

Globalization Conference – Closing Reflections

Michael Treleaven, S.J.
Associate Professor
Political Science Department
Gonzaga University
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Toward others one wants to have interest, sympathy, and humility. Inside the globe's richest, most powerful state, these outlooks are too easily dulled, sometimes even excluded.

Santa Clara University thus offered a magnificent gift to 120 or so academics from Jesuit universities across the world, in November 2002. The conference on justice and higher education in developing countries was an example of the continuing vitality of the Society of Jesus' apostolates.

My own campus, Gonzaga University, this conference made clear, has wonderful opportunities to link with other Jesuit works in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and elsewhere. GU has international studies and study abroad programs, and we welcome visa students. Justice and globalization present us with superb themes for teaching and research. The Internet and the Web offer facile means of collaboration with Jesuit sponsored institutes and colleges. The tools are at hand.

Each fourth semester or so I teach Politics 365 "African Politics and Development", the only course on Africa at my university. So culturally rich, so diverse is Africa that my one course is wildly inadequate. Students, and myself too, can benefit from learning about the continent directly from those engaged in studying it and persons who are themselves citizens of its countries. I would be a better teacher if my students were learning about Africa from Africans. Our Jesuit network can be the means to such ends.

Gonzaga University is, compared with schools in the developing world, rich in technology, staff, and other resources. But we are poor in our familiarity with the aspirations, cultures, and needs of so very much of the rest of the world. We have resources we can find ways of sharing with other Jesuit schools, and we also have much to learn from colleagues and Jesuits elsewhere.

But it is going to be very important for my university to keep in mind that it is, like other apostolates, a school set in a specific place and culture, with obligations to that wider, local and regional community. Eastern Washington state and Spokane suffer from higher poverty levels than elsewhere in the region. Access to health care is diminishing rapidly, for the poor and also for the middle class. Some lands nearby are seriously damaged by toxic wastes, and forests and other lands have been dramatically altered in past years.

By cultivating alertness to our own surroundings we at Gonzaga University will better appreciate the work of other Jesuit ministries in the developing world. And, GU is an American Jesuit school, teaching in what the Russians today sometimes call the “hyperpower”. America, more than ever, needs to hear from and dialogue with societies much weaker and less wealthy than itself.

Wealth, power, and privilege are most often, by themselves, quite poor guardians of justice. Gonzaga University literally needs this wider network of Jesuit colleges and institutes. Our full education is at stake and our companions in these other Jesuit apostolates can give us a balance.

To move the aims of the conference (“perspectives from the developing world”) forward we should set up one or two regularly used connections with at least one other Jesuit university or institute. We should ask, a year or so along, one other apostolate to assess our work and perhaps to themselves join it. That is, we should create and sustain, within the worldwide Jesuit network, a few particular working relationships.

Relationships should be specific to departments and programs, involving, at first, discrete individuals and groups. There should be personal responsibility and opportunity to make such ties function. Students should be involved. There are international studies programs at our universities. These could be natural homes such connections. But we should not readily send such opportunities to only one or two established services. If, two or so years from now, our business, education, and law faculties, our religious studies, history and nursing faculty and students are not, at least some of them, engaged in these working relationships, then we have failed.

One group I was in talked of shared research projects, with students and faculty at several locales, collaborating. Above all that is the message of this Santa Clara University conference on justice and globalization: collaboration. We have enormous, wonderful opportunities in this network of Jesuit institutions, found the world over.

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