

MUSLIM COMMUNITY RESPONSE ON IMPACTS OF GLOBALIZATION

(Pandangan Balas Masyarakat Islam terhadap Impak Globalisasi)

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at the globalization from both, conventional and Islamic perspectives. The concept of globalization, if implemented fairly, is in line with Islamic teaching. Therefore, it is important for the Muslims to examine its response towards globalization. Muslims must be able to identify the strategic issues with regard to globalization and develop concrete measures that are implementable, as well as to be able to differentiate between the positive and negative impact of globalization. More educational and economic cooperation must be established among Muslim countries, and Muslims need to engage in more scientific research in all areas of education, economy, science and technology. The Western scholars have interest in issues in the Muslim world. They look at these issues systemically and methodically, and they seemed to show an inclination towards an open attitude in accepting the relevance of Islam in the modern world. Therefore it is really important to have research cooperation with them.

Keywords: Globalization; education; economy; research; co-operation

ABSTRACT

Artikel ini membicarakan tentang 'globalisasi' dari perspektif konvensional dan Islam. Konsep globalisasi sekiranya dilaksanakan secara adil adalah sejajar dengan ajaran Islam. Justeru, umat Islam haruslah mengkaji tindak balas Islam terhadap globalisasi. Umat Islam haruslah mengenal pasti isu-isu strategik tentang globalisasi, dan menjana asas-asas yang dapat dilaksanakan dalam konsep

globalisasi, serta membezakan di antara kesan-kesan negatif dan positif globalisasi. Hal ini memerlukan lebih banyak kerjasama dalam bidang pendidikan dan ekonomi di antara negara-negara Islam, malah umat Islam sendiri haruslah lebih komited menjalankan penyelidikan saintifik dalam bidang pendidikan, ekonomi, sains dan teknologi. Para intelektual Barat nampaknya mempunyai minat dalam mengkaji isu-isu dalam dunia Islam, dengan mengambil pendekatan dan kaedah yang sistematik dalam mengkaji isu-isu ini, malah nampaknya mereka juga memperlihatkan keterbukaan untuk menerima Islam sebagai satu cara hidup yang relevan dalam dunia moden. Justeru, amatlah penting sekali dijalankan penyelidikan bersama dengan mereka.

Kata kunci: *Globalisasi; pendidikan; ekonomi; penyelidikan; kerjasama*

INTRODUCTION

People have been speaking about borderless world for many years now (Ohmae 1990), where geographical boundaries are blurred by information and communication technology (ICT). It is said that we are living in ‘global village’, where communication systems are faster and more efficient.

There is an onslaught of issues that have been raised vis-à-vis globalization. However, very few, if any, discuss these matters from the Islamic perspective. This brief paper hopes to provide the Islamic input of the important aspects of globalization.

What is Globalization?

To understand globalization, we must first understand that it is a continuous process and not a static condition. This means that globalization is a series of gradual actions that breaks down geopolitical boundaries and turns that world into a single global unit. Walker & Fox (1996) equated globalization with ‘*the end of geography*’. It must be remembered that globalization is both cause and effect of the information revolution which is driven by “dramatic improvements in telecommunications, exponential increases in computer power coupled with lower costs, and the development of electronic communications and information networks such as the Internet” (OECD 1997).

Globalization can be defined differently from various perspectives. Mazrui (2000) outlined three different distinct meanings to globalization. He noted that ‘at one level it (globalization) consists of processes that lead to global interdependence

and the increasing rapidity of exchange across vast distances'. The three definitions given by Mazrui are as follows:

1. From the perspective of information, globalization is made up of 'forces which are transforming the information pattern of the world and creating the beginnings of what has been called the information super highway'.
2. From the economic standpoint, globalization is the transformation of 'the global market...creating new economic interdependencies across vast distances'.
3. A more comprehensive definition of globalization is 'all forces which are turning the world into a global village, compressing distance, homogenising culture accelerating mobility and reducing the relevance of political leaders'.

