



## Globalization and the environment

The question of globalization's impact on the natural environment is complex. To the extent that it increases wealth and facilitates a more rapid diffusion of technology around the globe, it can allow for more resources to be used in safeguarding the natural environment. As against this, globalization has negative impacts when it encourages over-exploitation of the earth's resources or when it prompts transnational corporations to shift production to areas of the globe where environmental protection laws are weakest, thereby evading their responsibility to develop and use environmentally appropriate technologies.

Pope Benedict states that the most fundamental truth about the natural environment is that it "is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole" (CT 48). But in order to protect environmental ecology, we must first protect what he calls "human ecology". He says that the decisive issue in regard to environmental stewardship is "the overall moral tenor of society", adding: "If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology" (CT 51).

Some environmental groups view economic growth as necessarily evil and population growth as disastrous. Indeed, some expressions of environmentalism have acquired quasi-religious status. Warning against this, Pope Benedict says: "[I]t is contrary to authentic development to view nature as something more important than the human person. This position leads to attitudes of neo-paganism or a new pantheism [belief that everything is God]..." (CT 48). It is also necessary, he adds, "to reject the opposite position, which aims at total technical dominion over nature, because the natural environment is more than raw material to be manipulated at our pleasure; it is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a

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'grammar' which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation" (CT 48).

### Drawing up the balance

Looking at the phenomenon of globalization as a whole, we might be inclined to ask: is it good or bad? As has been made clear, it has both positive and negative aspects. Speaking of the process of globalization, Pope Benedict writes: "Originating within economically developed countries, this process by its nature has spread to include all economies. It has been the principal driving force behind the emergence from underdevelopment of whole regions, and in itself it represents a great opportunity. Nevertheless, without the guidance of charity in truth, this global force could cause unprecedented damage and create new divisions within the human family" (CT 33).

The globalization process is in some way a reflection of the fact that human beings are called to live in family and to enter into relationships with each other. This in turn reflects the fact that man is made in the image and likeness of God, who is a Trinity, a communion, of persons. In this sense, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that "there is a certain resemblance between the union of the divine persons and the fraternity that men are to establish among themselves in truth and love" (CCC 1878).

Seen in this light, globalization's capacity to multiply opportunities for interpersonal relationships of mutual benefit among people of diverse backgrounds is a great good. It simply reflects man's creation in the image of God. Always, the Trinity should be the reference point, and so Pope Benedict writes that "relationships between human beings throughout history cannot but be enriched by reference to this divine model." He goes on to say that "in the light of the revealed mystery of the Trinity, we understand that true openness does not mean loss of individual identity but profound interpenetration" (CT 54). Looking at it from this supernatural perspective, Catholics should be open to all that is good in globalization, while working to overcome what is negative in it.

Quoting Pope John Paul II's address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on 27 April 2001, Pope Benedict writes that "globalization, *a priori*, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it (CT 42)." He goes on to issue a challenge: "We should not be its victims, but rather its protagonists, acting in the light of reason, guided by charity and truth. Blind opposition would be a mistaken and prejudiced attitude, incapable of recognising the positive aspects of the process, with the consequent

risk of missing the chance to take advantage of its many opportunities for development.

"The processes of globalization, suitably understood and directed, open up the unprecedented possibility of large-scale redistribution of wealth on a world-wide scale; if badly directed, however, they can lead to an increase in poverty and inequality, and could even trigger a global crisis. It is necessary to *correct the malfunctions*, some of them serious, that cause new divisions between peoples and within peoples, and also to ensure that the redistribution of wealth does not come about through the redistribution or increase of poverty: a real danger if the present situation were to be badly managed" (CT 42).

What is needed, the Pope says, is "a process of discernment. The truth of globalization as a process and its fundamental ethical criterion are given by the unity of the human family and its development towards what is good. Hence a sustained commitment is needed so as to *promote a person-based and community-oriented cultural process of world-wide integration that is open to transcendence*" (CT 42).

