



Globalization and Christian Love

The Concept of Solidarity Runs Counter to Many of the Economic Values Dominant Today

As is so often said in political circles, “Where I *stand* on an issue depends on where I *sit*.” To that I would add, “And *with whom* I sit.” I sit in Zambia with Zambians—people of one of the richest countries in Africa (in terms of resources and peace) but among the poorest people in the world (in terms of life expectancy, literacy, and health). Zambia is a marginalized country on the marginalized continent of Africa; and sitting here shapes my perspective on globalization.

I feel the impact of globalization because I am in direct contact with the problems faced by Zambia. Questions of global justice that deal with debt, trade, famine, and aid have an enormous impact on the lives of the poor who surround me. Their cries are loud and clear in their hunger, inadequate education, lack of health care, and the destruction of their environment. I understand what belonging to a marginalized society means in terms of opportunities and aspirations. I see the faces of the people whom the mad



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rush of globalization charges by without a second thought or care.

From this highly personal perspective, I am extremely critical of the process of globalization as it currently moves forward in a way that is disadvantageous to the people in my world. I speak of disadvantages from experience, not from theoretical models. To speak too easily of the “advantages” of globalization can obscure two interrelated questions: (1) of what substance are these “advantages”? Food for the hungry or internet connectivity? And (2) who will receive these “advantages”? People of the first world, who already enjoy advantages, or the rest of the planet—the majority of the world’s population?

The *economic framework* of globalization is based on a neoliberal model that puts priority on a profit-oriented ethic, not a people-oriented ethic. We have experienced this directly in Zambia since the early 1990s with an economic reform program that has embraced “free-market” liberalism without social concern. As a result, the livelihood of the majority of people has plummeted. For example, the introduction of fees for education and health care has resulted in a decline in educated and healthy people; privatization of industry has led to a dramatic loss of employment opportunities. Marginalization of the Zambian people has increased as their quality of life has decreased.

The *political framework* of globalization is unipolar, with major decisions made by governments in the First World and the international financial institutions they control. In Zambia, sovereign decision-making powers have been subjected to policies imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (e.g., dictated budget priorities, a situation that has had a negative impact on issues such as hiring new teachers). This political influence is more often guided by ideology than wisdom. The Zambian people experience marginalization as a loss of voices that should be heard and counted.

The *cultural framework* of globalization is Westernization, or, more accurately, Americanization. This trend is marked by individualism (self-interest) and consumerism (self-indulgence). Zambians have experienced this under the influence of foreign media that ridicules African values of community, sharing, fidelity, respect, family, and religion. The African way of life—shared particularly by the poor—is marginalized as antimodern (i.e., non-Western).

To be involved in the struggles of the marginalized in an era of globalization requires resources of spirit and spirituality—specifically, a spirituality of solidarity. The challenges of globalization have made me think in a new way about my commitment to a faith and justice mission and to my religious life rooted in the concept of solidarity—a concept central to the church's social teaching.

UNDERSTANDING SOLIDARITY

Solidarity means, especially in the writings of Pope John Paul II, awareness and caring, actions and programs. Solidarity transcends simple community and interdependence, going beyond the interconnectedness of people that is primarily *empirical* to a relatedness that is primarily *ethical*. It is a contemporary expression of commitment to the common good. It is a response to the recognition that true development is not only of the whole person but also of the whole person *within the whole community*. This is a vision that contains the social values grounded in the fundamental dignity of the human person. In a provocative theological insight, Pope John Paul II described the model of true solidarity as the interior life—the “economy” of the Holy Trinity—persons in loving, life-giving exchanges.¹

This solidarity of globalization would mean, in the words of the United Nations Development Program *Human Development Report of 1999*, a globalization focusing on:

- **Ethics:** fewer violations of human rights
- **Equity:** less disparity within and between nations

- **Inclusion:** less marginalization
- **Human security:** less instability of societies and less vulnerability of people
- **Sustainability:** less environmental destruction
- **Development:** less poverty and deprivation²

This list echoes the best of the norms and principles found in the body of the church's social teaching. It is an expression of what Pope Paul VI defined as “true development”: the movement from less-human conditions to more-human conditions.³ For the follower of one who proclaimed, “I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10), this list is an outline of a spirituality of solidarity.

But how can we put that solidarity into the global structures, organizations, and activities that affect the lives of people around the world? “Make Poverty History,” a British-based campaign that urges Western nations to aid less-developed countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, identifies three clear areas of focus:

- Debt relief with mechanisms of transparency and accountability
- Changes in trade practices by the World Trade Organization and promotion of “fair trade” products
- Substantial increase in aid (grants, not loans) to the threshold of 0.7 percent of the gross domestic product of First World countries

Is it important—or even possible—to consider the eradication of poverty a primary goal in this era of globalization? We must first distinguish poverty *alleviation* (providing social welfare) and poverty *reduction* (lowering the numbers) from poverty *eradication* (eliminating it).

Poverty eradication is the goal, the vision, and the future that we must commit ourselves to. The line from Scripture that says “the poor are always with us” (Jn 12:8) is usually misinterpreted. Poverty is not the norm or natural; it is a condition of impoverishment and a consequence of the way we structure society. And it will continue to grow if societal changes are not made in this era of globalization.

SUMMARY

Globalization is having a very negative impact on the world's poorest people. Decisions made in the First World—decisions often based on a profit-oriented ethic—are degrading the quality of life of people in the Third World and taking away their voice. The church is called to act in solidarity to respond to people in need worldwide. It must take a radical stance to promote love, justice, development, and peace.

