

The Bishops' mission *vis-à-vis* the challenges of globalization

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Over the past three days we have explored ways in which the Church, our countries and our cultures are influenced by globalisation.

Throughout this dialogue, it has been abundantly clear that we as Bishops have an important role to play.

Before we discuss the outcomes of our conversations I would like to offer three themes which I believe reflect the nature of this mission:

Firstly - to help shape globalisation in a way that serves the human person;

Secondly to challenge isolationism – particularly hostility or indifference to the other;

And thirdly - to continually strengthen the Church's own example of global cooperation.

1. Shaping globalisation to serve people

Primarily we have a responsibility to make sure that globalisation operates in a way that works for the human dignity of everyone in our world and safeguards that of future generations.

Speaking to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in 2001 Pope St John Paul II reflected:

“Globalization, a priori, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it. No system is an end in itself, and it is necessary to insist that globalization, like any other system, must be at the service of the human person; it must serve solidarity and the Common Good.”¹

The crossroads we face is clear for the economic, cultural and technological manifestations of globalisation in the twenty-first century.

Economic globalisation

Take international trade: now worth more than \$10 million every minute. Each country's economy, and therefore the wellbeing of its citizens, is constantly influenced by economic transactions beyond its own borders.

We know that with the right rules and systems in place, this has enormous potential to work in the service of the human person, creating livelihoods and opening up new opportunities.

¹ Pope St John Paul II, Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (2001)

Proponents of global trade have long claimed that it is one of the most effective mechanisms for helping people out of poverty.

Access to foreign markets can also provide an incentive for governments and companies to improve the rights of workers. Many of the trade deals struck today contain explicit requirements to meet standards set by the International Labour Organisation.

There is even potential to advance a broader human rights agenda, as the European Union has demonstrated in requiring trade partners to respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the European Convention on Human Rights.

However as we know these opportunities are often squandered. Time and time again the system is stacked in favour of wealthy countries and multinational corporations, labour standards are kept low in the interest of profit, and human rights commitments remain nothing more than promises on paper.

Yes, international trade has helped people out of poverty. But on too many occasions it has also allowed rich countries to become dependent on cheap goods, holding back working conditions in the developing world. It has allowed agricultural dumping to destroy the livelihoods of struggling farmers. And it has undermined environmental safeguards designed to protect our planet for the next generation.

There is still a long way to go before economic globalisation truly serves the Common Good.

Cultural globalisation

Likewise the cultural globalisation that has transformed our world at an unprecedented pace in recent decades has potential to both promote and hinder human flourishing.

Today man-made borders are transcended by cooperation and the exchange of ideas between people, more than at any other point in our history.

This opens up so many possibilities: to share knowledge, language, arts and literature; to break down xenophobic misconceptions; and to learn from each other's successes in areas like governance and education.

Yet it also presents a threat to the rich diversity that characterises us as humans.

In 2014 the BBC published an article asking '*does globalisation mean we will become one culture?*'

It reflected a growing body of thought that rather than enriching different cultures, globalisation may simply result in cultural homogeny.

Acknowledging this danger Pope Francis warned: "*if a globalization tries to make everybody even, as if it were a sphere, that globalization destroys the richness and the specificities of each person and each people.*"

He went on to highlight to alternative path the we can take, suggesting that on the contrary: *“if a globalization tries to unite everyone, but does so respecting each individual, each person, each richness, each specificity, respecting each people, that globalization is good and it enables us to keep growing.”*²

Reflecting his words UNESCO has acknowledged that: *“balancing the benefits of integrating into a globalized world against protecting the uniqueness of local culture requires a careful approach”*, emphasising that *“recognition and respect for the diversity of cultures creates the conditions for mutual understanding, dialogue and peace.”*³

Technology

Turning to the prominence of technology in globalisation, we are once more presented with both tremendous opportunities and great risks.

Everywhere we look people are using technology to work in the service of others: doctors are remotely carrying out operations in warzones hundreds of miles away; international organisations are using digital surveillance to protect endangered species; and students are joining classes with their peers on the other side of the world.

