excellent food and friendly team of helpers, we simply experienced ‘American efficiency with ease’, symbolized in Bill Spohn, the director of the Conference.

Let us look at the dynamics of the seminar at two levels: the informal and the formal. The lively exchanges and engaged discussions during the breaks and meals deepened the conference discussions and carried it further. It was then that the hearts met when the minds remained silent but alert. When Paolo Albuquerque explained his grass-roots experiments and seminal thinking on ‘social technology’ in Spanish, I was attuned to it through my broken Italian and we carried that through further discussion at a larger circle; just to cite one example, as I am sure several other events ‘happened’ among us. The point that I want to make is that these informal sessions were part and parcel of the dynamics of the seminar as such.

At the formal level, I think we began on an excellent note with Michael Czerny’s composition of ‘place and time’ of globalization. From a very Jesuit perspective, we moved on to the nitty-gritty of issues; we grappled with those three key terms of ‘globalization, justice and faith’. As we moved on to questions of economics and poverty we were like the Emmaus disciples, confused, dejected, agitated and searching. But Emmaus is not very far away from Jerusalem. Certain clarity was brought into the discussion when Gap Lo Biondi hit upon the question of social systems embedded in economics and economics embedded in social systems. It was crucial to understand the linkage in order to de-link the ‘monopoly’ of economics over the rest of life. It might help us to bring in human affections into economics and thus to tame the whirlwind of globalization especially on the third world and the poor. I thought that put us on the road back to Jerusalem. Then we moved into thicker layers of social systems in terms of religion and culture. We recognized that religion and culture operate as ‘shock absorbers’ for communities in the wake of globalization. This would manifest itself often in fundamentalist terms. However religion and culture can also be resources to tame globalization and to direct it towards visions and healthy utopias. All during the discussions and sharing, there emerged signals of hope in the shape of the references to the so called anti-global movements, anti-war demonstrations, ecological initiatives, greater sensitivity to human rights issues, grass-root models, and global

collaborations during the time of natural calamities, etc. These were in a sense new religious forms that give us hope on the road of globalization and enable us to define globalization in a comprehensive way. In this venture, we recognize the role of Jesuit universities to operate as 'buffer zones' between the downward trend of globalization and the upward trend of peoples' movements. Universities could filter, clarify, and articulate the pedagogy of these movements and the demands of globalization with all rigor and comprehension.

I may be allowed to point out two areas of shadows that I perceived in the conference. The gender issue in relation to globalization was rather sidelined; it did not receive the attention that it deserved. This is all the more in Santa Clara, the only Jesuit mission dedicated to the memory of woman, I was told. The feminine issues are significant in the debate on globalization because it can bring about certain 'taming' as it were to the dynamics of 'masculine centered rationality of techno-culture' of globalization. The other shadow is with regard to the role of the panelists. Perhaps the panelists were over-stretched to answer questions related various fields which were not theirs. Those who framed the questions could have handled some of the questions.

That apart, I leave Santa Clara with a deep sense of satisfaction for having come to this conference and interacted with so many resourceful, loving and caring persons. After all globalization could be resourceful and ennobling, if it is guided, presented, understood and perceived as we attempted to do here. Fr.General Kolvenbach said that more than concepts, it is contacts that enable us to further the cause of Justice and faith. Here in Santa Clara we conceptualized through contacts; and we came closer to one another through discussions. Our hearts and minds worked together and brought about communion among us. This was very much reflected in Morning Prayer and the meaningful liturgy at the end of the day.

I work in *Visva-Bharati* University founded by Rabindranath Tagore, the nobel-laureate from India. '*Visva*' refers to the world; *bharati* refers to the whole of India and he envisaged that the whole of the world and India be found in a nest as it were in Santiniketan. We have had such visionaries in the first half of the last century who had global visions and utopias that were not dominated by technology. We could as well learn from them to envision a better future, not in spite of, but along with technological advancement and for all peoples. In Indian language, though we have terms for welcome and thanks, we don't use them; rather we bring palms to chest and signify: you are welcome into our hearts and you remain in our hearts. We say the same to one another at the end of this truly Jesuit conference. Thank you and God bless us.

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