Global Citizenship and YMCA Movements

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First of all, I would like to welcome all of you to this Forum. It is a great honor and pleasure to have all of you here for such a noble cause; to review ourselves from the perspective of globalization in general and global citizenship in particular. I would like to extend special thanks to those who have put their works aside for a while only to join and support us with their professional expertise at this historical juncture of YMCA movement. And could I also, while I am in thanking mode, say thanks to the Japanese YMCAs for their continuing interests and initiatives on this subject?

For the concept of global citizenship is a hugely important idea ---and a very much epochal one especially when we see it from the perspective of YMCA movement. Epochal, because it implies a sense of responsibility to those who are striving at the forefront of YMCA movements, not only for our region or countries and peoples, but for all countries and peoples of the world. Epochal milestone opening new idea to YMCA movements that it is no longer my community or country that matters for, which has long been a very traditional prime target among us, and that it is our world that is important: our world, and how we are going to live in it.

The concept of global citizenship implies that we should move away from the rather juvenile idea of my community first, your community next and start seeing things through the other end of the telescope. Perhaps even through a completely different telescope altogether from the previous ones that we have long been relied on. A telescope that is about shared responsibility, common goals, the sum of the parts being greater that the whole, real understanding of other people and their needs rather than their weaknesses.

It is very much painful, however, to realize that our understanding and evaluation of the concept of global citizenship among us is not agreeable each other. Probably because of the shady side of it, which is not clear to every one of us. We need to find some vocabulary that allows us to share our really diverse experiences of globalization in general and global citizenship in particular. Being differently positioned in our world, it is very natural to experience different dimensions of the same multi-faceted reality of globalization.

No doubt our deliberations today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow would greatly enhance our understanding on this concept and develop further consensus or common understanding on it. It is, however, clear from the initial stage that our understanding of the relationship between globalization in general and global citizenship in particular and YMCA movements be centered upon three major components of YMCA movement --- Youth, Christianity and the Association.

I. Globalization and Its Characteristics

Globalization in the sense of connectivity in economic, social, political and cultural life across the world has been taken place for centuries. However, the current situation is of a fundamentally different order to what has gone before. The speed of communication and exchange, the complexity and size of the networks involved, and the sheer volume of trade, interaction and risk give what we now label as globalization as a peculiar force.

This contemporary change of the world is not just simply an economic process even though it has been motivated by economic interactions, but a process of becoming increasingly interconnected--and also one in which competitions increase sharply, more diverse ways of living are exposed, traditional authority structures are challenged, values are becoming more oriented to a global context, and international institutions are playing a more central role.

Such changes bring in positive effects and some negative consequences as well to our daily lives. For the positive side, global competition encourages creativity and innovation and keeps prices for commodities/services in check. Developing countries are able to reap the benefits of current technology without undergoing many of the growing pains associated with development of these technologies. Governments are able to better work together towards common goals encountering with global issues. There is a greater access to foreign culture. The world becomes to have more choices.

For the negative side, however, it takes away jobs from one country to another, leaving many without opportunities to be employed. Although different cultures from around the world are able to interact, they begin to meld, and individuality of each begin to fade. There may be a greater chance of disease spreading worldwide, as well as invasive species that could prove devastating in non-native ecosystems. It pushes migratory movements provoked by insecurity, poverty or political instability, which can never be reversed with ease.

More than any thing else, it really reinforces the strong ones and weakens those that were already weak. Globalization plays a role as a dramatizer. In this context of interconnected world apparently promising prosperity to all, globalization appears as a process denying opportunities and outcomes especially to those living on the margins and enhancing the opportunities and outcomes of those who are at the center already.

II. Globalization and Youth

Youth is marginalized by its own definition being situated in the life cycle between the dependency of childhood and the responsibility of adulthood. It is in the process of transiting from being cared for to becoming an independent provider of social goods and responsibilities and yet to be fully integrated into society. As being such a marginalized identity, it is very natural that the consequences of unjust and unfair relationship among the peoples of the globalized world would bring much greater negative impact to them.

