

On Global Economic Justice

by Fr. Michael Hoolahan, CP

Globalization is a fact of life. The shoes I am wearing were made in China. My shirt came from Guatemala and my trousers from Vietnam. My undershirt came from the good old USA. My underpants were made in Jamaica. I don't know where my sox were manufactured. At a diner we had this week the wine came from Sicily. The cup on my desk (from a trip to London) was made in England. Earlier this month I drove from NYC to Washington DC for meetings in a Toyota Camry. We purchased gas at a Lukoil station. My cell phone is a Samsung from Korea. The telephone system in the office is from Nortel Networks, a Canadian company. The coffee I drank this morning came from South America and the banana I cut up for my cereal from Costa Rica. The computer keyboard and mouse I am using to write this article were manufactured in China. And so it goes.

We all recognize what has happened as our world has become smaller and trade barriers (tariffs and quotas) have fallen. Certainly economic globalization has enriched my life with many products and options.

Then there is the whole area of communications with satellites making TV news from far away live for us. Events from Iraq are now in my living room. Last month I participated in a teleconference with participants in London, Amsterdam, and Rome. The internet (www: world wide web) links us to Africa and Asia. It allows us to search for information from almost any source.

Globalization entails increasing industrialization. China and India are trying to catch up to the United States and Europe. Currently industrialization is based on the burning of coal for electricity and combustion of gas/oil for transportation. It has put more and more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Our planet earth faces global warming and the resulting climate change. Weather has become more extreme and unpredictable. Spring comes earlier in places like New England. Glaciers in Glacier National Park are disappearing. Melting ice sheets will gradually raise ocean levels threatening those who live on islands or low lying coastal areas.

A Catholic Perspective?

I am not sure I would say that there is a Catholic way of reflecting on globalization. Certainly there are many church statements on the issue. But at the most basic level our views on the issue come from principles and beliefs we share with all Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The fundamental truth is that God is the ultimate source of reality and that the human family is created in his image and likeness. Every person is loved by God and possesses a dignity and worth that endow that person with inalienable rights. Each human person has a right to the food, shelter, and health care necessary for a full human life. His liberty and life are to be respected. Education and a decent job should be available for all so that their human potential is actualized. Planet earth is shared by all people. The

trashing of earth resources is a crime against all. Clean water and fresh air are necessary elements to live a healthy life.

Yet we live in a world that is deeply flawed. Millions of people live at the bottom of the economic pyramid in conditions that are barely human. Thousands die each day of preventable diseases. Many are mal-nourished and go to bed hungry. Access to education is only a dream. Corrupt governments subvert international aid. Elites skim off the benefits of global investment. In the face of this the church has declared a “fundamental option for the poor”. The ministry, life, and teaching of Jesus require nothing less from his followers.

The Passionist Reality

The Congregation of the Passion is an international community. We live and minister in fifty-seven different countries in the world and on all the continents except Antarctica. When we gather at General Chapters we discover a rich mixture of languages, cultures, and different perspectives and expectations. We also discover that we are living in a global economy of dollars, pesos, pounds, euros, schillings, yen, and won. We also find ourselves with investments in corporations whose activities are worldwide. We become aware that some of us live in the first world of developed countries and some live in third world developing countries. Our own province of Holy Cross is presently intimately joined to the vicariate of St. Thomas in India.

I can say that my lived experience as a Passionist has shown me that the needs of people call us into action. Again and again I have seen my brothers respond to the suffering and crucified of this world. The sign that we wear reminds us continually of the passion of Jesus Christ. We know that his passion continues in the world today. It is not just in the person suffering right here before me but any person on this planet who is de-humanized or marginalized by any corrupt power.

