

“IMAGINE” Globalization

by Suzanne Thompson

Delivered at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Stockton on August 17, 2003

Back in 1997, on a snowy spring morning while living in Seattle, I had an extended bus ride to work into the city. As I sat there peering out the window (viewing the freshly powdered concrete and landscape), I thought to myself, how beautiful and peaceful a simple layer of frozen water can transform the cracked and oil-stained streets; how it hid all the litter and ugliness that surrounded the industrial structures that crossed my daily route into the Emerald City.

At that moment, I had a personal epiphany regarding my own direction, my own path. There I was, 29, in an average job, married to a controlling man, who slowly was isolating me away from my family, friends; and worst of all, ripping me away from my dreams, my goals. I decided to imagine my life in 10 years. It was not a pretty picture, to say the least (if you ever saw the movie, *American Beauty*, My in-laws were the boy's parents, I swear!). I was destined to become a numbed, motionless woman with nothing to live for; who sat at the end of a dining room table staring into oblivion with no feelings or care.

It was time I scared myself awake from a potential nightmare of a life. Of course, being isolated from current events and world affairs, little did I know, the world was waking up from the post-Cold War era and having an epiphany itself, regarding a new global movement. The world was transitioning from a controlling, isolating era of the Cold War into a multi-dimensional global stage.

As I chose to tear down the walls of a bad marriage, years earlier walls were being torn down across the earth. The beginning (as you all should be familiar with) was the most significant wall, separating western capitalism and eastern socialism, the toppling of the Berlin Wall in 1989. There were other walls tumbling, though, not made of concrete and rebar, were primary walls of communication, information, interaction, and trade with the other side of our planet.

Thomas Friedman (Pulitzer prize winning journalist from the New York Times), from his acclaimed book, *'The Lexus and the Olive Tree'*, (which has been touted the main source of defining globalization) eloquently expresses how he himself tore down his own wall; and had to re-think and re-educate himself into the globalization thinking. Friedman holds his degrees in the main study of the Middle East and Israeli relations. He spent majority of his career in the Middle East and Israel and reported on a two-dimension stage of relations and peace between opposite entities. A re-assignment in Washington DC literally threw Friedman upon the state of transition from Cold War to Globalization. As he was sensing his way in DC of exactly what to express in a story regarding world economics report, he experienced an epiphany himself, realizing the need to re-educate with the new times, stating:

Today, more than ever, the traditional boundaries between politics, culture, technology, finance, national security, and ecology are disappearing. You often cannot explain one without referring to the others, and you cannot define one without referring to the others, and you cannot explain the whole without reference to them all.

Friedman goes on to lay out the following perspective:

I believe that this new system of globalization-in which walls between countries, markets and disciplines are increasingly being blown away-constitutes a fundamentally new state of affairs. And, the only way to see it, understand it, and explain it, is by arbitrating all six dimensions (politics, culture, technology, finance, national security, ecology) laid out above-assigning different weight to different perspectives at different times in different situations; but always understanding that it is the interaction of all of them together that is really the defining feature of international relations today. And, therefore, being a globalist is the only way to systematically connect the dots, see the system of globalization and thereby order the chaos.

So, there was Friedman going through a career transition of world realization, accidentally stumbling (as he puts it) upon the global transition by a mere journal assignment.

A few years fast-forward, as I was going through a life transition myself, I had 'accidentally' stumbled upon it in the midst of-National Guard patrolled, tear gas winging, and curfew imposed quiet little downtown streets of Seattle. I had literally had tripped over the WTO stage. There I was on my way to work one morning in late November 1999, and ended up caught in the middle of protest marches all around me. They were slowly making their way very close to my work place in the Capital Hill neighborhood (my dad knows area, that's where his favorite chocolate shop presides, 'Dilettante'), and realized I would need to extremely re-route my way around the packed streets of protestors and police, if I wanted to see any daylight of my medical center.

Little did I realize as I was zooming in the back streets of Capital Hill in my trusty Toyota pick-up, that the Emerald gem that I called home for 12 years would take center stage on World Affairs and bring Globalization to the forefront of conversation everywhere! I must confess, little did I know the impact the last days of November in 1999 would have, or why it was occurring at that moment. I, along with a majority of the –more educated versus ignorant- persons across the United States and other countries were about to be barraged with information overload regarding our new world era that has been upon us, 9 years hence.

The WTO (World Trade Organization) was created in 1995 by 104 members to replace the 'General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade' (GATT). It is an international organization based in Geneva. Its purpose is to supervise world trade with the intention of making it flow as smoothly, predictably, and freely as possible. It aims to lower trade barriers and encourage multilateral trade (1). As you may all well know, The WTO has drawn both positive and negative criticism regarding its structure as well as their choices to ignore particular laws in the free trade arena. I bring to the table, the most informative argument regarding the fight to restructure the WTO and what it stands for. I have given you an insert of the most truthful and straight forward argument regarding the WTO, and hope you will take a moment and read through this information. It will give you insight to what

may need to be done to curb negative effects globalization brought upon our surface. Of course, the WTO, itself, can be a separate presentation. The birth of this international organization was created directly from Globalization. Its mission 'expresses' some of the six dimensions that Friedman discussed in his explication of our current global era. The question remains if they are taking care of the dimensions with healthy intentions for all, or ulterior motivations?

