

Universal Principles for a Harmonious Globalization: Insights from Catholic Social Teaching

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To say that the topic of globalization is controversial, both within and outside the Catholic Church, is surely a profound understatement. Around the world, we see Catholics and non-Catholics debating fiercely among themselves and with others about the meaning of the emergence of a variety of political, social, and economic phenomena collectively corralled in popular and intellectual discourse under the word “globalization.” For some, it represents the slow breaking down of barriers that prevent the poor from entering into the world market. For others, it represents what they believe to be the slow and steady diminution of particular cultures that have existed for centuries.

There are many today who are especially interested in what the Roman Catholic Church thinks about the process of globalization, and the role that it plays in this world. As a body of believers, the Catholic Church continues to grow globally, with its numbers embracing over one billion people. Its mission of evangelizing the world in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is, by definition, global in its aspirations. No man, no woman, no child in any time, place or culture is, from the Catholic standpoint, to be denied the opportunity to know the Way, the Truth, and the Life that is Jesus Christ. The small community of apostles left behind by the Christ who had truly risen from the dead was not told to stay perpetually in Jerusalem. It was commanded to spread the Word of Christ to all the nations, indeed, to the very ends of the earth.

As part of its global mission of evangelization, the Catholic Church proclaims that every Christian, indeed, every person, should seek to walk the way of Christ by living in accordance with the truth, especially the moral truth, proclaimed by Christ and His

Church throughout the centuries. At the core of this moral teaching is the axiom that human persons have the liberty and responsibility to transforming ourselves from the person we are into the persons that we ought to be. It is primarily in this way, by building up ourselves, that men and women contribute to the building of the Kingdom of God.

One part of this moral teaching is what many people describe as “Catholic social teaching.” My task today is to elaborate, albeit briefly, on how this social teaching helps Catholics to think about, and comprehend, the phenomenon of globalization, especially in terms of the principles that the Church believes need to under. My object, as such, is therefore not to focus on the questions of whether globalization is, overall, beneficial or detrimental to humanity. Rather, it is to think about how we think about and comprehend globalization. I will, however, offer some closing reflections about the engagement between Catholicism and a globalizing world on some of the underlying philosophical questions that require, in my view, continuing reflection and discussion, not least because they touch on the engagement between Catholicism and the phenomenon that we call modernity.

What is Catholic Social Teaching?

But before we do this, we need to consider what is Catholic social teaching. Contrary to much received opinion, Catholic social teaching did not begin in 1891 with Leo XIII’s social encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, any more than some Catholics seem to think that the Catholic Church began in 1966. There has always been a social dimension to Catholic teaching, precisely because the moral life is intimately linked with our nature as social beings.

The central proclamation of the Catholic Church and other Christians to the world—that Jesus Christ is Lord—has profound implications for Catholic involvement in public life. In making such a statement, Christians assert that our Kyrios is *already* Lord of heaven and *all* the earth. Fr Richard Neuhaus may therefore be correct when he states that Catholics do not believe it essential for the state to declare that Jesus Christ is Lord. The

same proclamation, however, means that Christ's demands cannot somehow be confined to one's private life. For while the Gospel contains important directives about how we should order our personal lives, the same moral commandments have implications for how we try to order the social and political world. The demands of the Gospel message are, of course, of a profoundly moral nature. But the Christian life is not limited to the proper ordering of personal moral life. It also has a social dimension not least because social life presents people with dilemmas to which they must respond by freely acting in ways which meet the Gospel's demands. Thus, whatever is meant by the widely used expression 'separation of church and state', it does not mean, as George Weigel notes, that Catholics believe in or accept 'the separation of religion from public life, or the proscription of religiously-grounded argument from public life'.

