

BARTOLOME DE LAS CASAS ESSAY SERIES

Twelfth Essay: 'Globalization' and a Call for University Student Leaders to Promote Human Dignity and Solidarity

Written by Professor Michael Pakaluk

“In today's complex situation, not least because of the growth of a globalized economy, the Church's social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 27).”

What is Globalization?

People speak about 'globalization' as if it was a single thing, but the term actually denotes at least four large-scale changes: one is economic; another political; the third involves communication, and the fourth is cultural.

Economic globalization is the process—now about 400 years old—by which the world has increasingly become a single economic market, while boundaries that divide nations have become less and less important, from an economic point of view. Economic globalization has its roots in the age of discovery, when explorers from Europe traveled to Asia, India, and the New World, paving the way for trade and colonization. The Industrial Revolution in the 19th century contributed to the interdependence of the economies of different nations, with colonies providing raw materials for the industries of more developed countries. In the early 20th century, especially because of the invention of means of rapid transportation (good road systems, air travel), and global communication (telephone and radio), business activity at a distance was made possible and was accelerated.

In the late 20th century, economic globalization pressed on at an even faster pace: the end of the Cold War led to an opening up of new markets and an exchange between free-market and formerly communist countries; moreover, multinational corporations arose which were now capable of viewing the entire world as their labor and consumer markets. And, finally, throughout the 20th c. industrial nations ratified a series of trade agreements such as GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), which served as catalysts for worldwide economic interdependence.

Political globalization is the process by which an essentially Anglo-American model of

democratic, constitutional government, as based on a declaration of human rights, has similarly spread throughout the world and effectively gained the support of the entire world. This process is also about 400 years old. It has its start in English parliamentary constitutionalism and political theory in the 17th century. It finds perhaps its best expression in the framing of the American Constitution.

This system of government is seen to 'work' in the remarkable success of the American experiment: economic development and political freedom, it seems, go hand-in-hand. British Imperialism in the 19th century propagated it throughout the world, at least in idea. And then it acquired tremendous prestige because of the leading role of the United States and Britain in the great wars of the 20th century. Indeed, at the end of those wars, the United Nations affirmed constitutional democracy through its *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

With the fall of the Soviet Empire in 1989 constitutional democracy on the American model, a 'free society', seems to be the only serious alternative—so much so that it, to some observers (most notably, Francis Fukiyama), it has appeared that, at least as regards political development, the human race has reached "the end of history". Any society which refuses to 'join the game' along with other free societies condemns itself to stagnation and even irrelevance.

Globalization in communications is a considerably younger phenomenon. We might take it to with the invention of the electromagnet by William Sturgeon in 1825. Less than twenty

years later, in 1844, Samuel B. Morse sends the first message by the newly invented telegraph (which relies on the electromagnet). In 1850, a telegraph cable is laid across the English Channel, bridging Britain and the Continent. In 1866, the first such cable is laid across the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, in less than forty years after Sturgeon's fundamental invention, businessmen in New York could communicate almost simultaneously with businessmen in London.

Progress in communication continues at no less rapid a pace in the years that follow. What we call the 'Internet' is simply the latest, although perhaps most dramatic, development in the same series. About 1 billion people (one-seventh of the world's population) now make use of this network of very fast computers linked by fiber-optic cables and can therefore, in principle, communicate with one another continuously and effortlessly. Because so much business is now accomplished through computers and on computers, and because national boundaries are meaningless for the Internet, this implies that about one billion people are, in theory, in a position to do business with one another immediately.

Globalization in culture looks to be a consequence of the other types of globalization. Ease of global communication means that some forms of culture will be spread quickly, and more widely, and prove more popular than other forms. As the Anglo-American model of a free society spreads throughout the world, so do corresponding cultural forms: because of the importance of freedom in that model of society, many of these cultural forms, which are superficially more 'free', appeal to pedestrian or even lower instincts and

thrive unless hindered somehow through law. Again, businesses that function well in a global environment, such as the multinationals, will naturally succeed in promoting, through their products, their vision of a good life; and because business aims at efficiency, it will impose uniformity.