Let me take a very few examples. One of the pertinent effects generally observed among youth is to do with intensifying unemployment. For the South, exclusion, the demands of competition for qualified work associated with modernization, income reduction and increase in work hours create tremendous pressures on the family in particular, including the need for youth to enter the work force prematurely as a means of survival. Polarizing domestic economy owing much to globalization aggrandize such a tendency further.

The circumstances in the North are not different. The process of globalization brings about global competition on the labor market which in turn forces business circle to lower the costs of production. Since wages tend to be high in these countries, many companies move their work to other parts of the world. Consequently youth unemployment reaches to high degree since youth is the most vulnerable one once stringency strikes labor market.

It is needless to say that the idea of having work in the sense of a potentially life-long profession plays a very central role for one's place in society but also one's personal identity and self-esteem. Therefore, youth unemployment is clearly more than just an economic problem. Rather it poses a severe challenge to social integration --- leaving young people with the feeling of not being needed, of not having a future and in extreme cases of not even being apart of a society.

On the other hand, globally networked communication media have a great impact on youth especially in that they offer activities for the consumption of free time. The prevailing individualism of the economic arena, thus, could be extended to other area and contributes to create a feeling of vulnerability and abandonment. Further, the media exerts a seductive influence upon youth whose self-value tends to be measured according to the expectations and models provided especially by the West.

Yet the same society which promotes those models does not offer the opportunities for youth to become fully integrated in its midst. The youth's self-perception is seriously conditioned by that factor. Thus the self-image of the youth often moves between aggrandizement and an exaggerated view of their potential, and a feeling of frustration and failure. Not unfrequently, the combined effect of atomization, individualism, and loneliness result in a loss of the sense of social belonging and of personal and cultural identity.

The internet has become a powerful and positive medium to promote learning and to build virtual partnerships and even friendships, but it is equally a major vehicle for the dissemination of distorted ideologies and value systems. Young people must learn how to sift, analyze and arrive at informed judgments, developing the knowledge dispositions and skills to identify reliable evidence and think of themselves within a framework of sound values.

Meanwhile youth is not simply a source of fears and discouragement, however, it is also a source of hopes and optimism. Youth is more adaptable since it is feeble. Youth is more innovative since it is yet to be integrated into establishment. It is important, therefore, to find some ways to deliberately and explicitly include the perspectives of youth as active social and cultural agents and to foster their participation in understanding and strategizing the process of globalization and our encounter to it.

III. Globalization and Christianity

What probably has been given least attention even with the wider understanding of globalization is the relationship between globalization and Christianity. This is not to say that this relationship has been denied or meaningless but they appear to be more interested in economics, culture and politics rather than in question of religion.

It seems to be clear, however, that the pressures felt in the struggle for survival amidst of the excessive competition instigated by globalization lead many parents to abandon their children's moral and spiritual formation while others delegate it to religious organizations like churches. They do not have enough time to communicate their beliefs to their children. Increase in physical and sexual violence within the family also is observable together with economic privation and negligence.

External family cares like ones that have been extended by the churches for youth are strongly called upon ever before to offer supplementary personal support including initiation on values such as truth, freedom, justice, love, and solidarity. But the reality is that new access to religiosity has been facilitated by globalization owing much to increased flow of information,

music, relaxation and self awareness techniques. Inner healing, theo-therapy, positive thinking, yoga, etc. have been promoted including explicitly pseudo scientific or spiritual foundation.

Non-christian or pseudo religions are no longer a feature only for remote countries but are experienced as part of our daily lives even in traditionally Christian communities. From early on, youth encounters other youth with different religious affiliations or with no religious affiliation at all. Given the plurality of religious as well as non-religious world views and orientations in society, the truth of any one of them could easily be challenged and relativized.

Detraditionalization, another quintessence of globalization, is also a source of hindrance to Christian education. Detraditionalization brings in the difficulty of communicating the Christian tradition to youth who has no Christian background whatsoever. It becomes uneasy to build upon the ground work of youth religious education in family and or church. Another difficulty concerns not only the content of tradition but the very role of tradition itself. Given the influence of the natural sciences and of technologies, tradition tends to have a bad name. People want to know what is most current not what appears dated and old.