### About the Author

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### Questions for discussion

1. What strikes you most about the phenomenon of globalization?
2. What are some ways in which you have benefited personally from globalization?
3. What do you consider to be some of the worst aspects of globalization?
4. Do you think that globalization is a process that simply happens on its own, or can it be controlled by governments, firms and even individuals?



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# INFORM

faith & life matters

# Understanding Globalization

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Globalization is a reality in the world today. But what exactly is it and how are we to evaluate and respond to it? **Eamonn Keane** answers these and many other questions.

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**"The principle of solidarity means that human beings are by nature called to be actively concerned for each other's wellbeing".**

## What is globalization?

The term globalization refers to the intensification of economic, social, legal and cultural relations between countries. It is characterised by the greater ease with which money, investment, goods, technology, information and people now move across national boundaries.

This has been made possible by new technologies in communications and transportation, as well as by the adoption of trade liberalisation policies by many countries. As a result the world, in a sense, has become smaller and people feel themselves part of the globe as well as part of the country where they live.

The impact of globalization is enormous. In the economic sphere, it can increase standards of living by making a wider range of goods available at lower prices. At the same time, it can mean the loss of a job when an employer decides to outsource production overseas. In poorer countries, it can mean increased job opportunities when foreign firms invest in those countries or buy their produce. Equally it can mean widespread social upheaval when foreign firms suddenly close down their facilities in order to pursue a greater profit elsewhere.

In the cultural sphere, films, books, newspapers and television programs are available all over the world almost simultaneously. People in other countries can be informed immediately of a catastrophic earthquake in Haiti, and a concert organised to help the victims of the earthquake can be seen live anywhere in the world, with people able to donate to the cause in their own country. Global media giants impact significantly on the development of moral perceptions and they can tend to foster global convergence in tastes and preferences for goods and services. In the area of cinema, for example, the top ratings in New York may not be dissimilar to those in Mumbai, and fashions can quickly become international.

In the area of education, the theme of globalization figures prominently in various subjects taught in Australian schools. Students are able to study and become acquainted easily with life in other countries. And with increasing mobility of students travelling to other countries for tertiary study, Australian universities and colleges have sought to change their mode of delivery and the range of courses offered in order to attract students from overseas, and some have even established campuses in other countries.

Similar things could be said about practically every aspect of life. Truly, we live in a global society.

## Economic globalization and the poor

One of the more obvious aspects of globalization is the economic, which involves greater integration of the countries of the world into a market-based economic framework. Markets are driven by the forces of demand and supply and are linked to rights associated with private ownership of property, including freedom of enterprise. In this setting, the pursuit of profit is regarded as a good motivating force in bringing about an efficient allocation of resources. Free trade between nations is integral to this economic philosophy.

Arguments supporting free trade include expanded consumer choice, lower prices, more efficient use of resources and increased international competitiveness. The historical record shows that countries open to international trade tend to achieve higher rates of economic growth than countries that are not.

However, many economists believe that the present rules governing international trade need to address more effectively the economic needs of poorer countries. In his 2002 book *Globalization and its Discontents*, Joseph Stiglitz, winner of the 2001 Nobel Prize in Economics and currently a member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, criticises the policies of international financial institutions for not responding adequately to the needs of poorer nations. He is particularly critical of policy requirements imposed by the International Monetary Fund on Indonesia in the late 1990s that placed a severe burden on the poor in that country. Stiglitz argues that different and better targeted interventions by the Indonesian government would have been more effective in stabilising the economy.

Referring to benefits that can accrue to developing nations from involvement in global trade, Pope Benedict XVI in his 2009 encyclical *Charity in Truth* (CT) writes that "in the economic sphere, the principal form of assistance needed by developing countries is that of allowing and encouraging the gradual penetration of their products into international markets, thus making it possible for these countries to participate fully in international economic life" (CT 58).

At the same time, he cautions against too hasty an embrace of globalizing processes. After noting how the global market has stimulated on the part of rich countries "a search for areas to outsource production at low cost" so as to enable consumers in developed countries to

acquire lower priced goods, he adds: "These processes have led to a *downsizing of social security systems* as the price to be paid for seeking greater competitive advantage in the global market, with consequent grave danger for the rights of workers, for fundamental human rights and for the solidarity associated with the traditional forms of the social State" (CT 25).