The Passionist Constitutions, Our Rule of Life

Our Constitutions reminds us that “the Passion of Christ continues in the world... therefore, we share in the joys and sorrows of our contemporaries.” (#3) It describes the world as a place where “the unjust distribution of goods is a major source of division, hatred, and suffering.” (#13) Christ’s “Passion and death are no mere historical events. They are ever-present realities to people in the world of today, “crucified” as they are by injustice, by the lack of deep respect for human life, and by a hungry yearning for peace, truth, and the fullness of human existence.” (#65) Hence we are called “to familiarize ourselves thoroughly with the Passion of Christ, both in history and the lives of people today, for the Passion of Christ and the suffering of his Mystical Body form one mystery of salvation.” (#65) We are reminded that “Saint Paul of Cross...saw the name of Jesus written on the foreheads of the poor.” (#72) Superiors are told to “be sensitive to the social implications of any investments they make.” (#172)

A Response

Finally we arrive at the point of this reflection. First we have the fact of globalization with its benefits and evils. Second we are Passionists in an international community with a charism that calls us to respond to Passion of Christ. When it becomes documented that the policies and practices of a US corporation are the cause of suffering anywhere in the world we respond by holding corporations which invest globally to standards that protect workers from exploitation and the environment from harm. We can do this because our investments in trans-national corporations give us the right as shareholders to call management to accountability. For the past twenty years Holy Cross Province through its membership in the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility has done this through informed voting of our proxies, the filing of shareholder resolutions and dialogs with management. This is often coordinated with other religious organizations to add more voices and power to the accountability action. Sometimes we can effect change. Other times we are ignored. But to be true to ourselves we continue to stand for justice and the protection of our environment.

On Globalization

By John Gonzalez

Globalization is a priori neither good nor bad. It is what people make of it. What is at stake is the quality of globalization. Likewise what is at stake is the quality of the contributions we bring.¹

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin,
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations

These comments by Archbishop Martin were spoken during his keynote address on the 2002 Conference on *Humanizing the Global Economy*. The Church has, for a time now, become aware of the phenomenon known as Globalization and it has also realized that this phenomenon is crucial for shaping the world we live in. We live in an increasingly global world. To understand how and why things happen in the world it is important to understand the lens of globalization which alone can offer us any real understanding for world events. To help us understand how our economy works, why terrorism is on the rise, why the climate is changing, or what dictates the foreign policy of almost all nations including our own we have to understand the context of Globalization which affects all these things.

As an historian it was important for me to put this phenomenon in a larger historical context. Globalization has ebbed and flowed throughout human history. We should recall that Christianity was born and developed during a period of Globalization that at the time was developed by the Roman Empire. More recently after two world wars the experiments of the League of Nations and the United Nations have attempted to organize this global society. Economically globalization really took off after the Second World War especially with the ideological competition between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. Today we find ourselves living in an economically global society and still struggling with a politically national agenda. Just think for a moment about how eager we are to tear down certain economic walls through the elimination of trade barriers while politically we are eager to build new walls like the one between the U.S. and Mexico.

Today's Globalization is very complicated. We are fortunate enough to have organizations that attempt to simplify this massive phenomenon. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has developed an educational site known as Globalization 101. In its general definition it states:

Globalization is a process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations, a process driven by international trade and investment and aided by information technology. This process has effects on the environment, on culture, on political systems, on economic development and prosperity, and on human physical well-being in societies around the world...

Globalization is deeply controversial, however. Proponents of globalization argue that it allows poor countries and their citizens to develop economically and raise

¹ keynote address for the *Humanizing the Global Economy* conference, January 28th 2002

their standards of living, while opponents of globalization claim that the creation of an unfettered international free market has benefited multinational corporations in the Western world at the expense of local enterprises, local cultures, and common people.²

This sets the tone for Archbishop Martins comment. As a phenomenon Globalization is neither good nor bad, it's simply an amoral concept. It becomes good or bad pending on how humanity creates and utilizes this phenomenon. At issue is the widening gap that has emerged between rich and poor. Economist Jeffrey Sachs from Columbia University offers this helpful image on the economic gap:

The gap can be 100 to one in some cases if you simply measure the gross national product per person in the United States versus, say, a country in Africa like Botswana, maybe a gap of \$30,000 per person and \$300 per person. That's absolutely astounding, to be on the same planet and to have that extreme variation in material well-being... It is an incredible moral problem -- how to live together with this vast gap in wealth.³

The response of the Church and of Catholic Social Teaching is to “Humanize the Global Economy” and to do this by promoting a spirit and a global ethic of solidarity. Pope John Paul II encyclical on Social Concerns offers this vision on the ethic of solidarity:

Solidarity helps us to see the 'other'-whether a person, people or nation-not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our 'neighbor,' a 'helper'(cf. Gn. 2:18-20), to be made a sharer on a par with ourselves in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God.