Every day new possibilities are emerging. Last year when Pope Francis became the first pontiff to give a TED talk, he acknowledged its worldwide audience by opening: *“good evening – or good morning, I’m not sure what time it is there!”*⁴ That talk has since been viewed almost three million times across the planet and its transcript published in 32 different languages.

And yet we are acutely aware of how technology is also being used to shape globalisation in a manner that undermines the Common Good. It has facilitated the spread of extremism, allowed organised criminal gangs to become worldwide enterprises, and taken warfare to new frontiers.

Just as with the economic and cultural manifestations of globalisation, we are challenged to help shape the technological aspects in a way that serves people rather than harming them.

The Bishops’ mission

In all of these areas Bishops have an opportunity to follow Pope Francis’ lead and participate in the public discourse around globalisation.

Addressing the recent Rethinking Europe conference in Rome he told us: *“the first and perhaps the greatest contribution that Christians can make to today’s Europe is to remind her that she is not a mass of statistics or institutions, but is made up of people.”*⁵

² Pope Francis, Independence Hall, Philadelphia (2015)

³ UNESCO: globalisation and culture

⁴ Pope Francis, TED talk: *why the only future worth building includes everyone* (2017)

⁵ Pope Francis, Rethinking Europe conference (2017)

His message is applicable far beyond the boundaries of Europe and provides a framework for how we as Christians should be challenging the systems and institutions of globalisation to put people at the centre.

In recent history the vocal support of faith communities has helped shape the way in which we interact as a global society; advancing fair trade practices, international agreements on debt relief, arms trade treaties, and environmental protections.

We also have a mission to help our own congregations recognise their stake in determining the nature of globalisation; by making them aware of the possibilities and challenges, along with their capacity as citizens to exercise change.

In all its various manifestations globalisation can be a positive force; but only if people of goodwill take a lead in making it work for all.

2. Confronting isolationism

Unfortunately we are today faced with a growing number of circumstances where instead of striving to make globalisation work in this way, people are choosing to reject it and erect barriers with the rest of the world.

This brings me to the second challenge that I would like to discuss: tackling isolationism.

Brexit

Many people in Britain who voted in the referendum to withdraw from the European Union did so sincerely, believing it was for the good of the country and the common good.

In just under a year from now the United Kingdom will withdraw from the European Union: not only reversing economic integration with our closest neighbours, but leaving a union that has facilitated free movement of people across borders, established shared standards on issues from workers' rights to protection of the environment, and created unprecedented international cooperation on areas as diverse as health, law enforcement, aviation and nuclear energy.

Studies since the referendum in 2016 have consistently shown that this historic rejection of globalisation and the benefits it can bring, was largely driven by opposition to immigration.

The authors of a recent book drawing on research into public opinion both before and after the vote concluded that: *"not only were those who felt negatively about immigration more likely to minimise the risks of Brexit, but they were also significantly more likely to turnout, and then vote for Brexit in the polling booth."*⁶

⁶ Harold Clarke, Matthew Goodwin and Paul Whiteley, *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

Despite the overwhelming evidence that migrants contribute both economically and socially to the UK, misconceptions about migration resulting in higher crime, fewer job opportunities and pressure on public services remained persistent.

These featured heavily throughout the referendum campaign, including false claims that millions of Turkish migrants would imminently arrive the UK, which commentators believe are *“almost certain to have shaped the views of a significant number of voters.”*⁷

Another prominent trend among those who voted to leave the EU was a feeling of being ‘left behind’ by globalisation.

In many communities wage stagnation and the loss of industry fostered a belief that our increasingly interconnected global economy has done nothing for them. Notably this often combined with hostility towards migrants, who were perceived as having benefited much more.

Such sentiments are far from unique to the UK: across the continent and indeed around the world we have seen populist and isolationist politics given fresh energy by the interaction of economic hardship and opposition to migration.

This not only risks creating further prejudice and division, but jeopardises the potential good that international cooperation can bring.

The globalisation of indifference

Isolationism can also stem from a different source: the belief that what goes on elsewhere in the world is none of our concern.