One of the consequences of this search for competitiveness is the 'sweatshop' working conditions in some newly industrialising countries. In seeking to maximise profits by outsourcing production to countries where labour costs are minimal, global businesses sometimes enter into agreements with local subcontractors that show little concern for the just entitlements of workers.

In the early 2000s, for example, a well-known sports shoe manufacturer's products were being produced in deplorable working conditions in several countries of Southeast Asia. Workers were paid a pittance for working in appalling conditions for long stretches at a time. In response to the negative publicity it received, the company argued that it was not able to control the working conditions provided by its subcontractors. Fortunately, the widespread perception that the firm was a human rights abuser induced it to place pressure on its subcontractors to improve conditions of employment for their workers.

Workers should never be treated as mere factors of production. They have a right to a just wage, to safe working conditions and to form trade unions. In some countries, independent trade unions are not allowed and frequently workers' protests



against their poor working conditions are violently suppressed.

In general, globalization processes need to be managed so as to ensure that they generate what is known as "decent work". By this term is meant work that is reflective of the dignity of the person performing it, that is freely chosen, free from any unjust discrimination, with wages adequate to support the worker and their family, etc. (cf. CT 63). The International Labour Organization seeks

to foster dialogue and cooperation between governments, employers and workers with a view to promoting decent work throughout the world. Pope Benedict XVI recalls how on 1 May 2000, Pope John Paul II "issued an appeal for 'a global coalition in favour of 'decent work'', supporting the strategy of the International Labour Organization" (CT 63).

## Globalization and ethics

Pope Benedict XVI warns of the harmful effect on society of understanding the social order as something determined only by market forces and government regulations: "The exclusively binary model of market-plus-State is corrosive of society" (CT

39). This corrosive impact is greater when market outcomes and government policies are understood as impersonal forces unrelated to individual moral decisions. Such a mentality weakens bonds of charity and solidarity between individuals and groups.

This points to the close connection that exists between achieving positive outcomes from globalizing processes and the ethics that underpin economic activity. Pope Benedict XVI states that economic life "is part and parcel of human activity and precisely because it is human, it must be structured and governed in an ethical manner" (CT 36). This truth becomes all too obvious when we recall that the 2008-09 global financial crisis was partially caused by thousands of housing loan applicants in the U.S. lying on their application forms and by "reckless behavior, unchecked excess, and an appetite for quick kills and bloated bonuses," as President Obama described it in a speech marking the first anniversary of the collapse of financial services giant Lehman Brothers.

While recognising the usefulness of markets in achieving desirable economic outcomes, Pope Benedict notes that "the market can be a negative force, not because it is so by nature, but because a certain ideology can make it so" (CT 36). "In and of itself," he says, "the market is not, and must not become the place where the strong subdue the weak" (CT 36). He adds that in evaluating market outcomes, it is necessary to understand them as something expressive of choices made by individuals: "it is not the instrument [the market] that must be called to account, but individuals" (CT 36).

In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that many economic and social problems cannot be solved on the technical level alone. They need the involvement of people who reverence truth and are inspired by a sense of charity. Pope Benedict XVI says: "The individual who is animated by true charity labours skillfully to discover the causes of misery, to find the means to combat it, to overcome it resolutely" (CT 30).

When governments and large businesses provide adequate scope for individual and group action inspired by truth and charity in the resolution of economic and social problems, the principle of "subsidiarity" is thereby respected. This principle affirms that individuals or smaller entities closest to a problem should not be crowded out in their attempts to resolve it by more remote and powerful government or business authorities. Pope Benedict refers to this principle as "a particular manifestation of charity and a guiding criterion for fraternal cooperation between believers and non-believers," something which he adds is "an expression of inalienable human freedom" (CT 57).

