

Building a world community

mondial

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Redeeming Globalization? By James Christie

On Sunday November 6th, 2016, distinguished labour leader, Larry Brown addressed the annual fundraising brunch of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Manitoba Division.

It was tough stuff. Mr. Brown added concrete numbers to the litany mostly-bad news we hear in popular media. He advised the gathered activists that roughly one third of the number of people gathered to hear him that morning, say 80 people, controlled more wealth worldwide than is held by 50% of the planetary population. And it's getting worse.

This was on top of the gloom over the policies of the U.S. president; a transnational assault on labour and labour rights; the continuing disregard for the health and welfare of indigenous people everywhere; the egregious increases in global military budgets and arms trade deals; the genocide of the Yazidi; political attacks on the International Criminal Court; the Russian supported perfidy of President Assad of Syria; the global heeldragging on climate change and, for federalists of all persuasions, the tragedy of Brexit.

For World Federalists, all this grim news is nothing new. Save for the current situational details it is a case of "plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose." We have long held to the mantra that global challenges require global solutions. Of course, not all global solutions are of equal merit.

During the 2016 United States Presidential campaign, the apparent mutual admiration society between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin has raised more than a few eyebrows on both the left and the right of the political spectrum, in the U.S. and internationally. It has brought to mind the sobering speculative proposition of Dr. Jerry Pournelle, still a widely respected voice in the genre of science fiction. In the 1980s, Pournelle imagined a not-to-distant future in which the United States and the then Soviet Union essentially divided the world between them for the sake of a putative peace. One shivers.

Globalization has seemed to many a chilling response to the planetary chaos which seems to grip the human community and endanger life on earth. Certainly the economic impact of globalization appears thus far to have increased inequity among nations and peoples, especially indigenous peoples. And yet . . . As limiting as globalization has thus far proved to the hopes and aspirations of world citizens, there is some light at the end of one particular rabbit hole: the topsy turvey, long overlooked and often despised world view of religion.

First, of course, let me acknowledge the usual and necessary confessions and disclaimers – i.e. that religion has been complicit in much unforgiveable violence and repression. Religion is also, however, foundational to virtually every system of ethics extant. In an emerging global village, it is clear that religion is not going away, even though it is in the process of radical transformation.

It is also in the process of developing a new relationship with global political processes. The legitimacy of the G8/G20 economic summit system may well be debated, especially by advocates of the United Nations and the concept of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly. that is for another day, another spilling of ink.

At the current historical juncture, let us take these G-Summits as a given, as we do globalization itself and the reemergence in the global commons of religion. Beginning in 2005, at Lambeth Palace in London, annual gatherings of world religious leaders have convened to address the G8 political leaders on the priorities of the world's religious communities. Employing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which emerged in 2000 from then Secretary General Kofi Annan's Millennium Forum as a "Rosetta Stone" (author's description), religious leaders determined to keep the MDGs on the G8 agenda through at least one full cycle of G8 summits. From 2005 in Lambeth, to Moscow, Köln, Kyoto/Sapporo, Rome, Winnipeg, Bordeaux and Washington, the meetings which are now referred to as the F8 Summits have largely succeeded in achieving that modest agenda.

The essence of the endeavour is something new under the sun. Positive discourse between "religion and the state" has emerged, without the political leadership being lectured or the religious leaders being compromised. In 2014, the Global Interfaith Summit process was renewed as the F20 Summits, thus far convened in Gold Coast, Istanbul and, with some constraints, in Beijing in August last. An F20 Summit is being planned for Berlin in July 2017, alongside the G20; and in an entirely new context, a Commonwealth Interfaith Summit is developing around the Commonwealth Games in Australia in 2018. The focus is now the Sustainable Development Goals. And meanwhile, according to Professor Patrice Brodeur of the Université de Montréal and the King Abdullah International Centre for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue headquartered in Vienna, well over 6,000 centres of local interreligious dialogue have emerged and are being chartered in the last generation.

The better angels of every world religion and of all indigenous spiritualities have ever held that the unity in diversity of humanity and the health of the "oikumene" inform their very being.

To many of the first generation of world federalists, religion will seem a strange bedfellow. But it has taken all aspects of humanity to make the much touselled and globalized bed of the human community. It will take all of us to strip and remake it.

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Documents, links, and other items referenced in the June 2017 issue of Mondial are available at <http://www.wfmcanada.org/mondial-links-june-2017/>