Thus, globalization in culture has been a process largely of homogenization and also 'Americanization': things become more uniform, as they become more like American popular culture. In part, this is helped by natural inclinations: people like to be like one another; people like what looks promising and new. But, as a result, a homogeneous and recent culture therefore displaces local and traditional culture. The spread throughout the world of MacDonalds and Starbucks is an icon of this homogenization. Moreover, high culture gets crowded out by low culture: after all, the leading uses of the Internet are not reading library books or listening to symphonies but rather pornography, gaming, and gossip.

Is Globalization Really All That New? And Is It Important?

If some of the trends referred to as 'globalization' stretch back 400 years, then is there really anything new about it? Is globalization simply a product of media hype? Perhaps here as elsewhere there really is 'nothing new under the sun'.

Although the continuity of the process is an historical fact, still, globalization seems to have increased recently to such an extent that a difference in degree has amounted to a

difference in kind. We mentioned the fall of the Iron Curtain, and the recent entry of China and India into world markets (about two billion persons), made possible by the Internet. One might also add the continuing, even if precarious, domination of world political dynamics by a single superpower (a real, but flawed, pax Americana). These are genuine changes of a world-historical scale, which have unified the world to an extent not previously seen.

It is a general rule that an association gets constituted when people think that they form an association, because an association is a social reality. For instance, the 'Silent Majority' became something real when people thought of themselves as part of a silent majority and identified with others as being part of the same group. In the same way, the Internet allows people to think of themselves as part of a single world community, and then, by that fact itself, such a community is constituted -- a 'global village' or 'flat world' (to use the term of *The New York Times* essayist and author Thomas Friedman).

"Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history," the Council Fathers at Vatican II wrote, in their prescient Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (1965), "Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world. Triggered by the intelligence and creative energies of man, these changes recoil upon him, upon his decisions and desires, both individual and collective, and upon his manner of thinking and acting with respect to things and to people. Hence, we can already speak of a true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on man's religious life as well" (n. 4). "The circumstances of the life of

modern man have been so profoundly changed in their social and cultural aspects,” the document later states, “that we can speak of a new age of human history” (n. 54).

Globalization is important because of its prospects for good and ill on a large scale. It is especially important for a Catholic who is an American, because of the central role of the United States in globalization. The United States is the leading force of globalization in all its aspects: business; politics; communications; and culture. **Indeed, given their tendencies to parochialism, Americans need to pay particular attention to globalization:** “Let everyone consider it his sacred obligation to esteem and observe social necessities as belonging to the primary duties of modern man,” the Council Fathers wrote, “For the more unified the world becomes, the more plainly do the offices of men extend beyond particular groups and spread by degrees to the whole world” (Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 30).

Globalization brings to our attention in a particular way the poor of the world. When our attention is trained simply on the business, politics, and culture within the borders of the United States, then the poor in other countries can easily appear to be the ‘needy’ that required ‘relief efforts’. But after globalization, when so much of the world participates in and benefits from a world economy, it becomes unavoidable to ask: “Why aren’t these people part of the game? Why does it seem that their condition is persistent? What steps should we take to help them?”

The 'Catholic' outlook of a believer implies a concern for the world as a whole. After all, 'Catholic' means 'universal': "The Church recognizes that worthy elements are found in today's social movements, especially an evolution toward unity, a process of wholesome socialization and of association in civic and economic realms." Why? Because: "The promotion of unity belongs to the innermost nature of the Church, for she is, thanks to her relationship with Christ, a sacramental sign and an instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of the whole human race" (Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 42).

So an American Catholic has a twofold reason to be concerned about globalization: as an American, because of the leading role of the United States; and, as a Catholic, because the outlook of a Catholic tends naturally to take within its scope the entire world.