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis #39

Our own Passionist Community took up this ethic in the 44th General Chapter:

“Solidarity” is the chosen word to describe a new way of being together as Passionists in the mission for the life of the world. New realities call for ‘new’ responses in faith... Solidarity calls us to a profound conversion of mind and heart. We grow in awareness that life is a gift to be shared.

44th General Chapter #4.6

Global solidarity is the key that will guide our Catholic response to the Global world. Through Global solidarity we would identify the global relationships we engage with and be a responsible agent of the global community in responding to the structural forces that impact and shape these relationships. We relate to the Global world through our own investments and consumptions as well as through specific global relationships that we have with our missions or with the international community. America’s main impact on the issue of Globalization is played out through its transnational business community and its International Trade Agreements. To be sure there are other factors such as foreign debt and

² http://www.globalization101.org/What_is_Globalization.html

³ http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commandingheights/shared/minitextlo/int_jeffreysachs.html#22

aid as well as the role it plays with international institutions but Corporations and Trade are, arguably, the most powerful forces of American Global involvement. We American Passionist will need to address these issues especially as we see that they are emerging from those in the underdeveloped nations.

The concrete expression of this ethic of global solidarity is found in the tradition of the evangelical counsel of poverty. The Passionist Rule states:

In a world where the unjust distribution of goods is a major source of division, hatred, and suffering, we want our poverty to witness to the true value and purpose of these goods.

As far as possible we intend to share our life with others, and to use our possessions for the relief of suffering and for the increase of justice and peace in the world.

Passionist Rule #13

Poverty is not only an exhortation toward living a simpler lifestyle. It is also a lens from which we understand the purpose of our divine calling which is to preach the salvific message of Christ Crucified. The purpose of preaching the Passion is to lead ourselves and others towards a loving relationship with God. Many factors lead us and other members of the human community astray from this path. Not least is the factor of material wealth. In reflecting on poverty Fr. Aelred Smith, C.P. offered this analysis:

The “problem” of riches is that they create a self-dependence which leads to separation both from God and from one’s fellow human beings. Riches wither the human spirit. Riches leads to an overconfidence in human resources and human capability to the neglect of God and inner values.⁴

Social structures are a reflection of the human condition and structures of Globalization are no exception. When we consider the global role of our own wealthy nation, along with its own global self confidence and either the lack or idolatrous use of Divine values, we have every reason to think that Fr. Smith’s reflection is applicable here. Solidarity is the social value that can break our nations vice towards “riches” and self-dependence.

As a community whose mission is to bring people closer to God through the message of the Passion we are obliged to live out this evangelical counsel which, along with chastity, obedience, and the memory of the Passion, we identify as essential for our goal to be with God. We (lay and vowed) ought to strive to also live out this value in our own daily lives and assess our own use of “riches.” However as we are a preaching community we also ought to highlight the lack of values towards global solidarity that exist in some of our global economic policies such as with our trade agreements or with the conduct of out transnational corporations.

⁴ Fr. Aelred Smith, CP *Poverty Alongside Humanity*, Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality, #9

Catholic Social Teaching on Global Economic Justice

1. Global Economic Justice:

We have to move from our devotion to independence, through an understanding of interdependence, to a commitment to human solidarity. That challenge must find its realization in the kind of community we build among us. Love implies concern for all - especially the poor - and a continued search for those social and economic structures that permit everyone to share in a community that is a part of a redeemed creation (Rom 8:21-23).

Economic Justice for All, #365

2. Fair Trade:

Trade relations can no longer be based solely on the principle of free, unchecked competition, for it very often creates an economic dictatorship. Free trade can be called just only when it conforms to the demands of social justice.

Populorum Progressio, #59

3. Corporate Responsibility:

The supreme criterion in economic matters ought not to be... the special interests of individuals or groups, nor unregulated competition, economic despotism, national prestige or imperialism, nor any other aim of this sort. On the contrary, all forms of economic enterprise must be governed by the principles of social justice and charity.

Mater Et Magistra, #38&39