We may also posit, however, that Christian involvement in public life should have a different content and set of priorities from that of secular programs. The priority of Catholic social teaching is not, for example, 'effectiveness'. As the Protestant theologian Stanley Hauerwas states, instead of 'attempting to make the world more peaceable and just' the 'first social ethical task of the church is to be the church'. This primarily means that the Church should tell its story and witness to the Truth about God. Hence, while Catholics should care for the needy and the poor (who are not, as the Church reminds us, confined to the materially poor), we should do so according to the Church's distinctive priorities rather than those of 'the world'. One would therefore expect Catholics heavily involved in justice issues to avoid speaking almost exclusively, for instance, about material poverty and instead also say a great deal about *moral* and *spiritual* poverty. Otherwise they may leave themselves open to the charge of providing nothing more than vague theological glosses to various secular agendas.

In light of our discussion thus far, what can we say about the general approach of Catholic teaching about the social, political, and economic order? The first point is that those Catholics who disdain the Church's moral teaching, while celebrating its social teaching are effectively living a schizophrenic existence. The Church social teaching flows from both the Church's understanding of itself as the Body of Christ and the People

of God, and the moral teaching and moral absolutes that are the basis of Christian love and Christian life.

The second point is that Catholics should affirm, against all utopias, that there is no paradise on earth. We are here only as pilgrims. The goal of our life is not here, but ‘there’—in God’s eternal Kingdom. The *provisional* character of all earthly realizations is something that we must never forget. Perfect freedom, complete justice, and total peace do *not* exist in this life, not least because of the reality of original sin. Surely this is one Christian teaching for which Christian faith is not necessary because, in the words of the ex-Marxist philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, it is so amply confirmed by human history. Against all resignation, however, Catholics should also insist that *relative joy*, *relative success*, and *relative justice* (relative in comparison to eternal life) *can* exist in this life. Hence, we must strive to create space for love and for the opportunity for all to self-realize and freely participate in the basic moral goods so that, even in the midst of great deficiencies and miseries, something of God’s Kingdom is made manifest on earth.

Thirdly, we can say what Catholic social teaching is not. Catholic social teaching is not an ideology; it is not a political or public policy program; it is not a “third way”; it is not “liberal”; it is not “conservative”. Nor is it based on that contemporary intellectual disease of the morality of feelings; it is not utilitarian; it is not consequentialist. At its heart is the articulation of principles and basic demands of morality derived from both Catholic faith and the natural law. These principles might be summarized as the dignity of the human person as the Image of God, the protection of the human rights and human duties that express this dignity, the virtue of solidarity, the principle of subsidiarity, the virtue of justice, and the love of preference for the poor. All of these, I might add, are derived from reflection upon Scripture, Tradition, the Church Fathers, the Natural Law, the Magisterium, and the lives and writings of the Church’s saints and scholars throughout history. They are also derived from serious reflection on what the Church considers to be the nature of the person: that is, the reasoned conviction that man is an embodied creature graced with reason and free will, capable of discerning and choosing

material, scientific, moral, and metaphysical truth, but also capable of choosing the opposite because he is marked by the disorder of original sin.

Fourthly, Catholics need to discern how they apply these principles to the social and political order, and to recognize that, in many cases, Catholic social teaching allows tremendous room for prudential judgment. On issues such as minimum wages and affirmative action, it is entirely possible for Catholics to arrive at quite different judgments and yet remain in good standing with the Church. There are, of course, a number of subjects where Catholic moral and social teaching translates into very specific, non-negotiable demands, most of which in our present age are concerned with the promotion and protection of the culture of life over and against the culture of death.

What is Globalization?

So, having summarized what Catholic social teaching is, and is not, we need to briefly describe what we mean by globalization. On one level, globalization is a new paradigm for describing the new way in which the human family can relate has emerged in the wake of the collapse of the previous Cold War paradigm. This is not to say that the world is no longer divided; it is. But the idea of globalization does reflect the end of Marxist-Leninist systems in most of those countries where it prevailed.

There are, of course, various features of globalization that we can identify without entering into a polemical discussion of its significance. Some of the features include:

- ? the proliferation of transnational organizations and movements both of a “private” (e.g., multinational corporations) and “public” (e.g., international judicial bodies) nature;
- ? the emergence of planetary dimensions to business, finance, trade, technological, and information flows;
- ? the diminution of many hitherto common political and economic barriers such as tariffs;

- ? an increasing degree of cultural homogenization; and
- ? the unparalleled expansion of personal relationships beyond the level of the family, local communities and associations, and even nations.

