

Zeitschrift: Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie

Band: 100 (2010)

Heft: [1]: Globalization and catholicity : ecumenical conversations on god's abundance and the people's need

Artikel: Catholicity and globalization : a perspective from the episcopal church

Autor: Wright, J. Robert

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-422211>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 04.04.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

4. Catholicity and Globalization: A Perspective from the Episcopal Church

J. Robert Wright, The Episcopal Church in the USA

Prepared for the conference convened by the Archbishop of Utrecht from November 6–11, 2006, and dedicated to the memory of the late +Alberto B. Ramento, ninth Obispo Maximo of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (G.T.S. 1994 D.D.), martyred on October 3, 2006, prophet of social justice, true friend of the people, and also my personal friend.

Introduction and Definition of the Term

This paper will attempt to offer a definition of *globalization* and some remarks about its significance from a perspective within the Episcopal Church in the USA. Almost every attempt to define *globalization* as a term is highly subjective, depending upon the political slant of the definer as being for it or against it, for example as to whether an increase of economic interdependence among nations and peoples is seen as being a good thing or a bad thing. Any single dictionary's definition is nearly as good as another, the following being the sort of verbal formulation that one might find: "an umbrella term for a complex series of economic, social, technological, cultural and political changes seen as increasing interdependence, integration, and interaction between people and companies in disparate locations."¹

Another helpful definition of globalization was offered by the sociologist and former Muslim, Professor Lamin Sanneh of Yale University, speaking in October 2006 at the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church, New York City. Professor Sanneh defined globalization as "merely the recognition that the world is integrated, both economically and technically." Still another definition is that proposed by the Peace Commission of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, D.C., which defines *globalization* as "the word used today for the great increase in movements of capital (money), information, goods, and people between nations."²

Popular usage has even created the verb *to globalize*, as when the *Chicago Tribune* reported on June 13, 2002, that the town of Lewiston, Maine

¹ Cf., e.g., globalenvision.org/teachers, acc. 27 March 2010.

² Typescript, p. 1.

(36,000 population, all white), had been “globalized” by the resettlement of the local work force. A definition without using the word itself was earlier articulated in resolution 1.15 of the worldwide Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops in 1998: “God has created a world in which we are bound together in a common humanity in which each person has equal dignity and value. God has generously given to the nations immense resources which are to be held in trust and used for the well being of all” (Official Report 384). None of these definitions, it should be noted, is either negative or condemnatory; all are value-free. Indeed the report of the Peace Commission of the Washington diocese even speaks of “both the benefits and problems caused by globalization.”

Credit for the coinage of *globalization* as a term and its projection onto the canvas of worldwide sociological studies is usually given to the economist Theodore Levitt, in an article entitled “Globalization of Markets,” published in 1983 in the *Harvard Business Review*. Levitt and subsequent writers on the subject use *globalization* as a collective term, whether for good or ill, to represent the growing integration of economies and societies around the world. They thus see it variously as a cause of change, whether economic, social, or even ecological, its results being capable of evaluation either positively, such as increased economic prosperity and a higher standard of living, or negatively, as in the case of profiteering, cultural imperialism, and the suppression of local values.

There is no question that the term is a neologism possessing definite shock value to those who would overuse it or define it one-sidedly. In the end, the intelligent student can only pose, while leaving unanswered, the following question: Is globalization a good thing, an opportunity, or a bad thing, a threat? It would seem at first that only those who are politically biased would have an answer that rests exclusively on one side.