The third definition is much more comprehensive in nature, spelling out the 'properties' of globalization. This definition is very much in line with the definition given by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 1997) which states that 'globalization is not a single phenomenon.....(but) a range of trends and forces changing the face of the world in which we live'.

A Brief History of Globalization

Throughout the history, mankind has experienced three major revolutions namely the agricultural revolution, the industrial revolution and the information revolution. There are both common features and distinctive characteristics of these three revolutions.

A distinct common feature is that the degree and the nature of the impacts generated by these changes have been uneven among different groups of the human population. On the other hand, certain groups of people have benefited from the changes and improve the quality of their lives, while there have been some others exploited by these revolutions.

Therefore, in the history of any societal change, there is a deep visible or invisible division among different classes, ethnics, professions, cultures and nations. A certain new idea, principle, procedure and machinery welcomed by a segment of population could be vehemently rejected by another. Classical examples are capitalism, communism, market mechanism and democracy. Even in developed countries like the United State of America, people are also split on issues such as taxation, alcohol, marijuana and abortion.

The Information Revolution

There are several distinctive, somewhat unique characteristics of the information revolution. The information revolution is faceless, paperless and speedy. These

characteristics make our society more vulnerable to criminal activities and violations of ethical and cultural norms. For example, one may argue that because users of internet are faceless, it is easier for criminals to engage in illegal activities and it is more difficult for the law to fight against them. These characteristics (faceless, paperless, speedy) in actuality, are the characteristics of the current nature of globalization.

Islam and Globalization

To my opinion, globalization is not an alien concept to Islam. Albrow (1994) stated that globalization is “the process whereby the population of the world is increasingly bonded into a single society”. The concept of single society is very much in line with the concept of *ukhuwah Islamiah* or Islamic brotherhood. The famous verse 13 of Surah al-Hujurat states to the effect that “O mankind, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other)”.

Islam relates to the fact that mankind has been created into many different races scattered all around the globe. From the verse, it can be argued that Islam encourages people of different races and nationalities to interact with one another. In the past, interaction have been limited and slow, but with the information revolution, this process have been sped up at a great pace.

On another note, it has been stated in verse 107 of Surah al-Anbiya' that “We sent thee not but as a mercy for all creatures”. This verse refers to the Prophet Muhammad who was appointed by God Almighty to spread the word of Islam to the whole of mankind.

This task is global in nature. The Prophet undertook his duties first by disseminating the teaching of Islam to his closest family members, relatives and companions. Then he focussed on the people of the city of Makkah, before spreading Islam to the people of Hijaz (present day Saudi Arabia). Later, when the Prophet established the first Islamic administration in Madinah, he sent out letters to other rulers in other parts of the world, such as Rome, Persia and Ethiopia to diffuse his message of Islam.

The nature of spreading the message of Islam is global. Even after the Prophet passing, this task was taken over by the Muslims. Muslim traders who travelled all around the world succeeded in spreading Islam to other parts of the globe. As such, we now find Muslim communities existing in almost all parts of the world. This

is simply because Islam is not founded on the notion of race, locality, nationality, political ideology or class.

Rather, Islam is based purely and simply on the belief and submission to Allah, the Almighty creator as well as belief in his apostles and his book. Again, it is interesting to note that this is global in character. It is fascinating to observe that Muslims all over the world pray five times a day facing one direction that is the *Kaabah* in Makkah. Equally interesting is the fact that all Muslims fast in the month of Ramadhan every year. Even more amazing is the congregation of Muslim pilgrims from the four corners of the world to the holy city of Makkah to perform the *hajj* at the same time.

All these rituals such as daily prayers, fasting, and pilgrimage to Makkah are evidently the result of globalization, where in the Muslims yesteryears had succeeded in spreading the teaching of Islam to other parts of the world-past, present and future. Pray, fast and perform *hajj* following the same global 'standard' (Musa & Shaikh Mohd Saifuddeen 2000) shows that Islam is global religion suitable for all people at all times in all places. As such, Islam and globalization are not alien to one another. The concept of globalization has existed hand in hand with Islam and the Muslims from very beginning.