Is Globalization Basically Good or Bad?

Yet should a Catholic be in favor of globalization or opposed? Globalization is, after all, controversial. Critics of globalization—those who are 'anti-globalization'—argue that globalization:

- represents a revival of cut-throat, *laissez faire* capitalism;
- is an expression of political and cultural imperialism (especially on the part of the United States);
- widens the gap worldwide between rich and poor;

- harms workers in developed nations, because jobs get exported overseas; and,
- destroys the environment.

Someone might reply that anti-globalization is pointless, on the grounds that globalization is inevitable. Compare: it would not have made much sense to have been opposed to the Industrial Revolution; that was going to happen, whether people opposed it or favored it.

Globalization may indeed be inevitable. But even then one might wonder whether it was a process that someone should basically affirm, but wish to guide or correct in some respects (how precisely it develops), or a process that someone ought to protest against and withdraw himself from—as, for instance, the Amish have done as regards industrialization.

One may distinguish between globalization as a means or instrument (a ‘technology’), and globalization as the use of those means. Globalization as a means allows trade among persons, easy communication, and free political association, all of which are good. It represents just one more instance of the growth of human technology, which a Catholic should affirm, without hesitation, as itself good, because it is a participation in the creative activity of God: “Throughout the course of the centuries, men have labored to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort” (Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 34).

To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself, this human activity accords with God's will. "For man, created to God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to Him Who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all" (Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 34). Even cultural unity throughout the world, the Council Fathers teach (although not a homogeneity!) ought to be welcomed, as making possible a greater community among persons, and shared cultural wealth: "The increase of commerce between the various nations and human groups opens more widely to all the treasures of different civilizations and thus little by little, there develops a more universal form of human culture, which better promotes and expresses the unity of the human race to the degree that it preserves the particular aspects of the different civilizations" (n. 54).

Nonetheless, largely because of the effects of original sin, every technology risks becoming subtly altered, from being something through which we exercise stewardship and 'govern the earth', into something, rather, that dominates us. So, the use to which globalization is put presents us with a moral challenge. But, as in other cases, the possibility of abuse does not negate the reality of the goods that can be acquired and shared through globalization considered as a means: Abuse does not take away use.

Two Common Mis-Conceptions about Globalization

The phenomenon of 'outsourcing' captures a common complaint about, and misunderstanding of, globalization. Outsourcing is when some relatively workers in a country perform rote operation, which is part of some service or the production of some good, other than that in which the good is primarily provided. For instance, physicians in the United States provide medical care for patients in the United States. But part of providing medical care involves keeping accurate medical records. To do this, many physicians simply dictate, into a tape recorder, on a daily basis, any necessary additions to the medical records of their patients. Skilled transcriber-typists then later transcribe these dictated notes. Since this task is relatively rote, it can be exported. And, indeed, now there are large medical transcription centers established in cities such as Bangalore, India, where transcribers receive, over the Internet, the dictated notes of physicians and work all 'night' (which is 'day' for them) to have the transcribed notes entered into the medical files for the next day.

This is an attractive arrangement for American physicians and insurers, because transcribers in India work for only a fraction of the wages of transcribers in the United States. So then: is it good that the work is outsourced in this way, because it keeps down medical costs for American patients and helps Indian workers gain affluence, or bad, because American transcribers lose their jobs to Indian workers who are paid much worse wages than American workers would have been paid?