From a catholic Christian viewpoint, however, such as that which characterizes much reflection on social questions within the Episcopal Church and the Anglican tradition, it will be the implication of this essay that more can be said and that principles can be derived from the wellspring of the church’s catholicity to allow value judgments to be made. From this perspective, therefore, the question for future investigation becomes not whether globalization is good or bad but, rather, *when is globalization good and when is it bad? What is good globalization, and what is bad globalization?*

The Ecclesial Background of the Episcopal Church's Relations with the Iglesia Filipina Independiente

The Iglesia Filipina Independiente (hereafter IFI) received the gift of apostolic succession signified by the historic episcopate on April 7, 1948, when three bishops of the Episcopal Church in the USA consecrated three new IFI bishops at St. Luke's Pro-Cathedral in Manila. Thus began a new and vital relationship, which culminated in 1961 when the Episcopal Church in the USA entered the relationship of full communion (earlier called intercommunion) with the IFI in 1961 under the three terms of the Bonn Concordat that had established the same relationship with the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht in 1931:

- (1) Each Communion recognizes the catholicity and independence of the other and maintains its own.
- (2) Each Communion agrees to admit members of the other Communion to participate in the Sacraments.
- (3) Intercommunion [Full Communion] does not require from either Communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion, or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian Faith. (Wright, *Communion* 184–89, 271–72)

In 1961, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church recognized the IFI as “a true part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.” A similar concordat was later signed between the IFI and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht at Vienna in 1965.³ No such agreements last forever, although my memories of the IFI and its relationship with the Episcopal Church at St. Andrew's Seminary in Manila from a brief lecture tour there many years ago are very positive indeed. The Episcopal Church in the Philippines sought and gained its autonomy from the Episcopal Church in 1988, becoming a separate province of the Anglican Communion but still not financially independent. A revision of the 1961 Concordat between the IFI and the Episcopal Church was thus already one of the subjects planned for discussion when Bishop Alberto Ramento, the IFI Obispo Maximo, visited the USA in the early 1990s and was entertained by the Bishop of New York, Richard F. Grein, at a dinner at which I myself was present. (In a visit to my home in

³ Referenced in an address to the IFI Supreme Council of Bishops by Joris Vercammen, Archbishop of Utrecht, given in Manila 9 May 2005 (typescript, p. 1).

1994, around the time that he was being granted the honorary doctorate of the General Seminary, Bishop Ramento graciously consented to autograph my own copy of the original altar-size Filipino Missal of 1961.)

Concerns about the “disruptive consequences of economic globalization” were expressed as early as 2002 when the so-called “Manila Covenant” was signed by Obispo Maximo Tomas Millamena of the IFI, Archbishop Joris Vercammen of the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht, Archbishop Peter Carnley (Anglican Primate of Australia), Bishop Christopher Epting of the Episcopal Church in the USA, and representatives of other churches in full communion with the IFI, such as the Church of Sweden, the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland, and the Church of North India, all of whom pledged to “stand in solidarity” with the IFI and its six million members, many of whom were thought to exemplify the Filipino peasant and working classes (Manila Covenant 1).

We note, however, that the concerns expressed at Manila in 2002 were only about “the disruptive consequences of economic globalization” and not about all of its consequences. Eventually, and after more nuancing of details, Obispo Maximo Godofredo David and Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold signed an updated version of the 1961 Concordat on June 19, 2006. This version of the Concordat provides for partnership in congregational development, mutual accountability and collegiality, and sharing of personnel and resources. This latest document, we note, does not mention the term globalization at all, either to praise it or to condemn it; we are left to wonder why its mention is omitted.

An Initial Episcopalian Response to the Remarks Distributed from the Old Catholic Side

The preliminary remarks prepared in two papers by Prof. Franz Segbers and transmitted to us from the See of Utrecht for the purpose of beginning these discussions at the 2006 conference at Maarssen raise questions and make assertions that would be regarded as one-sided, biased, and even inflammatory from a viewpoint within the Episcopal Church. Such papers do not allow for a “both-and” approach. They treat globalization, even economic globalization, in an entirely negative way, and they do not allow for more than one point of view. One must ask whether it is really true, as alleged, that globalization always “divides and destroys,” always “stands against what it is we want to be,” and thus “ruins the body of Christ”?