A few months following the WTO protests in Seattle, I sat down in one of my favorite living rooms, with my dear friend Richard Henriquez (an incredible genius artist, and an undiscovered UU at heart to boot). We exchanged banter regarding the average American and the state of affairs. Richard, of course, being well versed (turning me on to such alternative authors Charles Bukowski, Hunter S. Thompson, and of course we already both love Kurt Vonnegut), posed Globalization upon me, and how I, him, and everyone else needs to look beyond the foam of their Grande' caramel macchiottos; the Escalades, Volvos, and Mercedes we all want to drive; passed the wannabe Gucci livelihood; get their butts out the lazy boy recliners; actually walk outside of their self-absorbed cocoons, AND EDUCATED THEMSELVES with what is going on around them: Globalization. He emphasized the need to seek out the positive points of globalism and combat the negative aspects; to encounter a position and advocate global idealism. He got me off my tush.

So, these last few years I have added becoming a better 'global' citizen and contributing positively towards my local community and earth surroundings, to my life values and goals. I don't want to see my nation, my planet, turn into a nightmare for everyone in 10 years. I would like to pass this onto you, and hope you are able to take this bit of information and create and form your own individual position (as well as to motivate you to seek out information and educate yourself to the current surroundings of our planet).

You may ask yourself, what can I do? How can I make a change? What actions can I take to become a responsible global citizen? Am I a global citizen? Do I want to be a global citizen? A lot of you, I am quite sure have already have implemented practices that are traits of responsible global persons. I hope in this summation, I can answer these questions I've created and stirred up presently in your minds.

Keith Porter, a globalization journalist, who posts a weekly article on About.com expresses in one of his articles, Globalization-Good or Bad?-:

It is not just some passing trend. Today it is an overarching international system shaping the domestic politics and foreign relations of virtually every country, and we need to understand it as such.

As thoughtful people concerned about world affairs, our job is to pick up "globalization," examine it from all sides, dissect it, figure out what makes it tick, and then nurture and promote the good parts and mitigate or slow down the bad parts.

Globalization is much like fire. Fire itself is neither good nor bad. Used properly, it can cook food, sterilize equipment, form iron, and heat our homes. Used carelessly, fire can destroy lives, towns and forests in an instant.

Globalization has dangers and an ugly dark side. But it can also bring tremendous opportunities and benefits. Just as capitalism requires a network of governing systems to keep it from devouring societies, globalization requires vigilance and the rule of law.

Anti-trust laws, the securities and exchange commission, labor unions, charities, the federal trade commission, and countless other agencies and organizations keep American capitalism in check. Similar transparent mechanisms are needed to make sure globalization is a positive force in the world.

Globalization will always have a cheerleader who is blind to the destruction it can cause. And it will always have strident opponents blind to the way globalization gives some people their first opportunity to fulfill basic aspirations.

As with most issues, the majority of people will be in the middle. They will see globalization not as something to worship or demonize, instead, they will see it as something to mold, shape and manage for the betterment of everyone.

Porter goes on to define quite well in another piece I would like to share, the internal individual battle we may all carry within us:

So I count myself as one of those people in the broad middle. I love global telecommunication, cheap foreign travel, global music, foreign food, foreign policy, and – ashamedly- inexpensive goods made overseas. Yet I hate the fact that in most developing countries it is way too easy for a western company to exploit workers, dump toxic waste, and avoid taxes.

I like the McRib sandwich (okay...I draw a line with that line, but each to his own), David Letterman, and good American movies. But I hate the way this stuff is glorified in other countries to the point of driving out amazing local music, art, and food.

I don't want to invest in the Phillip Morris Tobacco Company, yet I also don't want to dress up like a skeleton on stilts and march through town. I like the fact that with only a few hours notice I could hop on a plane to Beijing, Hong Kong, Taipei, or Seoul. But I am scared that those planes could be bringing SARS to my hometown.

All this makes me conflicted...but it doesn't make me pro- or anti-globalization. So what organization do I join, what petition do I sign, and what color ribbon do I wear on my shirt? I still don't have those answers.

I, like Porter and Friedman, do not have it all figured out. But I do have an idea, a direction and path I would like to see globalization embrace. We do not need to homogenize the surface of the earth with the "American" way of life. There should be diversity in cultures and land; and, who is to say that a simple, non-technology-exploited way of life isn't better than what we have been groomed to accept as Ideal? We don't. I would like to see improvement of medicine availability not only in our country, but those who truly need the medicine to avoid significant wipe-out in impoverished countries. If

Bush can give 30 million dollars to the informant who brought the heads of Saddam Hussein's sons, I am sure we along with other UN nations, can finance medicinal and needed supplies for improving housing, farming, and land fertilization to those less fortunate countries.

I like the fact that I have opportunity to see the Great Wall in China, or the capture the beautiful landscapes in Sri Lanka. It is nice being able to turn on a computer and sign on to the world wide web and sit in an electronic chat room and converse with a person in Dubai or Ukraine. I enjoy the opportunity through technology of faster and smaller to be able to quickly view a diversity of cultures and ways of life that span 360 degrees around the planet. I do not relish the thought of them being destroyed, exploited, or their known quality of life being destroyed by homogenizing effects of negative globalization.

I would like to see globalization and will take the steps to educate myself on how to assist in advocating positive, responsible globalization surrounding me here in the Central Valley as well as expanding around the planet and seek out ways to mitigate the negative points. I hope you are able to seek out a path where you, on your own level, will be able to do the same...

This page is copyright © 2003, Suzanne Thompson; Commercial Duplication Prohibited. Non-commercial reproduction with attribution is permitted; prior notice would be appreciated.