Generally and simply put, globalization is the increased interconnectedness of all peoples on the face of the earth. While interaction between peoples is hardly new to human history, more and more people can now move more easily, rapidly and cheaply than ever—*and thus share*—themselves and their material and human capital with others.

I also think that there are at least two developments, beyond the demise of Communism, that are driving much of this increased interconnectedness. The first is the technological revolution that has emerged from the natural sciences. Specifically, two areas of technological progress have made globalization possible. One is rapid advances in communications technology. The rise of the personal computer in the 1990's and its interface with the Internet has created the ability to process, store and move large amounts of information and ideas with unprecedented and ever-improving ease, speed and economy. The other technical area promoting the globalization phenomenon is transportation. Again, with unprecedented and ever-improving ease, speed, and economy, we can move ourselves and our capital.

The second development underlying globalization is the “social dimension” of modernity. This is sometimes called “liberalism” because of its association with the idea of liberty, although as we all know, the number of contrary and even contradictory positions that claim the title of liberalism raises questions about the usefulness of the term.

Economic liberalism stipulates that the real wealth of nations would be greatest in an economy marked by private property and a relatively free market. Political liberalism is concerned with economics, but goes on to assert that a variety of freedoms—ownership, trade, association, speech, religious—are due each person, and should thus be protected

as (negative) “rights” by the state. It is also concerned with particular institutions such as constitutional order and rule of law.

The Catholic evaluation of liberalism has been, and continues to be, complex. My point is simply to note that it is not only technology that makes our new interconnectedness possible. Cardinal Francis George of Chicago has noted that technology would not carry our ideas, people and things without a philosophical premise that such exchanges are beneficial. Globalization, particularly its economic aspect, has thus, George states, proceeded not only because we possess the requisite technology, but also because it is held that certain freedoms are beneficial to all the human persons who inhabit the globe.

Globalization and Catholic Social Teaching

Having established, then, the nature of globalization as well as the character of Catholic Social Teaching, the challenge becomes how Catholics can apply the principles of the Church’s teaching in ways that help to direct the process of globalization towards the service of the human person rather than his degradation. For it is not a matter of thinking that the Church can somehow “stop” globalization. Globalization is a social process that reflects man’s social nature and thus has been going on for centuries as people throughout the world come to know each other. The difference is the accelerated pace, as countries in the developing world go through a process of change that took European countries centuries to achieve.

The question is how do Catholics apply the insights of the Church’s social teaching so that globalization reflects the full truth about the unique dignity of man. Broadly speaking, there are three areas in which this requires attention: the economic, the political, and the cultural. In this regard, as in any other area of the social order, there is tremendous room for prudential judgment. Catholics can say, for example, that we want a globalization that reflects the virtue of solidarity and the principle of subsidiarity. But discerning what this means in concrete terms can be, in many cases, very much a matter for prudential judgment.

One area which I do think will demand more and more attention from Catholics as the processes of globalization speed up is the area of the rapid growth and spread of biotechnology. By this, I do not primarily have in mind the use of technology to genetically enhance food products. Rather, I have in mind the work that is occurring in the area of human genetics and the reproduction and altering of the human species, either through direct intervention to either fix disordered genes or what some people believe is necessary to enhance their off-spring. While I will refrain from entering into the discussion about the specific morality of various possibilities, the process of globalization means that these and other issues must be discussed, considered, and then acted upon by Catholics at a global level, precisely because of their implications about what it means for our understanding of ourselves as human beings and possible changes in the meaning of what it is to be human. While science now has the capacity to allow us to do various things, science is simply incapable of saying in any authoritative way that we ought to do various things. Appeals to undefined, content-less notions of progress for the sake of change are simply inadequate for discussing these questions in a coherent and reasonable way. It is surely essential that the insights of theology and moral philosophy be brought to bear. In this regard, I would highly recommend that people read Leon Kass's latest book, *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity*, for a profoundly reasonable treatment of the issue. I would, however, also suggest that reflection upon Catholic social and moral teaching would help the process of a reasoned discernment upon an aspect of globalization that will only grow in importance.