Economists regard that sort of outsourcing as a good example of what the English political

philosopher, David Ricardo, referred to as 'comparative advantage'. Comparative advantage may be understood in terms of a riddle: "A man gets a smaller slice of pie, yet he gets more pie—how does he do it?" He can do so if the pie grows in size: a thin slice of a very large pie may contain more dessert than a big slice of a very small pie. Suppose that there is a successful economy and a struggling economy, but these two economies do not interact. The successful economy is so successful that it does everything better than the struggling economy. Even so, if the two economies joined together, to form a single market, and the successful economy allowed the struggling economy to do worse some of the jobs which previously it had done better, at the end of the day the successful economy would be even better off than before. Both economies together are stronger than either one separate; their common market constitutes a much larger 'pie'; and the successful economy, although now it has a smaller 'slice' (some percentage of work it had previously done is done somewhere else), is wealthier, because it takes its slice from this larger pie. That is 'comparative advantage'.

Globalization allows comparative advantage, and thus it is a mistake to presume that, because some American jobs are exported, the American economy will become weaker as a result. And obviously it is a mistake, anyway, to suppose that all jobs always last in all sectors of the economy: most New Yorkers are not farmers any longer; shoes are hardly made in Massachusetts anymore; and whaling ships are no longer built on the shores of Long Island. It is necessary that jobs get shifted or disappear as an economy develops.

A second misconception involves the relationship between globalization and changes in culture. The homogenization of culture, and the dominance of low or crass forms of culture, is not inevitable, given other phenomena of globalization. Economies could become integrated, and communication improved, among persons throughout the world, without its being the case that (say) Jennifer Aniston become an icon everywhere of feminine beauty and demeanor. It is no more necessary that Jennifer Aniston be popular in a place that has recently become integrated into the world economy, such as Bangalore, India, than that she be popular in Boise, Idaho, which has long been integrated into the world economy. The propagation of a culture requires people who want that culture. And the sort of culture someone wants depends on her moral outlook and habits: an R-rated movie (for instance) simply won't sell to a population which, for moral reasons, avoids R movies altogether.

As we saw earlier, the Council Fathers of Vatican II admonished us: "Let everyone consider it his sacred obligation to esteem and observe social necessities as belonging to the primary duties of modern man. For the more unified the world becomes, the more plainly do the offices of men extend beyond particular groups and spread by degrees to the whole world". Yet then they continued: "But this development cannot occur unless individual men and their associations cultivate in themselves the moral and social virtues, and promote them in society; thus, with the needed help of divine grace men who are truly new and artisans of a new humanity can be forthcoming" (Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 30). It is necessary to 'cultivate the moral and social virtues', so that the good that

can be accomplished through the means of globalization is not overmatched by the bad that results from how it is received and used.

Two Real Threats in Globalization

But corresponding to each of the misunderstandings we have just identified are two real threats: the abuse of workers through un-moderated market forces, and the impoverishment of human culture. Both of these require primarily 'moral' and 'spiritual' solutions.

Recent globalization presents us with an economy that is not directly under any government. As we saw, globalization as an economic phenomenon is characterized especially by the diminishing importance of national boundaries and the lifting of government intervention in trade. A market, however, is a social unity, and every social unity has a common good and should somehow be guided to a common good. Since there is no true global government (the United Nations does not have the status of a world government), then no authority has responsibility for this common good, and thus participants in the world economy are exposed to harm without remedy, especially the poor and weak.

It is true, as followers of Adam Smith argue, that a market, which is a natural reality, is generally governed by an 'invisible hand', which tends to distribute goods and services efficiently and for the long-term benefit of all. Nonetheless, all markets require some

guidance and oversight with respect to abuses. Everyone acknowledges this even with regard to the best functioning markets, such as the American equity market, which requires the cautious oversight of regulating agencies such as the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the adjustments of the Federal Reserve Bank. The same is true of the global market.

It is not clear whether a global government would be the best solution. Sometimes — perhaps in most cases — governmental intervention in a market is worse than the cure. In any case, we will not soon see a global government, so the question is moot. In the absence of such a government, then it is all the more important that leading actors in the process of globalization **‘cultivate the moral and social virtues’**.

Aristotle distinguished ‘intellectual virtues’ from ‘virtues of character’. Intellectual virtues are principles and insights that we grasp and are resolved to live by. Virtues of character are habits, dispositions, and inclinations, which constitute what we value and how we are prepared to act and to choose.