A failure to respect the principle of subsidiarity undermines that of solidarity as well. The principle of solidarity means that human beings are by nature called to be actively concerned for each other's wellbeing. Both principles imply that decisions taken in the head office of large businesses in say New York or Sydney must pay due regard to the impact such decisions will have on all their stakeholders. It would show a lack of ethical maturity for such businesses to pursue a line of action simply on the basis that it generates maximum profit and dividend return to a relatively small group of already wealthy shareholders, while simultaneously undermining the livelihoods of thousands of poor people in far-flung regions of the world.

## Cultural Globalization

A perceived benefit of globalization is that it fosters democratic aspirations and a desire for greater personal freedom. This is conducive to long-term economic and social development, provided the notion of freedom involved is understood as something related not only to individual rights, but also to duties and to the recognition of moral absolutes such as the prohibition of pornography, abortion, euthanasia, etc.

The danger here is that the cultures that dominate globalization, usually in the more wealthy countries, can spread not only the good elements but also the harmful ones all over the world in a short time. It must never be forgotten that such media as television, cinema and the internet have a powerful influence in determining how their users think and live.

This can of course be a good thing in spreading the acceptance of good moral values, the truths of the faith, and healthy lifestyles. But equally, and perhaps more commonly, globalization can lead to the spread of ideas and lifestyles contrary to the true good of man. For example, the various media often present the attainment of wealth, pleasure and technical efficiency as the most important goods to be sought.

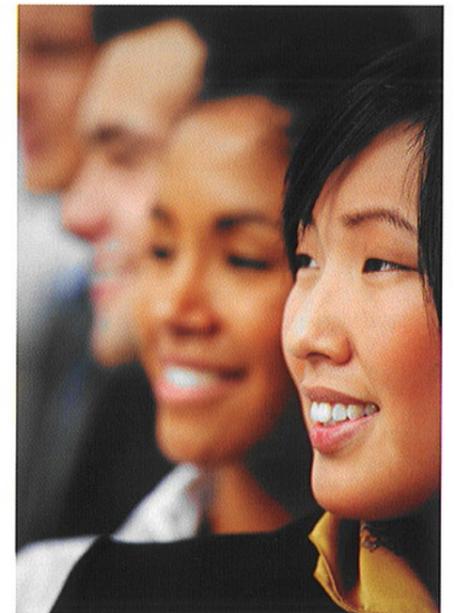
Always, globalization must respect the true values inherent in every culture. Pope Benedict mentions how years ago "cultures were relatively well defined and had greater opportunity to defend themselves against attempts to merge them into one. Today the possibilities of *interaction between cultures* have increased significantly, giving rise to new openings for intercultural dialogue: a dialogue that, if it is to be effective, has to set out from a deep-seated knowledge of the specific identity of the various dialogue partners" (CT 26).

The Pope identifies two dangers in the increased commercialization of cultural exchange. First there is what he calls "cultural eclecticism", where cultures are simply placed alongside one another and viewed as substantially equivalent and interchangeable. Secondly, there is the opposite danger of "cultural leveling" and indiscriminate acceptance of types of conduct and life-styles.

"In this way one loses sight of the profound significance of the culture of different nations, of the traditions of the various peoples, by which the individual defines himself in relation to life's fundamental questions" (CT 26).

International tourism is another important aspect of cultural globalization. It too has both positive and negative aspects. On one hand it can lead to a greater knowledge and appreciation of the different cultures of the world, and it can help to redistribute wealth to poorer countries that depend on tourism as an important part of their economy.

But it can have negative effects too. Pope Benedict mentions in particular "sex tourism", where even young people are sacrificed to the desires of tourists, often with the support of local governments. He also singles out tourism "which follows a consumerist and hedonistic pattern, as a form of escapism planned in a manner typical of the countries of origin, and therefore not conducive to authentic encounter between persons and cultures" (CT 61).



**We all have a part to play in trying to make globalization more conducive to human flourishing. Things we might consider doing are:**

-  Read more about globalization
-  Pray and share our faith with others
-  Join a political party or other group so as to influence the development of sound economic and social policies
-  Try to direct a greater proportion of our income to worthwhile causes, including support for people in poor countries
-  Befriend migrants and refugees and try to learn about their culture
-  Support organisations and politicians who defend the right to life and who support the family based on marriage between one man and one woman as the most vital cell of society.

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