Catholicism, Modernity, and Globalization

This subject of biotechnology brings us to the concluding point of this lecture which I foreshadowed at the beginning: that the pace of globalization makes ever more urgent a serious reflection by Catholics through the lens of Church teaching upon some more fundamental questions that concern the way that Catholics think about and regard the modern world. Globalization reflects in so many ways the spread of what the second Vatican Council called the modern world or what others call modernity to the rest of the

globe. Technological progress, as well as the emergence of political democracy, the spread of economic liberty and the institutions that underlie it such as private property, rule of law, and free markets, are all regularly associated with the idea of modernity. All of these things, incidentally, have their roots in Judeo-Christianity and pre-modern European Civilization. Nevertheless, there is also little question that the various Enlightenments, all of which were deeply ambiguous developments, have given a particular tone and meaning to all of these ideas, processes, and institutions, and it is a tone and meaning that much of globalization spreads around the globe as these ideas, processes, and institutions spread around the world. There are unresolved matters here that Catholicism, and Catholic social teaching, *must* continue to grapple with.

In many senses, the Catholic Church began grappling with these matters long before the Second Vatican Council. Many trace the Church's engagement with the modern world to Leo XIII's 1891 social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. It is, of course, a difficult engagement, because it involves Catholics establishing themselves equidistant between those who hold that all was darkness before 1789, and those who hold that nothing but darkness has followed after 1789. The inability of many Catholics to do so has relegated them to the irrelevance of romantic nostalgia or the triviality of aping secular modernity. In the case of the latter, the virtual disintegration of most mainline Protestant churches in Western Europe and North America that has followed their embrace of a rather uncritical view of modernity in the form of theological liberalism should be a salutary warning about the potential dangers involved.

There is, of course, no alternative to a Church engaged with the modernity that the processes of globalization continues to spread. But if such an engagement is to be meaningful, then Catholics should maintain no illusions about precisely what they have been called upon to engage. For while modernity has helped to create a world that is unquestionably more materially prosperous and scientifically advanced, it has spawned some terrible beasts. The following list, I would suggest, summarizes some of the deep chasms between Catholicism and the modernity being spread by globalization.

1. Modernity insists that God-talk is, at best metaphorical and at worst, irrational. Catholicism teaches that the Creed professed by Catholics every Sunday is the truth of the world.
2. Modernity's view of history remains that of the Enlightenment: that is, one of an "automatic" linear forward movement achieved almost by passage of time and without enormous personal effort. Catholicism, however, maintains that historical change is not necessarily benign. It insists that without a shared knowledge, understanding, and belief in the objective moral order that transcends time, place and culture, there can be no coherent, believable or effective knowledge of how to improve either oneself or society.
3. Modernity imagines that salvation is a matter of achieving one's human potential. Catholicism holds that while such achievement is important, salvation is ultimately a question of communion with God, in which our human potential is realized in an unsurpassable way by our free obedience to the truth.
4. Modernity understands evil primarily in social terms and largely as the result of disordered structures. Catholicism holds that, in the final analysis, evil and structures of evil proceed from original sin as well as the personal choice of human persons to do evil rather than good.
5. Modernity insists that all religions are equally valid. Catholicism honors other faiths, but teaches that God has revealed himself and His purposes definitively in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, thereby changing the world's history and restoring it to its proper trajectory. It also states, in the words of Vatican II's Declaration of Religious Liberty *Dignitatis Humanae* that the "one true religion [*unicam veram religionem*] subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus committed the duty of spreading it abroad among all men."
6. Modernity insists that the hope of life after death is, if not a nonsense, irrelevant to human liberation in this world. Catholicism teaches that the Christian hope of life after

death liberates us in the most radical way and thus makes a genuinely liberating transformation of the world possible in ways that mere politics cannot even begin to imagine.

