

GLOBALIZATION'S SECOND DECADE



ROBERT SCHREITER

*This is an excerpt from **Major Currents of Our Times: What They Mean for the Church**, an address by Precious Blood Father Robert Schreiter to participants in the general chapter of the Dominican order, held July 10-August 8, 2001 at Providence College in Providence, RI. Father Schreiter is a professor of doctrinal theology at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. His address appeared in *Origins*, August 16, 2001.*

The concept *globalization* has become shorthand for describing the world order which has been emerging since the end of the political alignment of the cold War in 1989 and the gradual emergence of new relationships in the world. Globalization is marked by the interconnection of four features of that world: 1) advances in communications technologies; 2) the dominance of neoliberal capitalism; 3) a new alignment in the political order, still finding itself and as yet far from certain; and 4) dramatic sociocultural changes attendant upon the changes in communications, economics and politics.

It must be said immediately that although all four of these features point to a more interconnected and interdependent world, they are also sharpening and widening the chasm between those included in this new world order and those excluded from it. The majority of the world's population finds itself on the excluded side of the divide. As the church and for you as an order within the church, a sense of justice demands that this divide be addressed and indeed denounced in the name of the dignity and well-being of humankind. How we will go about addressing and engaging this divide requires an analysis which does not simply repeat the nostrums of the past, but reads the situation in such a way that action might be taken.

The concern here is not to go into a lengthy description of globalization. Such descriptions are now available in abundance. What I would like to do is simply note some salient elements in the communications, economics, politics and sociocultural ramifications of globalization and then move quickly

to what might be the contours of globalization which will need to be addressed now that this period of globalization is in its second decade. For this is not the first time patterns of globalization have presented themselves in our world. (Most scholars would say that the most recent one previously was from roughly 1870-1914.) Despite the immensity and complexity of globalization currently, it is not inevitable and can come to a halt as peoples and nations might suddenly decide to build walls around themselves.

The purpose of this presentation, then, in this first part, is to set the stage for what we, as agents of the Gospel, might be doing within this larger picture.

Globalization is based on connectedness and the speed with which that connectedness can be utilized. As one observer has put it recently, it is the close connection between distant parts of the world. Scholars of the previous history of globalization point to advances in transportation (the large sailing ship, the steam engine) and communication (telegraph and the telephone) as the technologies which drove globalization in the past. For the current phase of globalization, it is certainly the electronic technologies which made the new networking of the world possible.

Two things need to be noted here about these technologies. First of all, a significant proportion of the world is excluded from them, although that number of persons continues to shrink. It has been estimated that as much as 42 percent of the world's population has never used a telephone, the basis of Internet technology, simply because these are not available. While that number continues to go down, thanks to cellular

telephone technology and the next generation of computers, it will take a long time to sink further. Exclusion at this fundamental level means that the gap between rich and poor will continue to stalk the well-being and the unity of humankind.

Second, the communications technologies have democratized the flow of information. That means, on the one hand, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep information from people (with all the political and social consequences thereof), but also that people at the grass-roots level can organize public opinion against powerful political and transnational combines. As is now well known, the international treaty against antipersonnel land mines was organized on the Internet. And similar organizational efforts have forced transnational companies to become more responsible ecologically. The potential for organizing mass public opinion is a powerful resource for social change in the future.

The economic features of globalization are perhaps the most prominent. They rely on the information technologies but wield a powerful influence on the rich and poor of the world alike. The relatively unbridled capitalism of the 1990's is likely to be tethered somewhat in the coming decade as it becomes clearer that the short-term profit margin can completely undermine the entire system. There is a likelihood that more measures of self-policing and other forms of regulation will emerge. These will probably not grow out of a larger vision of humanity but out of more utilitarian reasons and rational choice.

The political realignments coming with globalization still remain uncertain. The nation-state's influence will continue to be reduced, but not to a point of zero. There are important services which cannot be delivered and maintained on an international basis but must be delivered at more local levels. Economics has, however, eclipsed and now dominates politics. Ideological differences have become increasingly moot points in many countries as the fundamental criterion for holding and staying in office becomes the building and sustaining of economic prosperity. Hence, transnational

regional arrangements will likely continue to spring from economic motives, as we see in things like the European Union and various treaty organizations.

The end of the Cold War seems to have brought to an end the bipolar political arrangement of the world, which had prevailed since World War II. What a truly multipolar world will look like still remains to be seen. Whether the dominance of countries like the United States will continue is difficult to say. With regard to the possibility of wars, the interstate wars of the next decade will likely be about access to natural and energy resources, as we have already seen in the Persian Gulf and in Western Africa. Intrastate wars about cultural identity and sovereignty will continue but in diminished number.

Sociocultural movements will continue to reshape our lives together. Migrations of peoples are creating multicultural societies for which in most places there is still no social policy about how people of great diversity might live together.