IMPACTS OF GLOBALIZATION

During the Tenth General Conference of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs between 2 and 5 July 1998, several recommendations have been made with regards to the Islamic response to globalization. The recommendations were made up of three sections, namely:

1. Islamic response at the political level to issues pertaining to globalization
2. Islamic response at the economic level to issues pertaining to globalization
3. Islamic response to issues pertaining to globalization in scientific areas

Nonetheless, while serious thought has been given and recommendations have been made *vis-à-vis* globalization issues, there must equally be concrete and practical plans to realize all those recommendations. Putting ink to paper is easy, but to translate what is written into a practical and realistic actions require a lot more effort and initiative.

The challenge for Muslims, be they Muslim countries, organizations or individuals lies not only in identifying the problems and issues of globalization. Mere rhetoric is insufficient. But the real challenge for Muslims in this era of globalization is to face these issues head on with concrete measures that are implementable.

Global Muslim Unity

Looking at the state-of-the art of education and knowledge development including the area of modern technological advancement, we observe that the Muslim world is in critical condition. The illiteracy rate is still high in the Muslim world. So too are the poverty rate and the unemployment rate in many Muslim countries. Since the Muslims are still lagging behind in terms of modern technology, the rich resources of the Muslim world is still being manipulated and dominated to the maximum by the developed nations.

Politically, some parts of the Muslim world are in turmoil due to domestic political problems as well as foreign pressure. The implementation of economic sanctions against Muslim nations are still unresolved. Problems in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan and other parts of Muslim countries remain unsettled. These issues have accumulated into a big problem to the Muslim world, which resulted in political and economic uncertainty that has brought about suffering among the people of these nations. By and large, this situation is the main reason why Muslim countries are left behind in terms of education and economics development. What we see instead is the rich nations (including the rich Muslim countries) becoming richer, as a consequence either directly or indirectly of the backwardness of the majority of the Muslim countries.

No one can actually claim that internal problems do not exist in any one country. Several Muslim countries are facing the problem of continuous bloodshed and killings. The Middle East is currently facing turbulent time with the dangling issues of Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and extremist groups. These political problems have also destabilised those countries.

History has taught Muslims to strive for excellence in all areas and achieve stability in all aspects of life. The first political manoeuvre that the Prophet Muhammad took when the city of Madinah was founded was to create a united and strong *ummah* (community/nation) through the concept of *mu'akhat* (brotherhood) between the Muslims of Madinah (Ansar) and Muslims from Makkah (Muhajirin).

The concept of brotherhood as applied by the Prophet involved the development of economic and political system that is global in nature. According to historical sources, the Muslims of Makkah had expertise in trade and commerce, while the Muslims in Madinah were specialists in agriculture and handicrafts. The combination of these two fields created a strong, resilient and solid nation-building process. The concept of *mu'akhat* between the Ansar and Muhajirin became something that was very practical and pragmatic, not only on everyday matters, but also in strategizing

the socio-economic development of the Muslims, in competing with the advancement already achieved by the Quraish of Makkah.

One of the important issues that was stressed by the Prophet was the importance of knowledge. The Prophet personally illustrated this importance when he established the mosque in *Quba'*. The Prophet strengthened the spiritual aspect with faith (*iman*) and piety (*taqwa*), and at the same time the Prophet instilled the need for the acquisition of 'worldly' knowledge. This was done by the Prophet by delegating matters pertaining to certain areas of expertise to his companions who had the knowledge on those matters.

To this end, I am of the opinion that if Muslims of today could focus on unity and to achieve common goals in this world, as shown by Ansar and Muhajirin through the concept of *mu'akhat*, then almost certainly the Muslim world would not be in its current predicament.

I believe that if Muslims put the emphasis on knowledge and a common global vision, then perhaps all the problems and side issues, such as differences of opinions among the jurists and different school of thought, varying interpretations of justice and whether we are secular or not would be resolved with wisdom without resulting in disunity of the Muslim ummah.

