

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION

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As its name signifies, the Catholic Church is no stranger to globalization. The Church's mission from the beginning has been to spread the Good News to every corner of the earth. In the course of pursuing that mission for 2000 years, she has time and again confronted challenges posed by transformations of culture as well as by cultural differences. The Church has always understood that great transformations – the fall of the Roman Empire, the Enlightenment, industrialization, democratization, globalization – are phases rather than culminations. (As Paul said to the Corinthians, 'The world as we know it is always passing away').

Unlike some other religions, however, Catholicism does not stand aloof from 'the world'. On the contrary, the Catholic social tradition is one in which the faithful are obliged to be active in working for justice, freedom, respect for the dignity of the person, the common good, and peace. Pope John Paul II emphasized that point in an important address to university professors and students, telling them: "The Christian cannot limit himself to analyzing historical processes as they happen, maintaining a passive attitude, as if they were beyond his capacity to intervene, as if we were led by blind and impersonal forces".¹

Those two propositions – the constancy of change and the obligation to be concerned with the world – bring us to the mission of this Academy and to the topic of this plenary meeting. For to be effective in the world, we must try to understand it. And to understand what is going forward in the world today, one must try to understand the phenomena collectively known as globalization.

¹ "Social Change Hinges on 'Small Daily Options'", ZENIT, April 9, 2001, No. 1040907.

Pope John Paul II has counseled and modeled a cautiously hopeful view of globalization. Provided that the principle of common humanity is recognized, he said in his *World Day of Peace Message* for the Year 2000, 'this recognition can give the world as it is today – marked by the process of globalization – a soul, a meaning and a direction. Globalization, for all its risks, also offers exceptional and promising opportunities, precisely with a view to enabling humanity to become a single family, built on the values of justice, equity and solidarity'.² Most of the papers presented to the Academy at this meeting have taken that same approach, exploring the perils and the promise of the economic aspects of globalization.

The Holy Father, however, has placed special emphasis on the cultural as well as the economic aspects of globalization. They are, of course, related. Many of the participants this week have expressed concern that economic globalization is increasing the gap between rich and poor nations and peoples, even as it makes them more interdependent. But what is the nature of that concern? It is not only that many members of the human family are suffering severe material deprivation. It is also that those on either side of the gap may come to regard those on the other side as *radically* 'other' – in other words, to reject their common humanity. While advancing economic freedom and individual liberty for many, economic globalization seems to bring new risks that human beings will be treated as instruments or objects.

In this new context, it seems fair to say that the Church has become the principal institutional advocate in the world of the need to re-unite the two halves of the divided soul of liberalism – its commitment to human liberty and its acknowledgment of a single human family for which all bear a common responsibility. In his speech to the U.N. on its fiftieth anniversary in 1995, for example, the Holy Father issued the following plea: 'Inspired by the example of all those who have taken the *risk of freedom*, can we not recommit ourselves also to taking the *risk of solidarity* – and thus the *risk of peace*?'³

It is important to note, however, that 'solidarity' in Catholic social thought diverges in important respects from similar-sounding secular ideas. The Church teaches solidarity, not as a set of policies or programs, but as a *virtue* which relates to the perfection of the individual,⁴ by inclin-

² *World Day of Peace Message, 2000*, Par. 5.

³ *Address to the United Nations*, October 5, 1995, Par. 15.

⁴ See Ernest Fortin, 'Church Activism in the 1980s,' in *Human Rights, Virtue, and the Common Good*, Vol. 3, 273-74.

ing us to overcome sources of division within ourselves (personal sin) and within society ('structural sins').⁵ The virtue of solidarity is inseparable from personal reform and requires constant practice.

For those of us who believe that the social teaching of the Catholic Church offers important ethical perspectives on economic globalization – and even the hope of helping to humanize and optimize the benefits of that process – the cultural effects of globalization are of great concern. Globalization seems to be spreading a thin transnational culture that is not only resistant to ethical perspectives, but inimical to respect for the dignity of all members of the human family. The values of productivity and efficiency, so prized by the market, are not so fine when they seep into the intermediate institutions of civil society or when they become normative in family relations. A transnational popular culture seems to foster an ethos charged with materialism, hedonism and hyper-individualism. The increased geographic mobility of our times has acted as an accelerant for the spread of these new values, by eroding the particular cultures where virtues and habits of solidarity are rooted. In his popular and largely affirmative book on globalization, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thomas Friedman has written that 'the more I observed the system of globalization at work, the more obvious it was that it had unleashed forest-crushing forces of development and Disney-round-the-clock homogenization which, if left unchecked, had the potential to destroy the environment and uproot cultures at a pace never before seen in human history'.⁶

Needless to say, the Catholic faithful are not exempt from these influences. All too many Catholics resist the teaching that living the whole Christian faith means living the preferential option for the poor. All too many others embrace a secular understanding of solidarity, which leads them to trivialize the problem of sin, to ignore the moral teachings that make a commitment to solidarity sustainable, and to look mainly to government bureaucracies for 'social justice'.