Surely one would want to allow for a positive interpretation as well. There are benefits from globalization, such as better communication, a

higher standard of life for greater numbers of people, cheaper prices, greater availability of the benefits of technology and invention, air travel, and networking of churches for social witness. It is not true to say that “the logic of globalization promotes competitiveness that destroys the unity of the Church”⁴ without at the same time admitting that globalization’s logic also promotes cooperation and enables conciliarity. To say the one and not the other is to betray a onesidedness that is less than full catholicity.

The Episcopal Church, in terms of statements at the highest level, has virtually no official position for or against globalization as such. It does have its own office for Peace and Justice, which is very effective and very knowledgeable about such matters. Care is taken that no public position be asserted in such questions on behalf of the Episcopal Church as a whole without the endorsement of that office. With the advocacy on behalf of the poor and oppressed, and in solidarity against the bad effects of globalization, all causes for which Bishop Ramento was well known and widely admired, the Episcopal Church would be ready to stand in unity with the IFI, and with the Union of Utrecht if that is also their position. There is no question, but only admiration, from our quarter regarding the total commitment that has been exhibited time and again by the IFI, even to the offering of a human life in the person of Blessed Bishop Ramento. We will want to hear more specifically what the Union of Utrecht is doing in this regard, what position statements have been adopted about globalization, what diocesan resolutions have been passed, and whether the efforts of all our churches can mesh into one coherent picture that will make a difference.

The Episcopal Church already has a democratic form of decision-making in its General Convention, itself a model of “conciliar community,” and many of our ecumenical efforts with the Roman Catholic Church in the United States are directed to the same end. Certainly the Episcopal Church’s eucharistic theology, which implies an interdependence in the Body of Christ, as well as our endorsement of all eight Millennium Development Goals at the 2006 General Convention (including the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, the achievement of universal primary education, and the development of global partnerships) and our endorsement of the World Development Advisors Network and the World Missions Conference, all in support of companion relationships and in opposition

⁴ As asserted on page 3 of the original paper, “Preliminary Remarks,” prepared by Fr. Segbers and circulated in preparation for the Maarsse meeting.

to modern expressions of injustice and the enslavement of underprivileged peoples, are aimed at resisting the negative effects of globalization.

Additionally, the Episcopal Church's focused development of "Bishops' Blend" coffee and its related advocacy of fair trade prices, frequent public support of workers' rights to unionize and demand living wages, and the work of its observer's office at the United Nations are all ways in which the Episcopal Church does not merely condemn bad globalization but really does, as a church and at the official level, combat the bad effects of globalization without denying the good that it can also produce. These policies thus stand against the bad effects of globalization while at the same time encouraging the good effects. We would respectfully ask what comparable moves have been taken by the See of Utrecht in these areas. We know the record of the IFI, and we wish to learn what the Utrecht Union is doing about this at all levels of its life.

Certainly the ecumenical dimensions need further and much more careful exploration. At least in the United States, Episcopalian relations with the Roman Catholic Church and with the Evangelical Lutheran Church are generally so positive that we would hesitate to make a negative condemnation of all forms of globalization without close consultation with our larger sister churches. It must be admitted by ecumenists of good will and reasonable mentality that the Roman Catholic Church, even though we may not agree with that church on all points, has the size, the resources, and the sophistication to reflect upon questions of globalization in much greater depth and breadth than do we, and we would almost certainly never make a fully negative assessment of the topic at hand without seeking their wisdom and advice.

Likewise, the ELCA, with whom the Episcopal Church is in full communion, counts itself so close to the Episcopal Church on most social questions that neither church would proceed to make sweepingly negative judgments on public social questions without careful consultation. It may be true that the Union of Utrecht and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente do not yet enjoy such close relations with Rome, but the Episcopal Church does. At the very least we would propose for the future to have a Roman Catholic observer present and participating in our common efforts.