In his Lenten message three years ago Pope Francis explained: *“Usually, when we are healthy and comfortable, we forget about others (something God the Father never does), we are unconcerned with their problems, their sufferings and the injustices they endure.”*

He went on to warn: *“Today, this selfish attitude of indifference has taken on global proportions, to the extent that we can speak of a globalisation of indifference. It is a problem which we, as Christians, need to confront.”*⁸

Millions of people every day demonstrate an alternative to such indifference, by donating to international development, campaigning for human rights and acting to protect our shared environment.

However all too often indifference still characterises our approach to others across the globe:

⁷ James Ker-Lindsay (Professor of Politics and Policy at St Mary’s University, Twickenham), *Did the unfounded claim that Turkey was about to join the EU swing the Brexit referendum?* (London School of Economics blog, 2018)

⁸ Pope Francis, Lenten Message (2015)

when we turn away from news reports about the carnage in Syria without asking what we can do help;

when we contribute to climate change without thinking about the poorest communities who bear the burden;

or when we buy cheap products without considering the conditions in which they were made.

This attitude is both exacerbated and exploited by political actors who appeal to nationalism and abandonment of our shared responsibilities.

The Bishops' mission

For us as Bishops, just like our mission to help shape globalisation in way that serves the Common Good, our mission to challenge isolationism can be advanced through speaking out in the public square.

As part of a universal Church we are uniquely positioned to challenge those who promote division, highlight all that is to be gained through international solidarity, and emphasise the duty that every one of us has to each other and to our planet.

We also have a mission to pastorally support those who legitimately feel left behind by globalisation, as well as those who have been stigmatised because of isolationist sentiment. Particularly when upheavals such as the Brexit vote take place we have a role to play repairing bridges both within and between our countries.

3. Strengthening the Church's example

The final area I would like to discuss is our responsibility to nurture and strengthen the Church's own global cooperation in the service of humanity.

One of the strongest demonstrations, is the work of Caritas in almost every country on the planet, with each national organisation linked to every single Catholic across the world through our shared universal mission.

By embracing the possibilities presented by globalisation we have ensured this is not simply an abstract concept.

Our schools and parishes today have the opportunity to raise funds for Caritas projects anywhere across the world; see the results of their support in real time; and hear the voices of those whose lives they are helping to improve.

Our global response to conflicts or natural disasters is now informed and enhanced by instant contact with people living and working in the communities affected.

Our worldwide presence allows partners from outside the Church to provide support for people who they would otherwise be unable to reach.

This is truly global solidarity in action.

Another example of the Church's international approach to the Common Good is the Santa Marta Group: an unprecedented alliance of Bishops and police chiefs from more than 35 countries working in collaboration to tackle modern slavery.

The partnerships, education programmes, community initiatives, and victim support services that have been established through the group are making genuine progress in the fight against this horrendous crime. Our own congregations are also being mobilised to educate themselves, hold elected officials to account and exercise their power as consumers in pressuring businesses to act.

Speaking last month on the fourth anniversary of the Santa Marta Group's launch Cardinal Nichols reflected: *"It is worth emphasising the foundations from which we in the Church act: a radical commitment to the dignity of every human person, a dignity which has to be protected and promoted in every circumstance and time; a dignity which does not depend on the abilities or status of a person but which is rooted entirely in the inner depth of the person's existence, in the gift of human life which always comes from God."*⁹

This commitment, combined with the Church's universal character, places us in a unique position to lead the way in using international cooperation for the good of all.

The Bishops' mission

Our mission as Bishops is to sustain and develop such work; building the capacity of the Church's global projects, encouraging our communities to get involved, and increasing dialogue between our conferences through occasions such as this.

Conclusion

I hope that these three themes: shaping globalisation to work for the human person; challenging isolationism; and strengthening the Church's own global cooperation, will assist our reflections as we close our meeting and return to our dioceses.

I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss these important matters with you today: for just as globalisation means that the world is changing faster than ever, so too must our mission continue to adapt and evolve.

I would like to finish with a quotation from Yuri Gagarin, The First Human Being in Space "looking at the earth from afar you realise it is too small for conflict and just big enough for co-operation."

Thank you.

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⁹ Cardinal Nichols, *Each trafficked person has their own story': The Catholic Church and law enforcement agencies unite to tackle modern day slavery* (London School of Economics blog, 2018)