Global Ethic

In a document entitled *Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Document* prepared by the 200 respected and influential from the world's spiritual communities who attended the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, the following four vital commitments have been proposed (Barney 2000):

1. Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life.
"All people have a right to life, safety and the free development of personality insofar as they do not injure the rights of others. No one has the right to torture, injure, must less kill any other human being. And no people, not state, no race, no religion has the right to hate, to discriminate against, to 'cleanse', to exile, much less to liquidate a 'foreign' minority which is different in behaviour or holds different beliefs".
2. Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order.
"We must utilize economics and political power for service to humanity instead of misusing it in ruthless battles for domination. We must develop a spirit of compassion with those who suffer, with special care for the children, the aged, the poor, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely".

3. Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness.
“We must cultivate truthfulness in all our relationships instead of dishonesty, dissembling, and opportunism....We must courageously serve the truth and we must remain constant and trustworthy, instead of yielding to opportunistic accommodation to life”.
4. Commitment to a culture of partnership between men and women.
“The relationship between men and women should be characterized not by patronizing behaviour or exploitation, but by love, partnership and trustworthiness”.

When reflecting on the future of the human community, the critical issues facing the world today present an acute ethical challenge to the human society. We believe that what urgently needed is a new opening to creative engagement among the guiding institutions an active, attentive and inventive collaboration, rooted in shared moral principles and expressed in mutually sustained programmes. Thus, we should focus on opening doors to creative engagement, between Muslims and Muslims, as well as between Muslims and Non-Muslims, in line with following objectives:

1. To correct the image of Islam which has been wrongly portrayed as promoting terrorism, conservatism, fanaticism, backwardness, poverty and other degrading stereotypes.
2. To present Islam as a religion that promotes the concept of truthfulness and that thrives on tolerance and dynamism, while at the same time being full of extraordinarily pure and valuable universal precepts
3. To nurture a harmonious society whereby Muslims and Non-Muslims can live and prosper side by side.
4. To provide a platform for Muslim and Non-Muslim scholars to discuss or analysis issues of mutual importance
5. To remove the jaundiced opinion and incorrect view among many Non-Muslims about Islam.

We should find ways and means as to inculcate the understanding of Islam in areas generally considered to represent the world-view of Islam, which is actually global, rather than, restrictive in nature. Some of the important universal values and ethics are as follows:

Justice

On the subject of justice, Islam is a just religion and it is suitable for all societies, including multi-religious societies. However, the world is now dominated by the concept and principle of justice based on that of the Non-Muslim countries of the

West. International laws provide the mighty with the right to suppress the weak, that is, might is right. Efforts to reassert the Islamic concept of justice is frowned upon by the West as an attempt to revive old and antiquated thinking. In Islam justice is supreme and clearly defined. It means placing something in its rightful place. The objective of the creation of the universe is to uphold justice and truth, and remove cruelty and evil.

Justice in Islam is similar to the universal concept of justice. Allah demands Muslims to be fair and just, including in their treatment of the Non-Muslims. An Islamic government or one run by Muslims is certainly a benevolent, just and good administrator. If it is callous to its people, both Muslims and Non-Muslims, then it is not an Islamic government, or one based on Islamic teachings.

Justice is the number one prerequisite for a continued stability of a multi-racial, global society. The truth of the matter is that the principles of justice and tolerance are part and parcel of the Islamic history. Christian and Jews in Islamic Spain were given equal opportunity to study together with the Muslims. Furthermore, there was no inquisition under the Islamic administration.

Tolerance

Tolerance is yet another fundamental ethics of Islam. Islam has often been described as an egalitarian religion, and in a profound sense, this is true. The world into which Islam came in the seventh century was very far from egalitarian. To the east there was an elaborately structured and rather rigid class of pre-Islamic Iran, and beyond that an even more rigidly discriminatory caste system of Hindu India. To the west there were the systems of hereditary and privileged aristocracy, which Christendom had inherited from the Greco-Roman world and the Germanic barbarians like the Visigoths.