The Position of the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church

By canon law (currently I.2.4 [a]), the Presiding Bishop as Chief Pastor and Primate of the Episcopal Church is charged with responsibility for leadership in initiating and developing the policy and strategy of the Episcopal

Church and articulating it as the Primate understands it to have been developed and authorized by the General Convention. In the last resort the position of this paper must rest and rely upon that position as thus articulated, especially in the absence of explicit resolutions of the General Convention. That position can be demonstrated evidentially as a balanced position that sees globalization as in some ways a good thing, an opportunity, and in other ways a bad thing, a threat. As of fall 2006, three key statements could be found on the web that defined this position as articulated by Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold. They are as follows, the first two balancing each other and the third incorporating the balance within itself:

- 1) Globalization can be understood as a form of domination whereby others are made to bear the burden of our greed, consumerism and unquestioned belief that economic growth is a self-evident good. (May 1, 2000)
- 2) A great gift of the Anglican Communion is that it makes each of its 38 provinces (national churches) part of something larger: a vast web of relationships that helps us to overcome our parochialism and nationalistic perspectives, and grasp the fact that we are “members one of another” – not just as members of the Episcopal Church but across the world, our global village. (May 1, 2000)
- 3) The force of the United States economically and culturally is such that the Episcopal Church is seen as part of that highly ambiguous reality which is perceived as both curse and blessing known as globalization. (July 16, 2002)

This paper, in the end, rests upon these three statements, which constitute our position at the highest level. We would ask specifically to learn of any corresponding position statements of the Old Catholic Union.

Additional Dimensions of Good Globalization

As was posited at the beginning of this paper and again demonstrated above as our official position, some globalization is bad and some good. The final section of these remarks is intended to mention only two or three of the sorts of additional resources that are at hand.⁵ Mention has already been made of the Peace and Justice Office of our national Episcopal Church Headquarters, which has been watchfully directed by Canon Brian Grieves, as well as our Anglican Observer’s office at the United

⁵ As of late 2006, when this paper was written. Since that time there has been much reconfiguration, relocation, and consolidation of many of the Episcopal Church’s national offices.

Nations. To them should be added such resources as our national office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, which has been ably headed by Bishop Christopher Epting, and our Department of Anglican and Global Relations, as well as Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) and the related social justice work of Canon Richard Gillett of Los Angeles, whose 2005 book *The New Globalization: Reclaiming the Lost Ground of Our Christian Social Tradition* is an outstanding recent Episcopalian contribution to the literature in this field. Other recent studies of the positive aspects of globalization would need to be considered. In an addition to this paper, I append a thoughtful report that I commissioned from my former student, the Rev. Dr. Derek Darves; his concluding reflections on the weaknesses of “Ecclesial Responses to Globalization” are especially perceptive.

First, however, I summarize the concluding recommendations of the report on “Alternative Globalization” from the Justice, Peace and Creation Team of the World Council of Churches (Geneva, 2005), of which the Episcopal Church is a member. These recommendations may well furnish an agenda for value judgments and action goals in our future efforts to separate, on the basis of catholic social theology, that which is good in globalization from that which is bad. I think we would all want our churches to be able to make some impact on the world scene in this area, but not at the expense of truth, insight, or balance. Perhaps our next meeting should turn to explore what our churches are doing to further the Millennium Development Goals, with specific reports as to what our leaders in the churches who signed the Manila Covenant of 2002 have done (not just said, but done), concretely, to accomplish its stated goals. Their names are on record, and they pledged themselves, not just their churches, to do something about the problem.

Finally, it should be underscored that we from the American/Episcopalian side of this discussion have no vested interest in defending what has sometimes been called the Global Empire of the Bush Administration. We shall gladly convey any serious critiques of the policies of our church or our nation back to those who may be in positions to change them.