In such newly emerging social, cultural and religious context, it is very natural that youth is prone to respond with considerable disorientation and religious relativism in addition to culturally promoted individualism. Thus the foundation for a subjective individualism is laid according to which truth is relativized. So it is not enough to just introduce youth to the Christian tradition-- they must also come to realize how this faith relates to other orientations and why it is not just arbitrary commitment. We have to mobilize further strenuous efforts to work for youth Christian education.

IV. Globalization and YMCA as an Association

YMCA as an ecumenical association was created at the dawn of industrialization and has tried to respond to the social needs and demands arising in its deepening process. Entering into information society and globalized world, it is very natural for us to be encountered with discrepancies taking place between conventional working mechanism of the association and contemporary social structure.

If we really want to be faithful to the changing needs and demands of the contemporary society, we have to develop more accountable and responsible structure of the association to make it further universal and effective at all its interconnected levels. We have to design structures of governance which equip us better to face the challenges of globalization---promote dialogue and provide spaces for further interaction among us.

Such a change would promote a global system of checks and balances in which the power of any single movement or the conspiracy by few of us would not be able to oppress or domineer. We are called to create mechanisms for wider and more equal participation in the collaboration among us both at national, regional and global levels. We are called to discern the most appropriate way to cooperate in empowering the marginalized to have an equal voice in decisions that affect our daily works altogether.

We have to look at the phenomenon of globalization from the perspective of the marginalized to forge stronger alliance among us. We have to make substantial progress in functioning as a universal body. Partnership and collaboration among the movements have to take new forms crossing over the boundaries separating us by different worldviews and unequal environmental conditions. It is very much demanding and crucial to rebuild trust in the network of international YMCA movements across institutional, cultural, and national boundaries.

It is also demanding to realize that the globalized world is so complex that it can not be easily approached simply from a binary perspective as we have been accustomed to do so in the era of industrialization. We need to see them from a rather holistic perspective. We have to not to square things into binary terms of north- south, rich- poor, western- non-western, included- excluded, and winners- losers. It is high time to put more emphasis on the ecumenical teachings of our Lord embracing all the creatures altogether no matter humane or not, Protestant or not, and Christian or not.

Such an attitude of living together, in communion, is the Gospel challenge expressed by Jesus Christ in his call for the Reign of God. The mystery of the Trinity reveals the essence of God as life-together. We are called to be one in many, to include rather than exclude. The logic of the Gospel must be lived and shared with all those with whom we struggle to bring God's Kingdom no matter whether they are under the umbrella of YMCA movement or not.

Particular attention, therefore, needs to be paid to the capacity to work in teams to the willingness to work even with non-Christian and in non-christian contexts. Such a strategy is also required since YMCA as an ecumenical association can not enjoy its exclusive leadership any longer, which has long been provided with in the field of youth and religion oriented services owing much to the rise of many NGOs aiming at quite similar objectives after the advent of information society in the global context. YMCA now encounters with more severe competition with other organizations ever before.

Brothers and sisters, this is a tough stuff. These are the situations the YMCAs deal with and are expected to wrestle with every day in every part of the world in this globalized context. We have to reflect the challenges we see in the phrase of 'globalization'. And I believe the concept of "global citizenship" carries a lot of implications with which we can counter against those unseen and seen impacts of globalization to us.

I do believe that this region of the world will find its own route to greater social cohesion and more opportunities for us when we identify ourselves as equal members of "globalized city" rather than those of individual communities. It will be more difficult if the present route of globalization is left on autopilot. Balanced and reasonable changes are necessary, but most importantly possible, yes, they are possible-- a fair globalization that creates opportunities for all of us is possible.

I wish all of you have a successful dialogue, develop inspirations, and arrive at forging very meaningful steps forward. I want this forum be remembered as a very historical turning point in our maneuvering to transform spiritual guidance all across the movements of the world altogether. We have to approach the Asia and Pacific Alliance not as a simple regional identity but as a window to look into the global world. It should play a role of springboard to leap forward into this troubled water of globalization and globalized world.

Thank you for your kind attention!!

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