Contrariwise, the new religion of Islam did not undertake to condemn and persecute the non-believers. Rather, it enjoyed tolerance. Thus, for the Jews the arrival of Islam meant a change for the better, as they had already endured under conditions of political, social, and economic instability during the reign of their previous masters. In the core countries of the Middle East like Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq, the Christian minorities also welcomed the Muslims. The reason was that though sharing the Christian religion with the rulers of the Byzantine Empire, they were of different sects and subjects to discrimination and even at times to persecution. For many of the adherents of the Eastern churches, the advent of Islam and the transfer of their countries from Christian to Muslim rule brought a marked improvement in the circumstances, and a greater degree of religious freedom than they had previously enjoyed.

During the Islamic civilization a good deal of easy social interaction existed among Muslims, Christians and Jews. Though professing different religions, they formed a single society, in which personal friendship, business partnership, intellectual discipleship, and other forms of shared activity were normal and, indeed, common. In Spain or al-Andalus, Islam formed a syncretism and a cultural fusion based not only on its idea of universality and tolerance but also on its prodigious capacity for assimilation and creativity. It was also here that the most important ethnic and cultural fusion of East and West took place. The Muslim rulers of the Umayyad, Amirid and Taifa periods employed Jews in diplomacy, finance and public administration (Armstrong 2001).

Thus, in multi-religious Malaysia, tolerance and respect have always been the hallmarks of the mutual relationship between the religious groups. Both Muslims and Non-Muslims are granted the freedom to practice the tenets of their religion, which include matters like worship, celebration, or other practices. Violence as a means of solving inter-racial and inter-religious disputes is abhorred by all communities of the country. The leadership bears the responsibility, obligation and participation to the leadership of the country to achieve stability and development.

Today, Malaysia which is located at the periphery of the Islamic heartland, is a plural society. Subscribing to the Islamic principles of tolerance is the country's answers to the present realities and challenges of a pluralistic community. In economic terms, it encourages dynamic growth and material development. In political terms, it holds a religiously and ethnically mixed society together as a nation. With clear-sighted policy formulation and program implementation, the people have moved forward on the basis of tolerance and respect for differences and a commitment to emphasizing common ground while minimizing causes of friction.

Business Ethics

On the subject of business ethics, we are now looking at a very rapid explosion in terms of economic activities across the world. Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, cautioned that in developing the *ummah*, the basic aim of religion, that is to guide man in the correct path, cannot be sidelined. In order to ensure that whatever forms of economic development would take into account the nature of man as God's vicegerent on Earth, he said (Mohamad 1994):

Religion should never be regarded as simply the rituals which affect people only at the individual level, religion, which seeks truth to establish justice in all aspects of societal life, should be regarded as beneficial to society. It is religion which acts as the anchor of underlying principles that govern not only the physical and material well being but also the spiritual growth and

uplift of man. It is religion that steers people towards a more balanced life. It is also religion that provides true guidance and the strongest motivation towards achieving a more fruitful and meaningful life. Foremost among the issues at hand is to find out the ways and means of how a nation can produce a people or society that has as its core the deep sense of religious consciousness, committed to the highest standards of ethical and moral values and yet is most progressive, industrious, dynamic and dedicated towards advancement and progress. This is indeed very necessary and pertinent because we can easily achieve material progress by physical planning and development.

But, the stark truth is that all the material wealth that we have accumulated can be completely wiped out if we do not have the morally right set of values among the people who manage them. We have repeatedly seen this happening at the individual and family levels; we have also read in history about the fall of empires for invariably the same reason. And we are seeing today the destruction of many civilizations.

TOWARDS A COMMON CIVILIZATION

We realize that global ethics can also be promoted by deciphering the strengths of civilizations of the past, with the view of formulating a common civilization. Research has shown that civilization like the Egyptian, Persian, Chinese, Mongolian, Roman, Islamic, Turkish and British rose because the people were willing to organize their society and shape values and cultures which contributed to the greatness of their civilizations. By adhering to and practicing these values, the society became intelligent, efficient, wealthy, safe and strong. To attain a common civilization, we need to understand the role of values in life, culture and civilization. We have to determine and practice good values and discard the bad ones. Even though the values of a society are formed naturally, a society that wants to succeed must choose, plan and cultivate certain values, which are believed to be able to help it.