7. Modernity conceptualizes reason in instrumental, technical terms. Catholicism also understands reason to be capable of knowing moral, metaphysical, philosophical and theological truth.

8. Modernity understands morality in terms of externalities, that is, the effects of one's actions upon others. It speaks of "the greatest good of the greatest number," and is profoundly utilitarian, and thus irrational, in its inspiration and methods. Catholicism disputes the consequentialist notion that the good is quantifiable. Intentions may be noble, people may claim to be acting in good conscience, and circumstances may mitigate personal responsibility. Nonetheless, Catholicism teaches that many human acts remain *everywhere* and *always* evil.

9. Modernity conceptualizes freedom as freedom of choice. Catholicism underlines free will as a sign of our dignity as the *imago Dei*, but insists that one is only truly free when one lives in truth. As Deuteronomy states: 'I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live' (Dt 30:19). This leads to a particular vision of freedom so aptly captured by Lord Acton's statement that liberty is "not the power of doing what we like, but the right of being able to do what we ought."

Reflection upon these points soon indicates that a genuine conversation between the impulse of modernity that underlies globalization, and Catholicism is bound to be difficult. It should also remind Catholic intellectuals that a conversation between the church and the modern globalizing world is not necessarily one in which the world sets the agenda for the church. A genuine conversation is a two-way process, and more than one observer would agree that in recent decades too many Catholic intellectuals have

simply articulated pale imitations of whatever happens to be the latest transitory secular intellectual fashion.

Conclusion

Certainly, in some of the areas that I have listed above, it seems clear to me that there is room for some dialogue and less room in other areas. A conversation is, however, essential and inevitable. Globalization holds out great promise for humanity, the promise of making, as the Second Vatican Council taught, human life more humane. The expansion of free trade and of institutions such as the rule of law and private property throughout the world presents us with tremendous opportunities for helping the developing world to raise its living standards. But the challenge for Catholicism in the midst of a globalizing world is to make sure that in the midst of ever-increasing change that the great dignity of the human person, the only creature who God made for his own sake, is not lost sight of. The spread of what some people call “liberal institutions” such as market exchange, private property, limited government, constitutional order, and rule of law throughout the world through globalization hold out tremendous promise, both materially as well as morally, for humanity. Ultimately, however, what matters from a Catholic standpoint is whether or not these institutions are based on an anthropology of man reflects the truth about the human person. One need only read the writings of St. Thomas More, the greatest Englishman, in my view, over the past two millennium, to see that these institutions can be based upon an authentically Christian humanism: a Christian humanism that tells us that, by virtue of our humanity, by virtue of our status as the Image of God, we transcend our culture and place; a Christian humanism that shows us how to take advantage of the immense opportunities that globalization offers humanity in ways that accord with our dignity; and a Christian humanism that shows respect for the rich variety of cultures and yet also teaches us, as Vatican II reminds us, that no-one is or ought to be considered a prisoner of their culture and that the evils that are present in any culture ought to be identified and dispensed with. It is this Christian humanism that is at the basis of Catholic social teaching, and this Christian humanism that can provide us with the principles we need for a truly harmonious globalization to emerge—principles

that speak forever about the innate dignity of man and at all times and places express the spiritual grandeur of the human person.

About the Speaker

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Dr. Gregg is the author of several books and monographs, including *Challenging the Modern World: Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II and the Development of Catholic Social Teaching* (1999), *Morality, Law, and Public Policy* (2000), and *Economic Thinking for the Theologically Minded* (2001). He also publishes regularly in journals such as *Journal of Markets and Morality*, *Crisis*, and *Policy*. He is the American editorial consultant for the Italian journal, *La Societa*, as well as American correspondent for the German newspaper *Die Tagespost*. Dr. Gregg is Director of Research at the Acton Institute, Grand Rapids, Michigan, an Adjunct Professor at the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for Marriage and the Family within the Pontifical Lateran University, Rome, and a consultant for Oxford Analytica Ltd. In 2001, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society