

Essay by Amy Williams

We live in a globalized world. Commercial jets make worldwide travel quick and comparatively inexpensive. Fiber optic and satellite technology enable us to communicate around the world almost instantaneously by e-mail, text, voice, or video. Global media, entertainment, and business abound, connecting people more than ever before. Yet we simultaneously face global challenges: unequal consumption of resources, environmental harm and climate change, regional conflict and terrorism that threaten to explode globally, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the global spread of infections for which no cure exists. To survive in this new world, mankind needs to move beyond nationalistic thinking to a substantially new kind of thinking—global thinking.

We live in a time of crisis, but mankind has faced crisis before. In the Middle Ages, Europe was covered with small fiefdoms, each self-contained, ruled by petty lords. After the Bubonic Plague killed one-third of the population of Europe, people changed their thinking to survive. Nation-states arose out of the devastation as lords could no longer sustain and defend their isolated fiefdoms. Common people began to see themselves as belonging to a larger community; they no longer found their identity in their local fiefdom. As people joined that larger community, they began to share knowledge and specialize in crafts. The Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, colonization and industrialization—movements that shape our world—arose from this new, broadened thinking.

Today we need another revolution in thinking. While technological advances connect the world, mankind lacks global identity. National boundaries often control our thinking, leading to selfishness that focuses on the good of our nation instead of the good of humanity. This mindset is counterproductive, because today one country's actions affect all other countries. U.S. environmental policies dramatically affect the rest of the world since we consume over 25 percent of the world's oil and produce over 25 percent of the world's carbon emissions. Environmental catastrophes affect the entire planet; Mexico's Ixtoc I oil spill almost wiped out an endangered species of sea turtle, and the Exxon Valdez spill devastated the ecosystems of the Gulf of Alaska and the Pacific Coast. Nuclear proliferation affects the whole world. When a nation chooses to test a nuclear weapon, the radioactive particles released into the atmosphere spread around the world.

We need to collaborate, not compete, internationally. Mapping the human genome has been a vital step in discovering cures for diseases. The project required the collaboration of scientists in China, France, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Together, the project took 15 years. If nationalistic thinking had prevented collaboration, the project would still not be completed, and cures that benefit us all would be decades further away.

Abraham Lincoln declared, "a house divided against itself cannot stand." Mankind will not stand if we remain divided by nationalism. Just as the nobles in the Middle Ages had to stop warring and unite, so we must unite to solve the crises that we face. In this age of global challenges, we must learn to think globally to survive.