The effects of globalization upon culture thus pose a special challenge to a Church that seeks to spread Christianity through 'inculturation'. Globalization, coming in the wake of industrialization and urbanization, tends to accelerate the decline of the mediating structures of civil society (families, parishes, neighborhoods) where the virtues that might serve to humanize globalization are instilled, reinforced, and transmitted from one

⁵ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pars. 37, 38.

⁶ Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (Rev. ed., 2000), 23.

generation to the next. The culture-destroying aspects of these changes have alarmed even secular observers like Friedman who see them as undermining the benefits of globalization itself, especially in developing countries: 'You cannot build an emerging society... if you are simultaneously destroying the cultural foundations that cement your society and give it the self-confidence and cohesion to interact properly with the world... [W]ithout a sustainable culture there is no sustainable community and without a sustainable community there is no sustainable globalization'.⁷ While noting the problem, Friedman has absolutely nothing to say about how to counter those effects!

So how can the Church mediate her teachings, 'ever ancient and ever new' through the turbulence and fragmentation that characterize what theologian Frederick Lawrence calls 'the contemporary diaspora situation' of Christians in a secularized world?⁸ That is an enormous challenge both for the Holy See as an actor in international settings and for all Catholics. In both cases, there are two essentials: understanding the world and personal formation of the actors. And of the two, formation must have priority. As the Holy Father strikingly put it in his address to university professors and students: 'It is part of Christian realism to understand that great social changes are the result of small and courageous daily options. You often ask yourselves: When will our world be configured to the Gospel message? The answer is simple: When you, in the first place, act and think permanently like Christ, at least part of that world will be given to Him in you'. Regarding globalization, and perhaps thinking of our Academy's work, he went on to say that 'to promote a global culture of those moral absolutes that are a person's rights, it is necessary that each Christian begin with himself...'⁹

The Church's work in the ever-changing world is thus perhaps best regarded as an ongoing crusade to shift probabilities in favor of what John Paul II calls the civilization of life and love. Globalization undoubtedly poses formidable challenges to that never-ending task. But the resources that the Church brings to meet those challenges are formidable as well. Some recent developments that seem especially encouraging are:

The Transcultural Catechisms. The recognition by the 1985 Synod of Bishops that globalization offers new opportunities for the spread of the

⁷ Id., 302.

⁸ Frederick G. Lawrence, 'The Church and American Culture' (Unpublished paper, 1998).

⁹ "Social Change Hinges on 'Small Daily Options'", ZENIT, April 9, 2001, No. 1040907.

faith inspired the *Catechism of the Catholic Faith*, now available in many languages. Recognizing that many Catholics are lamentably unfamiliar with the Church's social teachings, the Holy Father has also commissioned the preparation of a 'social catechism'.

Formation for a Mobile People. With traditional parishes eroded by geographic mobility, the Church's burgeoning lay organizations (e.g., *Regnum Christi*, *Comunione e Liberazione*, *Focolare*, *Opus Dei*, the *Neo-Catechumens*) are helping to fill the resulting needs for formation and fellowship among adult Catholics.

Solidarity through Subsidiarity. With regard to the problem of how to move from the principle of solidarity to its practical implementation under diverse social and political conditions, the Church's principle of subsidiarity is attracting increasing attention from political thinkers and actors. (Since this potentially useful idea is one that needs to be deepened and developed, it may at some point merit the attention of this Academy).

The Dialogue with the Natural and Human Sciences. In an era when relativism and historicism prevail in secular academic circles, the Catholic Church stands as an unabashed defender of reason.¹⁰ Hers is not the calculating reason of Hobbes in the service of the passions, nor narrow scientific rational-*ism*, but rather the dynamic, recurrent, and potentially self-correcting processes of human knowing. That permits her to take modern historical consciousness seriously, but to find the basis for a genuine transnational culture in 'the dynamic unity of the human mind in its related and recurrent operations'.¹¹ Her commitment to reason, moreover, both invites and requires her to engage the modern natural and human sciences at the highest levels. (Christians, Pope John Paul II reminds us, are obliged not only to bring light to the world, but also to remain open to discover 'every fragment of truth... in the life experience and in the culture of individuals and nations').¹²

It must be admitted, however, that none of these developments is more than a beginning. The Church has yet to work out the social, cultural, and political methods that will mediate the truths she possesses in the ever-changing world. What may be required, therefore, is nothing less than a large-scale re-appraisal and renewal of the educational apostolate

¹⁰ See, especially, *Fides et Ratio*.

¹¹ Matthew L. Lamb, 'Divine Transcendence and Eternity: The Early Lonergan's Recovery of Thomas Aquinas', in *Continuity and Plurality in Catholic Theology* (1998), 75-76.

¹² *Centesimus Annus*, Par. 46.

of the Church.¹³ The Church needs to make manifest not only that Catholic Christianity is in harmony with full-fledged intellectualism, but that the intellectual apostolate is integral to her mission.

Needless to say, these challenges and opportunities for the Church also constitute challenges and opportunities for this Academy!

¹³ This is the principal message of Dr. Lawrence's excellent paper, cited above. Dr. Lawrence and Father Matthew Lamb, cited in note 11, pursue the dialogue with the natural and human sciences at the Boston College Lonergan Institute.