Appendix 1: Concluding Recommendations to the Churches of the Report on “Alternative Globalization”⁶

The Rev. Canon J. Robert Wright, The Episcopal Church in the USA

Decent Jobs, Emancipated Work, and People’s Livelihoods

- Build alliances with social movements and trade unions that advocate for decent jobs and just wages.
- Work for programs that encourage participatory budget processes whereby workers become subjects of their own resource allocation for self-development.
- Support ethical financing for small entrepreneurs, farmers, indigenous peoples, women, youth, and people with disabilities.
- Support economies of solidarity by developing a code of moral principles.
- Engage in efforts of regional ecumenical organizations and world communions to develop alternative economies.
- Engage in interfaith cooperation to seek alternatives that challenge economies of greed and competition.
- Support initiatives to promote adequate social services and access to medical care.
- Encourage education for all, particularly for women and youth.

Trade

- Establish the use of fair trade products as a minimum.
- Contribute to re-negotiation of multilateral trade agreements that are just, equitable, and democratic.

Finance

- Use money and manage finances according to biblical standards, investing only in businesses that follow social and ecological justice and in alternative banks that do not apply interest rates higher than the real growth of the economy or engage in speculation.

⁶ Justice, Peace and Creation Team of the World Council of Churches (Geneva, 2005) 56–60, summarized with some paraphrasing and abbreviation.

- Work for debt cancellation as well as the regulation of global financial markets.
- Advocate global financial systems that link finance and development.
- Call on national governments to regulate transnational corporations and international financial institutions.
- Support democratic control over critical financial issues that affect people's lives, including audit of financial debts that are illegitimate.
- Advocate reverse of the flow of financial and ecological wealth from the South to the North by canceling illegitimate debts as a restitution for past exploitation.

Ecology

- Care for the web of life and the rich bio-diversity of creation.
- Seek a change from unsustainable and unjust patterns of the use of natural resources, especially in respect of indigenous peoples and their lands and communities.
- Support movements and initiatives that defend vital common resources, such as water, against privatization.
- Advocate efficiency of resources and energy and a shift from fossil fuel-based energy production to renewable energies.
- Encourage public engagement in reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and work for policies to support people affected by rises in sea level.
- Work for sustainable consumption and production patterns by adopting self-restraint and simplicity in lifestyles and resistance to dominating patterns of consumerism.

Public Goods and Services

- Struggle against the privatization of public goods and services.
- Actively defend the rights of countries and peoples to define and manage their own development.
- Use church land for life-giving farming.
- Create an ecumenical forum for life-giving agriculture.
- Oppose the production of genetically modified organisms.
- Promote organic farming.

Power and Empire

- Reflect on the question of power and empire from a biblical and theological perspective and take a clear faith-stance against hegemonic powers.
- Encourage bodies such as the United Nations to address the needs of the peoples of the world for peace and justice from a Christian perspective, where possible.

Appendix 2: Globalization and The Episcopal Church

The Rev. Dr. Derek Darves, The Episcopal Church in the USA

This paper presents a brief exposition of the various phenomena typically associated with globalization, with particular emphasis on its ecclesial and social implications. The first section briefly outlines the range of economic, political, and social phenomena typically categorized under the broader, unifying concept of globalization. The second section reviews the array of deleterious social and economic consequences often linked to emerging patterns of global commerce. The final section briefly considers the challenges associated with developing a credible and articulate ecclesial response to economic globalization.

Defining Globalization

In recent years, the term *globalization*, first coined in 1983 by Harvard economics professor Theodore Levitt, has found widespread application in various mass media, social science, and theological publications. However, despite its popularity as a unifying concept, most references to globalization are frustratingly vague in terms of what activities they imply. Given that most uses of the term are not accompanied by a working definition, some people have argued that the term itself adds little to a theoretical understanding of the various cultural, political, and economic integration processes to which it refers (see Held, et al., and Rodrik). Rather than attempting to reduce such a broadly construed phenomenon into a single-sentence definition, it may instead be useful to list the range of human activity typically associated with globalization. While this list is by no means exhaustive, it is emblematic of the processes typically implied:

1. *Growth in international trade and investment, especially*

- The outsourcing of integral parts of the production process from developed to developing countries,
- The increasing economic and political power of multinational corporations and other agents of international economic activity,
- The increasing utilization of “just in time” (JIT) manufacturing processes, whereby production is spread across the globe and final products are produced only days and weeks before their consumption (Gereffi), and
- Massive increases in global currency exchange and speculation (Held, et al.).