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Europe struggles with this perhaps more than any continent today. It will also likely be facing decline because of its greatly diminished birthrate, which will diminish possibilities for innovation so important to neoliberal economy. This demographic diminishment is being only partially counteracted by immigration. And with the absence of coherent social policies for the integration of immigrants, Europe faces greater conflict in the future.

The dominance of the social media (with its preponderance of American programming) will continue to create a kind of world hyperculture, with the control of news media in ever fewer hands. At the same time, local forms of cultural resistance will likely also increase, in terms of resilience of local languages against the overwhelming presence of English and protection of local cultural forms.

The negotiation of the great gap between rich and poor will likely become a more prominent issue than it is today, as has already been mentioned. It is not so much

inequality as the absolute poverty and destitution into which populations are being thrown that will become politically and socially explosive. Thus, the issues are not just economic but also social and political. The current paralysis before the situation of the continent of Africa, with the wars fought for its natural resources, the helplessness before the ravages of AIDS and the profound political instability of much of the region, represents the forestage of what may be mirrored later regarding the countries of the former Soviet Union and the poor regions of Latin America and Asia.

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Similarly, the rhetoric about environmental protection will need to be translated into action as the evidence of physical deterioration and depletion of the environment continues to increase. Decades of rhetoric will have to find action if life is to be sustainable on the planet.

These features of the current phase of globalization, now in its second decade – dependent partially on where technological innovation goes, how economic well-being is negotiated for the poor, whether new political alignments will assure stability, how cultural production will make a genuinely multicultural existence possible in the world and how the physical environment will be sustained – will be shaping the contexts in which we preach the Gospel in the first part of the 21st century. To see how these complex factors translate into strategies for action, I would like to focus on two places where the Gospel will need to be brought. These are the two dominant forms of discourse in the kind of world which I have just tried to describe: the emerging forms of global discourse and the proliferating forms of local discourse.

Globalization in its current form has much to do with the articulation of the global and local forms of discourse, that is, how each is expressed and how they relate to each other. What we are seeing in the second decade of globalization is increasing attention to global forms of discourse, i.e., the formulation of ways of living together as a single planet. Concerns, for example, about developing a

global ethic have been going on now for over 10 years, and the attendant difficulties of articulating an ethic for behavior acceptable worldwide become ever more apparent. The international language of human rights, first codified after World War II, became more salient in the 1990's, especially regarding the rights of women, indigenous peoples and other populations at risk. Most recently, discourse about international justice has been in the forefront of concern, with the establishment of international tribunals for crimes that happened within the borders of nation-states, borders that heretofore were largely inviolable, and a growing concern about international crime and terrorism.

It seems to me that religious believers need to be more active in engaging and contributing to these global discourses about environment, human rights and international justice. Catholic social teaching, a treasure in itself, will need to be extended more consciously into these areas as is now already being cautiously done. An order of scholars and preachers such as your own needs to take leadership in contributing from a Catholic and evangelical point of view what the Gospel has to offer in these areas, which will be essential for the sustainability and peace of the planet.

The other part of globalization has to do with the local. The profound ambivalences of globalization are felt most keenly here. Global contributions to life at the local level – where most people live – can be intoxicating, giving a new sense of cosmopolitanism. But economic globalization especially also takes away local autonomy regarding basic decisions about human well-being. Powerful social media can threaten to overwhelm local language and cultural expression. Issues of identity and autonomy can drive people in local settings to powerful resistance. Such efforts are often necessary for survival. They can also be manipulated by local powers for selfish ends. Whatever the case, they create the fundamental paradox about globalization, namely, that even as the world seems to be becoming more uniform, it deepens its diversity, continues to assert itself.

Again at the grass-roots level, where most people live their lives, the Gospel must speak to concrete and immediate realities. One of the tasks of agents of the Gospel is to help people articulate local identity in light of their faith and to relate that identity to the larger realities impinging upon it. The relating of global realities involves both situating what is happening at the local level, but also criticizing and resisting it if necessary. Put another way, a task of our ministry is to create the social spaces where people can find themselves and one another, and take hold of their own lives.

The second decade of globalization therefore requires that a transnational order such as your own find ways of contributing to and linking global and local discourses. Those connections will

entail both being faithful to living out the Gospel in local life and remaining critical of global (and local) discourses and practices that distort and degrade the dignity of the human person. The agencies you create within the order will need to reflect both these local and global demands upon your energy and resources.

Put more theologically, the second decade of globalization prompts us to find new forms of solidarity at both the global and local levels. Solidarity has to be more than a battle cry or a general notion of intellectual agreement; it must translate into concrete forms of action. Both the global and local must be attended to. Development of the theological concept of solidarity, as it has come into Catholic social teaching in the last 25 years, will be central to this endeavor.

Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S., teaches theology at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, and at the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands. He lectures widely on future trends in the Church. Among the books he has authored are, "The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local" (Orbis Books, 1997), "The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies" (Orbis Books, 1998), and "Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order" (editor) (Orbis Books, 1992).



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