Acting in solidarity with others expresses a commitment to the common good and recognizes that all people are interconnected—that “our” well-being depends on the well-being of others. It acknowledges that people exist within a community. The concept of solidarity—with its emphasis on relationships among people—runs counter to many of the structures that drive globalization.

People of the church must undertake a personal assessment, examining their thoughts and feelings about acting in solidarity with people in need. Through change and personal action, these individuals can promote justice around the world.

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Solidarity is a counter-emphasis to the structures that drive globalization today. This emphasis is summed up by John Paul II in his World Day for Peace message from 1998, when he called for a “globalization in solidarity, a globalization without marginalization.”⁴ Solidarity also is expressed in this beautiful African proverb: “I am because we are; we are because I am.” Our personal existence, identities, and worth exist only within community; and the order, function, and beauty of community are only possible with our individual contributions.

As against a selfish sexuality that is frequently exploitative of women, we need the witness of generous love that is truly life-giving in a non-exclusionary way. As against a demand for individualistic control over one’s destiny that is frequently dominative of others, we need the witness of cooperation for the common good with a willing contribution of talent and time to something larger than ourselves. As against neglecting the fact that we belong to the community of creation as well as the community of humanity, we need the witness of a lifestyle of sharing, caring, and sparing (generous, protective, and simple). In light of globalization today, we must ask ourselves if we really do live out an apostolic dimension that contributes to building the society we know is so necessary.

Some elements of the spirituality of solidarity include a “seven-step” program of personal examination:

- **Placing/sitting:** Asking where am I? With whom am I?
- **Looking/seeing:** Overcoming blindness induced around us
- **Probing/pushing:** Analyzing below the surface, seeking the root causes of social conditions
- **Feeling/moving:** Turning compassion to passion, discerning what is in yourself
- **Responding/acting:** Taking planned and intelligent steps toward action
- **Daring/risking:** Overcoming fear by using our rich resources
- **Hoping/trusting:** Persevering despite lack of progress

What is needed today is a radical stance, one that is out of the ordinary and unexpected and that calls us all to recapture some of the boldness of imagination and initiative of the church’s early fathers.

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

What do *eros* and *agape* have to do with work for social justice in this era of globalization? That is the question that came to mind when I began to read Pope Benedict XVI’s first encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est*.⁵ Although some might describe it as a philosophical discourse about love without much reference to global struggles, the letter in fact makes a contribution to a world in which justice, development, and peace are central to the Catholic Church.

Pope Benedict makes several points regarding charity and justice that can be applied to a discussion of globalization. He states that the church’s actions are “an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of women and men,”⁶ promoting human beings in all areas of life and attending to human suffering and material needs. The church’s promotion of love is perfectly in line with the works of justice, development, and peace that play such a central role in the mission of the church in Zambia and throughout the global community.

If one takes the pope’s thoughts of charity to their broadest meaning, it can be assumed that social activism is an essential part of the mission of the Catholic Church. Charity that focuses only on alleviating suffering without trying to end it is only *partial love* at best.

Pope Benedict is careful to say that political action as a “direct duty” of working toward a just society should reside properly in the lay community.⁷ Church leaders, on the other hand, through the “indirect duty” of rational argument and moral sensitization, can promote just social structures. The church is responsible for promoting rational argument, or as the pope refers to it, “the purification of reason.” He argues that, absent a reawakening of moral forces, “just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run.” Pope Benedict seems to be emphasizing the power of the church’s social teaching: pastoral letters; statements from diocesan justice and peace commissions; and formation programs for the laity, religious, and clergy have all brought Catholic social teaching into the world of politics and policy.

One major spiritual theme that emerges from this encyclical is that of *solidarity*. Solidarity is a basic mark of true charity and a key element in the “struggle for justice and love in the world today.” Benedict considers solidarity when he

discusses the consequences of increasing globalization of communication and means of assistance. In other words, we are now able to comprehend the enormous needs around the world, and we have the ability to respond to those needs. Solidarity is a profound, moral sense that emphasizes that our well-being depends on the well-being of others. No matter how materially prosperous some elements of global society are, we are all spiritually and morally poor when we live in a world of great disparity.

Pope John Paul II was certainly fond of the concept of solidarity, but it was Pope Paul VI who had earlier defined its message in *On the Development of Peoples*. "There is," he wrote, "no progress toward the complete development of women and men without the simultaneous development of all humanity in the spirit of solidarity."⁸ Pope Benedict seems to speak to this situation when he emphasizes the church as the normative community described in Acts 2:44-45: "Within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life."⁹ Poverty cannot be eradicated by charity alone; it requires the consequence of charity—the promotion of justice that changes the structures of society.

Padre Alberto Hurtado, a Jesuit social activist in Chile in the early years of the 20th century, was canonized a few months before the release of this encyclical. He is reported to have said, "Marx said that religion was the [opium] of the people. But I also know that charity can be the opium of the rich." A charity without justice and a commitment to change can indeed be such a drug. But *Deus Caritas Est* provides a beautiful description of charity that is not an opiate—Pope Benedict's invitation to charity is never far from the mandate for justice. ■

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NOTES

1. Pope John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 1986, para. 7, available at www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_18051986_dominum-et-vivificantem_en.
2. United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 1999*, New York City, 1999, p. 2, available at http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/1999/en/pdf/hdr_1999_full.pdf.
3. Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 1967, available at www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_nc_26031967_populorum_en.html.
4. Pope John Paul II, "From the Justice of Each Comes Peace for all," January 1, 1998, para. 3, available at www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_08121997_xxi-world-day-for-peace_en.html.
5. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 2005, available at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html.
6. Pope Benedict XVI, para. 19.
7. Pope Benedict XVI, para. 29.
8. Pope Paul VI, para. 86.
9. Pope Benedict, para. 20.