



## **Globalization: Christian Challenges**

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**Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology**

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# Globalization: Christian Challenges

## Abstract:

Ever since Marshall McLuhan coined the term “global village” the world has been fascinated by its meaning and relevance to human interaction worldwide. Has the shrinking of boundaries through advances in technology from country to country, nation to nation, continent to continent bolstered and strengthened cooperation and collaboration among human beings? Or, are human beings becoming more and more isolated caring more for their electronic gadgets than for their flesh and blood friends and neighbors? Actually, both may be true. The concept of the global village while inviting us to embrace the world in charity may constrict and limit our contact with “the other.”

What role does the “ordinary” Christian have to play in this drama labeled “globalization”? What will be the Christian response to the gulf between the rich and the poor worldwide? These and many other questions, especially those involving the Church, contributed to the discussion at this weekend conference.

Five essayists covered the areas the ITEST Board considered relevant to the subject of globalization: science, politics, economics, culture, philosophy, and theology respectively. Six edited discussion sessions followed.

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## Foreword:

On September 26-28, 2003 people from diverse backgrounds and levels of education attended the weekend Workshop on *Globalization: Christian Challenges* at Our Lady of the Snows Conference Center near Belleville, Illinois.

How does the current 21st century drive for increasingly rapid globalization challenge our Christian values? What are aspects of the contemporary scene that propel this global march toward political, legal, cultural, scientific and perhaps even religious response to essentially One-World positions and policies. What will be the Christian response to the gulf between the rich and the poor worldwide? How will we act with respect to youth, to the sovereignty of the state, the growth of the world economy, religious adherence (and the related religious fundamentalism) and a dizzying multiplication of other factors? The underlying consideration in all discussions was the Christian challenge of globalization. These as well as other questions formed the basis for discussion over the weekend. This Workshop, *Globalization: Christian Challenges*, was sponsored by the St Louis-based

What is the role of Christianity in globalization? Fr. Robert Brungs, SJ, director of ITEST, quipped, “It [Christianity’s thrust for the global] started when the Holy Spirit drove the apostles out of the upper room on Pentecost Sunday and sent them down into the streets. Literally! It was part and parcel of the missionary thrust of the early Church.” That is the beginning of the Church’s involvement in globalization. Since Pentecost, Christianity has been a global religion. He continued, “The Church moved out into the community and within ten years or so, the disciples were bringing pagans into the faith. That’s a relatively short time.” The Apostles went out to all nations, immersing themselves in the local culture while spreading the universal message of love.

Five essayists presented their views on globalization according to their specialties.

Dr. Robert Collier, head of the Animal Sciences Department at the University of Arizona, stressed that science, while recognizing its limitations, has much to offer in the effort to alleviate hunger around the world. “... the globalization of agricultural research capabilities (among them genetically modified organisms) offers the world a unique opportunity to reduce poverty and improve living standards.” Collier, also recounted a history of advances in science, noting that with the discovery of the structure of DNA, scientists learned that the movement of genes from one species to another was not just possible but a reality. He concluded that “Transgenesis ... will continue to have its biggest impact in agriculture where it already is responsible for dramatic increases in food production.”

He noted that the Church as early as the Middle Ages played a large part in the early development of the scientific method. Yet today, because of the rapidity of scientific and technological advance, the Church cannot react quickly enough to give sound moral advice to those who are looking for guidance.

Collier noted that one technological issue, however, which the Church has begun to probe is genetically modified food. Pope John Paul II, in his exhortations, called for discussion among scientists and other professionals on genetically modified food, for example, noting that while some are adamantly opposed to the process, others approach it with a receptive mind. The Pope cautioned that whatever the outcome of genetic modification, the benefit should accrue to those in need.

Dr. Edward O’Boyle, an economist from the Mayo Research Institute, West Monroe, Louisiana, speaking of norms for evaluating economic globalization, approached his topic from the personalist viewpoint. He emphasized the difference between the “individual” as one who is self centered and the “person” as one who is other centered.

Making the connection to Christianity he paraphrased Pope John Paul II, who explained that the person “for others” is closer to the Divine than the individual “for himself.” Traditional Christians viewing economics then, seek to share the abundance or even what little they have with others while respecting the human dignity of each person they serve. He concluded that free markets with appropriate and equitable norms would assist in establishing that respect for human dignity on every level.