We strongly believe that there must now be an urgent appraisal to the interactions of cultures, so as to avoid untoward encounters. There is need for both the Non-Muslims and the Muslims to improve their perceptions of each other in order to improve their relations. By religious teaching and by culture Muslims are eminently amenable to reconciliation. If the Non-Muslims can change the views of Islam and the Muslims, it is possible for reconciliation to be effected and a completely new relationship established between them, a relationship that will solve most of the conflict that we see today and will certainly prevent any clash of civilizations in the future. The experience that Malaysia has leading a violent-free Muslim majority country would perhaps qualify us to provide the example of a truly Islamic *modus Vivendi* in inter-religious and inter-civilizational accord.

Therefore, during my service as Director General of a think tank institute in Malaysia (1992-2002) The Institute of Islamic Understanding (Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia - IKIM), several inter-faith discourses have been organized over that last ten years. In 1993, a joint seminar on *Islam and its world-view* was organized with the Malaysian-American Commission on Educational Exchange. One of the resolutions that came out of the seminar read, "There must be respite from the crude polemics of East verses West". Another dialogue was held together with the Goethe Institute where the theme *The Role and Influence of Religion in Society* was chosen. Then German Ambassador to Malaysia reaffirmed the many common elements of Islamic and Christian religious and social orders.

An international conference on *The Islamic World and Global Corporation* was convened jointly with the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. One of the most important and significant proposals then was the establishment of an alternative media network in the Muslim world to combat biased reporting. And we can see today how vital this network would have been for, not only the dignity, but also survival, of the Muslim *ummah*. Therefore, Muslims are now at the mercy of the international media community, which is intent upon pitting one Islamic group against the other.

Another inter-faith dialogue organized in this country was the one entitled *Towards a Common Civilization*, which was graced by His Excellency Dr. Roman Herzog, the then President of Germany. Dr. Herzog was impressed at the approach Malaysia had taken to promote inter-cultural understanding. Towards the end of 1997, yet another cross-culture event was co-hosted with the Japanese Institute of International Affairs. The aim of the symposium on *Asia and Islam* was to promote the understanding of Islam in Asia generally and Japan particularly.

IKIM's other venture into inter-civilization dialogue was the joint seminar with the European Union. A number of the participants expressed surprise at the fact that Islam actually flourished beyond the Middle-East. Malaysia, it seems offers a different version of a modern and prosperous Muslim state.

ISLAM AND GLOBAL BASIS

I used to attend a dialogue session in Berlin in 1999, I could observe the seriousness of scholars from non Muslim countries in Asia and Europe, in discussing current issues pertaining to intercultural interactions between Islam and the rest of the world. They stresses positively on the need to maintain a healthy bilateral relationship in generating global co-operation based on tolerance, knowledge-sharing and joint programmes between the Muslim world and their nations. The idea of the clash of

civilizations (Huntington 2011) was rejected by the majority of scholars. It is really important to co-operate between Muslim and non Muslims scholars in the area of education and research.

It is hoped that these pertinent issues, as well as the issues of the portrayal of Islam in the international media, be discussed scientifically and openly in an effort to identify the underlying cause of this malaise in the Muslim world. The discussion on matters relating to religions and nations should be held void of sentiments and emotions. I am happy to note that some non-Muslim scholars I met have very deep understanding and interest in issues in the Muslim world and Islam itself. They look at these issues systemically and openly, and they seem to show an inclination towards an open attitude in accepting the relevance of Islam in the modern world.

The fact that non Muslims world is seriously studying and researching issues vis-a-vis Islam and Muslims should make the Muslims aware that there is an urgent need to scrutinize the research activities conducted by the Muslim academics and scholars in the Muslim world. We Muslims should be brave enough to pose some critical questions to our own Muslims brothers and sisters: Are the research and scholarly activities showing improvement and maturity? What are the issues being researched and discussed by Muslim scholars and *ulama*? Are we addressing current issues brought about by the rapid advancement in ICT and biotechnology? Or are we still busy debating on matters pertaining to decrees (*fatawa*) and injunctions (*Ahkam*)?