What would it mean to ‘cultivate the moral and social virtues’, then, in a way that was relevant to globalization? This would involve, first, study, with a view to understanding and affirming the basic principles of classical philosophy, natural law and ‘Catholic social teaching’. Such study would include within its scope such things as understanding what is meant by ‘subsidiarity’, ‘solidarity’, ‘service’ and ‘common good’, and being resolved to live by the principles which promote these ideals.

The relevant virtues of character would be acquired by someone's coming to live in a certain way, especially in community with others (because no one succeeds in being virtuous on his own): for instance, by acquiring shared habits of life which implied, for instance, a correct valuing of money; by adopting a relatively simple lifestyle which showed an awareness of the poverty in which most human beings actually live; by cultivating dispositions to learn about and become familiar with the mores and language of other cultures; and by the practice of genuine friendship, which is the only sound basis for effective solidarity and goodwill.

Someone who had these 'moral and social virtues' would do business in the world economy in such a way as to show, in deeds, a genuine respect for the equal dignity of the human persons with whom she associated, even if these others were in a position of weakness and could in principle be exploited by her.*

A Society in Which Young Men Know Folk Songs

The second real threat presented by globalization may perhaps best be explained by an anecdote. Several years ago, a group of American college students traveled to Mexico for the summer, to learn about Mexican culture and to do modest building projects for the poor. Mexican and American student volunteers lived together in a residence hall in Mexico City, sharing meals and recreational events scheduled for the free time.

One evening everyone gathered in a common room, and the Mexican students sang various folk songs that they all knew. The Americans did not quite know what to make of this: it was clear that they had never spent an evening simply sitting together with friends and singing songs. The Mexicans at one point took a break and asked the Americans to sing for them some American folk songs. The Americans were perplexed. They huddled together: “Does anyone know any folk songs?” “What can we sing?” “What do we all know?” Eventually it was decided that the only songs that everyone knew were Christmas songs, and so, even though it had been a sweltering day in July, the Americans treated the Mexican students to all the verses of “Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer”.

Recall that the Fathers of Vatican II envisioned a suitable world culture as one in which each local area has its own culture, which it then shares reciprocally with others: “The increase of commerce between the various nations and human groups opens more widely to all the treasures of different civilizations and thus little by little, there develops a more universal form of human culture, which better promotes and expresses the unity of the human race to the degree that it preserves the particular aspects of the different civilizations” (Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 54).

Clearly, this sort of ‘universal human culture’ requires that each group preserve its own culture, and to preserve a culture presupposes actually possessing one in the first place. It is universal precisely through being a widespread sharing of what is particular to each. The threat of the homogenization of culture, then, and the wiping out of rich local cultures by superficial and transient culture, is properly answered by a vigorous promotion of local

culture. Each person can battle the *MacDonald-ization* of world culture by being more devoted to his home culture.

But how do we do this? What inspires a person to love his own culture in the first place? What ways of life are such that they are friendly to the preservation of historic and indigenous and local cultures? How must a person live for culture to be important to him at all? Culture derives from *cultus* and has its roots in religious worship as centered around family life.

Josef Pieper in *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (1948) points out that a contemplative, religious outlook is the seedbed and nourishment of culture, and the family is the society in which we best live that sort of leisure. One might think, then, that religious devotion and strong families are the best safeguards of culture: and indeed, experience seems to confirm this. And, similarly, genuine culture is a safeguard of religion: "...the Church recalls to the mind of all that culture is to be subordinated to the integral perfection of the human person, to the good of the community and of the whole society. Therefore, it is necessary to develop the human faculties in such a way that there results a growth of the faculty of admiration, of intuition, of contemplation, of making personal judgment, of developing a religious, moral and social sense" (Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 59).