2. *Development of sophisticated global communication mechanisms, especially*

- The expansion of voice and data communication resources through transoceanic and transcontinental fiber-optic networks,
- Growth in global news outlets and entertainment conglomerates, and
- The spread of Internet connectivity in developed and developing economies.

3. *Dramatic reduction of tariffs and quotas, compared to historical levels, facilitated by*

- The creation of a World Trade Organization during the “Uruguay Round” of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade negotiations during the 1980s,
- The creation of complex regional free-trade agreements that incorporate numerous economic, labor, and environmental provisions (e.g., the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Maastricht Treaty),
- Pressure applied by multinational corporations on national governments to remove the barriers to trade and international production.

4. *Homogenization of culture and life forms, especially*

- The “McDonaldization” of commerce and culture, whereby unique local choices and variety of products are overtaken by the forces of economic standardization and “sameness” (Barber),

- The strategic marketing of Western consumer-oriented lifestyles around the globe (Moe-Lobeda), and
- The commodification of life forms, as with the patenting of genetic material and productive agricultural seed strains.

What is obvious as one reviews these different dimensions of globalization is that many are neither recent phenomena nor easily distinguishable from those of the long-established concept of internationalization. In fact, depending on how broadly one defines the term, strands of contemporary globalization can be traced back centuries and even millennia. For example, while the popular press often frames globalization as a recent development, it is instructive to note that the economies of Japan, the United States, and Western Europe are now only slightly more open to international trade than they were during the late Gold Standard Era, circa 1870 (Rodrik 7).

Nonetheless, despite the present era's continuity with the past, there is little reason to doubt that the current scale and scope of economic, political, and cultural interaction among nation states mark a new and distinctive era of human history. It can be generally said that the tremendous cross-border activity that characterizes the contemporary era – including both old and new forms of interaction – creates the opportunity not only for prosperity and cooperation but also for vast social dislocation and human conflict.

While economists and politicians in developed countries have often (though by no means universally) accented the positive economic and political benefits of globalization (Gillett 15–16), environmentalists, labor advocates, and other social activists have typically drawn attention to its dark side. Many observers, for example, have linked (though with differing success) the variegated processes listed above with a number of negative social, political, and economic developments. Episcopal priest Richard Gillett, to take a recent example, associates economic integration with the “accelerating domination of an all-engulfing global capitalism whose sole ethic is the market, what has been called the commodification of all life” (Gillett 9). Taking a similarly critical view, theologian William Schweiker argues that “the paradox of the global age is how human beings create immense wealth, shape consciousness, and yet endanger the meaningfulness of life through unjust distribution or rampant consumerism” (Schweiker 108).

Critical views of globalization typically make a direct link between economic integration and major social problems, including

- Increasing economic inequality (Gillett),
- Increasing global poverty (Gillett),
- Destruction of ecological systems critical to human life (Moe-Lobeda),
- Decimation of traditional cultures through the imposition of Western cultural values (Barber),
- Homogenization of commercial products through the spread of mass-marketed Western commodities, i.e., “McDonaldization” (Barber),
- The annihilation of domestic industries, for example, the US steel sector, through the importation of cheaper foreign substitutes, resulting in layoffs, the destruction of communities, and social dislocation (Rorrik), and
- The breakdown of democratic systems of governance and the concomitant ascendance of large, multinational corporations (Moe-Lobeda).