Dr. O’Boyle, with his paper and with his interventions in the discussion, presented an “introduction” to the vast problems of economic growth and to some of the problems, like dislocation of jobs or debt forgiveness, that globalization produces. In some respects, this was Economics 101 on a sophisticated level. In so doing he gave a very good overview of many of the challenges facing the Church in the rapid growth of efforts to globalize both the economy and, indeed, all aspects of life.

Dr. Jean-Robert Leguey-Feilleux examined the political considerations of globalization reminding the participants that globalization is a multifaceted phenomenon which may even become an ideology with both dedicated supporters and ardent opponents. He stressed the importance of the role of the United Nations in the

furthering of cooperation among nations. Although he acknowledged weaknesses in the UN he also applauded the work they accomplish in agencies that are an integral part of their structure and operate under the UN budget, such as the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Program (WFP) the International Trade Center (ITC) and the Joint UN Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), among others.

He cautioned, however, that nationalism and the nation state will probably not wither away with the advent of globalization; yet he conceded that the "nation state has useful functions to perform." He noted that the number of states has radically increased during the years after World War II and can be expected to continue to grow. But the Christian challenge lies, he said, in addressing the need for a greater sense of responsibility for the global common good. This effort, he said aligns itself well with the Church's vision of a universal order.

Fr. Stephen Rowntree, SJ, both in his essay and in the discussion, accented the place of religious, social and economic pluralism in the development of globalization. He brought a unique perspective to the discussion, namely, the years he spent in Zimbabwe as a member of the formation team preparing young men to become Jesuits. Noting that modernization or globalization poses major challenges to all religions, Rowntree chose three religious responses to the perils and possibilities of the phenomenon: 1) Fundamentalist movements which actively oppose modernization, 2) conversation or dialogue both within the denomination and outside the denomination, commonly referred to as "interreligious dialogue" and 3) consensus when that is possible, facilitating a process for a global ethic.

During the discussion following the essayists' presentations, Rowntree shared stories of the struggles of the people of Harare, Zimbabwe striving to become partners of other countries in the world in the areas of trade, manufacturing and agriculture. He urged Americans either to reach out to developing countries in their search to survive, grow and prosper in the world market or to suffer the consequences of non-involvement -- eventual isolation.

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, the fifth essayist, focused on the role of young people in the globalization process. He defined and, indeed, created the phrase "emerging adulthood" as a period extending from the late teens to the mid-twenties and characterized by self-focused exploration of possibilities in love, work and worldviews. As a consequence, instability is also a part of this emerging adulthood. Further, Dr. Arnett concentrated on the psychological consequences of globalization highlighting identity issues. Specifically, he noted, some claim that many people worldwide now develop a "bicultural identity" that combines their local identity with an identity linked to the global culture; yet, "identity confusion" may be increasing among young people in non-Western cultures as a result of globalization and further, that some people join "self-selected" cultures in order to maintain an identity that is separate from the global culture. Arnett challenged the Catholic participants to extend themselves to members of other religious denominations thus countering the "bad press" sometimes pervading the reporting of Catholic positions on various global issues.

In the discussion Dr. Arnett stated a challenge to Catholics first, and then to all Christians at the Workshop. He mentioned that to a non-Catholic the Church seemed to be extremely negative with respect to the development of science. While there was hardly any time to enter the discussion of this "challenge," a few did point out that the problem was not between Catholic faith and science but between that faith and applied science or "engineering." Nonetheless, it is a real challenge that must be met by groups like ITEST who are trying to bridge the gap between "faith" and "science." We cannot allow this attitude to become more ingrained. If it does we have lost the ideological struggle.

The input from the young college students and young adults present led the older participants to a deeper understanding of what the young seek in searching for a truly human and Christian identity. For that we are distinctively grateful. Too much was said to allow for any kind of a summary beyond what was already said. But in closing, we want to thank both the essayists and all the participants for their patience and their gracious responses. All waited patiently to be recognized and all showed real charity in their interventions.

Finally, we want again to thank the administration at Saint Louis University and the Directors of the Our Sunday Visitor Institute for the support they showed us. Their generosity made this meeting possible.

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