Sometime, I feel as if Muslims are still discussing matters based on partisans, sentiments and emotions. Sadly, in doing so, we have made up Islam to be so limited and narrow, while in reality Islam is a complete way of life, which is very wide in scope and global in nature. It is sadder still that the non-Muslim scholars are the ones who are seriously studying contemporary Islamic issues from a very global perspective.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that in global ethics at least, religions can play a more effective and expanded role in this era of globalization, because they have the spiritual, intellectual and moral resources to provide the appropriate answers, solutions and responses to the issues of the day. The basic universal principles of religions such as, condemning greed and destructiveness, while commending restraint and protection, could be adopted. How can religion contribute to the flourishing of global ethics? The contribution of religious communities to global ethics is there fold. Religious communities are grass-roots communities of moral deliberation and formation on

matters of extended rights. Religious communities are also international institutions. In that role, they can be present as advocates in international policy-making as well as local, regional, and national ones. And religious communities are perhaps above all, shapers and keepers of overarching meaning and values as mediated across ages and generations, through ritual, instruction, and concrete practices, all in the context of community understood as cosmic in scope.

However, if the established world religions fail to provide the proper guidance as well as holistic action plans for the continued well-being of man nature in the more challenging years and decades ahead in a globalised world, then the spiritual and moral vacuum will be filled by the new religions occult movement, charismatic sects, deviant mysticism, religious fraud or doomsday cult (Hassan 2000).

Looking at the bigger picture each nation, therefore, will have to make room for the expansion of religious-based ethics and spiritual values into all realms of living, from business to international relations, from politics to law, and from medicine to technology. An example is provided on the effort to incorporate religious ethics in tackling the issues of global environmental degradation. Eco-ethicist of the world's major religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism and Taoism, have been consulted upon extensively by the Harvard University Centre for the Study of World Religions in the last few years to come up with guiding religious principles pertaining to sustainable development. The secular eco-ethical approach alone has not proven to be successful in nature conservation campaign. It is clear that bioethics needs to be complemented and supported by deep convictions that transcend virtually all these religions, giving rise to a moral framework based on a global human unity that emphasizes on care for the earth, generosity toward all creatures, compassion for all that suffer and see all things together in or before the divine, and therefore considered precious.

In the final analysis, the lack of a universal, spiritual-based ethics in this globalization era would only serve to aggravate the existing crises, sufferings, injustices and conflicts. These parting words which are quoted from a book entitled *Globalization: The Perspective and Experiences of the Religious Traditions of Asia Pacific Region* (Camilleri & Muzaffar 1998) sum up the feeling of several scholars on the future of religion and hence ethics in a globalised world:

“More than any other cultural force, religion will become the singular most important force resisting the tendency towards uniformity. It is religion that will become the moral armour against the battery of sensate culture and ensure that we remain faithful to our own primordial nature and ethical roots. It is religion that will ensure that the world remains multicultural, rather than

being dominated by a single Colossus. But globalization has set the stage for an encounter of religions on an unprecedented scale...(which) entails a coexistence among believers of different creeds founded upon tolerance and mutual respect”.

In this modern world both Muslims and Non-Muslims have a real mission. They must bring back the spiritual values to a world that is fast becoming Godless and thoroughly materialistic; so arrogant that it thinks it knows all the answers to everything; a world which will develop the ultimate of destruction and place it in the hands of irresponsible and insane individuals; a world tittering on the brink of a Man-made Apocalypse. And because the human race is becoming more and more arrogant, religion and spiritual values are needed even more.

Islam can provide the spiritual values, to those who believe and to those who do not. And if the Muslims chose to play a constructive role while retaining their faith, their spiritual values and their true brotherhood, they would be able to contribute positively to the development of mankind, to put it on an even keel again and to prevent the self-destruct course which the human race appears to be heading for. The Muslims can be a force for human good in the 21st Century.

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