We said earlier that the spread of superficial and homogeneous culture is only accidentally connected with globalization. Now we can say: a superficial and homogeneous culture is what results when globalization affects a society insofar as its

religious commitment is vapid, or its constituent families are breaking down. To the extent that Western societies become post-Christian, and to the extent that people in Western societies no longer center their lives in the shared activities of leisure in the family, to that extent they will become vulnerable to forms of culture that do not adequately magnify or express human dignity. A culture of “MacDonalds” will dominate—when it does—not because of globalization, but because of a prior moral decline, which is distinct from globalization. And the correct response is not to attack globalization, but rather to build up a society consisting of households in which, so to speak, people want to sing folk songs together.

G. K. Chesterton finishes *What's Wrong with the World* (1910) by tracing a just society back to one in which the dignity of the human person, as represented by a mother's joy in her daughter's beautiful (hair, is the fixed point to which everything else adapts, even a bureaucratic love of efficiency: “Now the whole parable and purpose of these last pages, and indeed of all these pages, is this: to assert that we must instantly begin all over again and begin at the other end. I begin with a little girl's hair. That I know is a good thing at any rate. Whatever else is evil, the pride of a good mother in the beauty of her daughter is good. It is one of those adamant tendernesses that are the touchstones of every age and race. If other things are against it, other things must go down. If landlords and laws and sciences are against it, landlords and laws and sciences must go down.

“With the red hair of one she-urchin in the gutter I will set fire to all modern civilization. Because a girl should have long hair, she should have clean hair; because she should

have clean hair, she should not have an unclean home: because she should not have an unclean home, she should have a free and leisured mother; because she should have a free mother, she should not have an usurious landlord; because there should not be an usurious landlord, there should be a redistribution of property; because there should be a redistribution of property, there shall be a revolution.

“That little urchin with the gold-red hair, whom I have just watched toddling past my house, she shall not be lopped and lamed and altered; her hair shall not be cut short like a convict's; no, all the kingdoms of the earth shall be hacked about and mutilated to suit her. She is the human and sacred image; all around her the social fabric shall sway and split and fall; the pillars of society shall be shaken, and the roofs of ages come rushing down, and not one hair of her head shall be harmed”.

Similarly, we shall ‘set fire to all harmful globalization’ not by actual lootings and burnings, but if we look for, and put into practice, those conditions of life which make it easy for a family to gather together after a home-made dinner, shut off the television, turn off the Internet, put aside business worries, and enjoy sharing simple stories and songs about God, neighbor, and country.

What Should I Do About Globalization?

Globalization is not the sort of thing that someone is assured of dealing with appropriately

by simply letting things happen as he will. Although globalization is a natural development of human technology, we have no natural affections that go along with globalization. When parents have a child, they naturally feel a strong affection for their offspring. Siblings and even cousins, if they spend time together, will develop spontaneously a natural affection for one another. But there is nothing about seeing someone's screen name on a computer monitor that will lead us to have friendly affection for him. (In fact, the importance of the appearance of anonymity in cyberspace is well known. That is why people do and say things on their computer, which they would never say or do if they took themselves to be in the company of others.)

Consequently, it is necessary that we develop the habit of dealing with others globally as persons who are equal to us in dignity and who should be treated fairly, with a view to friendship. This 'habit' is also known as the virtue of solidarity. Like any virtue, it needs to be acquired by actions that are typical of the virtue. The best way of acquiring the virtue of solidarity, is to practice it. Book learning is important for solidarity -- we need to understand what justice and the common good are, for instance -- but also practice and 'training' in living a life marked by solidarity and friendship with citizens of other cultures and nations.

"The more unified the world becomes, the more plainly do the offices of men extend beyond particular groups and spread by degrees to the whole world" (Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 30). This is why the North American Educational Initiatives Foundation

(www.naeif.org) was formed: in order to provide university students with opportunities to acquire the virtue of solidarity, by living it.

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