While the precise relationship between each of these developments and economic integration is complex, there can be little doubt that contemporary patterns of global economic exchange have significantly contributed to environmental crisis and widespread social dislocation. Despite this fact, it has often been difficult to oppose the more deleterious consequences of globalization. In part, this problem arises because the current system of global commerce is often imbued with an aura of inevitability, making any attempt to stand in its way appear both naive and destined to failure (see Moe-Lobeda; Sassen). Additionally, and unlike previous social movements, whose desired outcome was clear (e.g., the international mobilization to abolish the apartheid regime of South Africa), opposition to globalization is generally directed toward more illusory goals. A major problem confronting any attempt to articulate a clear agenda is that many aspects of economic globalization are quite positive. Thus an important question may be how – or whether – globalization can be neatly divided into constituent parts in such a way that the church and socially minded nonprofit organizations can oppose its negative effects while simultaneously supporting its positive ones.

Ecclesial Responses to Globalization

While economists are generally quick to cite the increased productive efficiency made possible by international trade, many find that the vast wake of social dislocation that generally follows deep economic adjustments problematizes unqualified support for free trade. In contemporary

theological literature, a common criticism of globalization is its purported effect on human consciousness. The current system of global commerce has been linked to greed (Gillett), denigration of human value (Schweiker), and loss of moral agency through the obfuscation of the production process (Moe-Lobeda). William Schweiker, for example, links the current system of global commerce to a declining sense of human worth:

In economic exchange there is the constant possibility of losing the means to protect the grounds of those societies, namely, the dignity of persons as historical agents. The loss of “persons” is a pervasive threat in systems of commodification that reduce value to one system of measurement (say, money) and feed human vice, especially greed. The inability to articulate a robust sense of the worth of persons is a fact in most commercial societies. This is a regular feature of economic exchange and not (as some think) peculiar to a capitalist economy. (Schweiker 108)

This failure to grant inherent value to people is certainly among the central problems created by the contemporary pattern of economic integration. The problem for the church, however, is how it should proceed in developing an articulate and effective response. Working against such an effort is the fairly widespread view that developed-world churches (such as the Episcopal Church in the USA) lack credibility when opposing negative aspects of global economic integration because they directly participate in the system through various investments and pension funds. Additionally, the historical ties of these churches to colonialism are also frequently cited to support the argument that the church lacks the moral authority requisite to challenge global capitalism. Even at the congregational level, clergy often hesitate to question the morality of extant commercial systems for fear of alienating congregants with strong ties to the business community (Rohr; see also Gillett 182–84).

At the same time, there has been a general tendency to abrogate moral language from discussions of the merits of different forms of economic production. Among many professional economists, the litmus test for economic globalization is whether it makes society better off. Since basic economic theory clearly demonstrates the efficiencies created by international commerce, economists have typically shown strong support for economic globalization. The problem with this model, it would seem, is that growth and expansion become the core values by which human production systems are evaluated and judged. In a world that extols the virtues of limitless accumulation, ecclesial appeals for cooperation, sharing, or reduced consumption seem if nothing else anachronistic. This development

leaves the church in the awkward position of supporting and participating in a system of exchange that undermines non-economic moral criteria typically associated with Christian theology.

In many ways, globalization confronts the church as an amorphous reality that is rapidly yet autonomously transforming cities, regions, and nations. Given the immensely complex nature of economic integration, it would seem that the church's efforts and energies are perhaps best spent confronting specific aspects of economic globalization – such as economic injustice or unbalanced trade agreements that favor the interests of multinational corporations – rather than attempting to confront it as a singular reality of the modern age. In practice, this approach will probably entail social-justice activities consonant with the recommendations of the World Council of Churches presented in Appendix 1 above, particularly those recommendations pertaining to labor and environmental protections. Additionally, and in the interest of promoting deeper economic changes, the church may also consider directly engaging trade-policy officials in future international-trade negotiations in order to promote meaningful labor, environmental, and social provisions. Indeed, the church may rely on international-communication networks, even created by globalization, to strengthen and broaden these political efforts.