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# Development and Globalization as Challenges – A Christian Perspective

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to discuss development and globalization and the challenge they pose when consumerism and endless economic growth are thoroughly pursued as economic doctrine. Issues such as social justice and poverty are also addressed, as well as the role of faith communities in providing alternative models that affirm life, justice, and right relationships. It is argued that faith communities ought to be communities that live out such alternatives.

KEYWORDS: Development, globalization, consumerism, cultural change, Christian existence

## Introduction

We live in a "global village." It is a world in which the task faith communities have assumed, to provide coherence and the perpetuation of positive values, becomes increasingly challenging (Măcelaru 2020, 87-96; Măcelaru 2014a, 169-74; Măcelaru 2009, 123-47). Below are some reflections on this task in the light of the concepts of development and globalization. Both play an important role in the world today, and this is so because both are not only facets of contemporary economics, as some would purport, but their impact caries out into areas such as social justice/injustice, poverty, migration, etc. In the light of these, believers and faith communities ought to consider their stance vis-à-vis development and globalization (Rotaru 2014, 532-541) to identify in which way these have an impact on the values we affirm and ponder further about their task to be light and salt in the world today (cf. Mat. 5:13-16).

## Development

Development as a concept is essentially secular in its origin. It is the child of the European and American Enlightenment. It embodies the belief that the natural condition for the free person is to achieve unending economic and social progress. This approach to life is so widely spread that it became "the secular religion" (Rotaru 2006, 251-266) of the contemporary society (Sine 1987, 2; cf. Sine 1983, 9-36). This progressive view of the future contains the firm conviction that economic progress will automatically result in social and moral progress. Within it, human activities are focused on production and consumption. The mind-set driving such life-style, called consumerism, emphasizes productivity to the point that members of society that do not conform to it are neglected or entirely left out. Thus the increasing ability to produce ever-new goods and services has become a synonym for "good-life." Economic growth has become synonymous with a better future.

Development as a concept is in constant flux. It is carried out in the context of the global economy, but is also influenced by local culture and religion. As early as 1954, Schumpeter (1954, 9-41) described development as an innovative technological phenomenon that breaks the capitalist cycle and initiates a new economic process. This process is seen as progress and, ultimately, the very "road to prosperity." This also became the economic doctrine by which the world was divided into rich and poor countries, the latter being pushed to reach higher levels of economic status through

industrialization. Thus the widespread use of labels such as "the first world" vs. "the third world." Admittedly, voices that began to question the development doctrine and patterns observed in European and North American societies as normative for the rest of the world emerged as early as the 1960s. Representatives of poorer countries talk about "alternative development" that accounts for their own traditions, culture, and societal arrangements. Notions such as person-centered development are also put forward as alternatives. These single out "human" development as a goal of economic growth. Yes, the development of industry, agriculture, and communal potentials does not necessarily lead to the development of human beings (Rotaru 2016, 29-43). Thus, there is a need for holistic alternatives that take into account the needs human beings have that are not material but rather social, psychological and spiritual.

After Schumacher published his classic "Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered," a new model of development based on small-scale technological initiatives began to flourish in the so-called "underdeveloped" countries. We consider these as the first signs of a return to values such as human dignity and community-nurturing (Măcelaru 2021, 596-608). As Chavannes Jeune (1987, 218-25) has pointed out, poverty is not an accident. It is a consequence of the existing socio-economic and political order – where the wealthy endeavor to stay wealthy, the poor will remain poor. The mechanism of injustice is based on dependency and oppression. Consequently, the "developed" countries ought to ask themselves if the help given under the rubric of development is *for* the poor or *with* the poor. Within Christianity, the example of Jesus is a life shared with those in need (Rotaru 2010, 7). We should ask ourselves whether the help provided really addresses structural poverty or simply scratches the surface of the problem. As Jeune (1987, 220) observes, "the nature of structural poverty demands that we tackle its root causes rather than just its effects."

Of course, the possibility of establishing a new international economic order may seem unattainable, at least for as long as mentalities and life-models in the "developed" world remain the same. Yet, beginning in the mid-1960s, Christian voices have begun to strongly address the issue of social justice vs prosperity. The slogan became "help them to help themselves," and this became a major topic of discussion at such gatherings as Vatican II (1965) and the Second Latin American Bishops' Conference in Medellin, Columbia (1968). The principles put forward in such gatherings emphasized the self-reliance of those involved; the pursuit of social justice in respect to work, property, education, and political participation; and the change of focus from economic growth for its own sake to the betterment of standards of living for the poorest amongst us.

The debt crisis of "underdeveloped" countries is another important issue within this discussion. The debt of the so-called Third World countries constitutes between 46 to 60 percent of their annual export earnings. During the 1980s, the Church began to step up and openly side with such impoverished nations, disclosing national debt as a fundamental issue of justice. The call was made to industrialized countries to stand in solidarity with the less fortunate ones and to solve the problem through debt remission.

All these point to the need to reexamine the models of economic development perpetuated in the world today. Christians should raise questions about who benefits and who loses within the current economic growth framework. In reality, what kind of economics can help the poor without adding new burdens on their shoulders? To what extent is this the responsibility of faith communities? Perhaps we should look again at what the Scriptures have to teach us (Măcelaru 2019, 31-40; Măcelaru 2016, 13-19; Măcelaru 2011, 167-73). in terms of living a simple lifestyle, in spite of the material wealth made available to us. For "if we do not authentically incarnate the values of the kingdom in lifestyles of simplicity, how can we work with the poor in integrity?" (Sine 1987, 15).

**Globalization**

There are millions of people nowadays who live in utter poverty. Many lack the very basic necessities in life and the very survival of thousands is at stake on a daily basis. Even more millions live without access to clean drinking water, without appropriate health care, and opportunity for employment and education. This is the one side of the global picture nowadays. The other side is the hopeful image projected by the increased connectivity and opportunities associated with globalization.

There is no single definition of globalization. It has been said that globalization is a "multifarious, ever changing, and at the same time, vague phenomenon" (Măcelaru 2014c, 71). The term "globalization" appeared in the sociological literature during the 1970s. However, its emergence as a concept that describes global trends came during the 1990s. As a process, globalization has two main characteristics. It unifies cultures, making the world more and more "a single place," while also broadening the consciousness of the world as a whole. Globalization is sometimes called the process that creates the McWorld or the process of CocaColonization of the world. However, the issue is more complex, since, with globalization, the shape of the world is in a continuous flux: the West is no longer seen as the colonizer but is itself colonized and changed due to massive migration (Măcelaru 2018, 69-76), a process which is itself facilitated by the ease of traveling and communication characteristic of globalization. Thus, globalization also brings the fall of local borders and the universalization of markets, ideas and technology. Măcelaru (2014c, 72) defines globalization as:

> ...a process of transformation, presently ongoing worldwide, that touches upon all areas of life and is characterized by: pronounced economic change, technological advancement particularly felt in the development of various modes of global communication, the emergence of a more homogenous global culture as cultural differences between nations and social groups begin to dissolve, and the apparition of a pronounced risk culture whereby manufactured risks (e.g., pollution, AIDS, international terrorism) begin to surpass natural risks (e.g., natural calamities).

This definition, however, is functional and leaves out other global trends, such as the political, evident in the "intentional" spread of liberal democracy, the dominance of global markets, the pursuit of global economic integration, and the transformation of production systems. Also, on the negative side, the different standards that are being applied, contribute to making the rich richer and the poor poorer and the influence of globalization on demography. While child mortality rates have decreased, so did birth rates. While life expectancy has increased, so did human upheavals, displacement, violence, wars and death caused by wars.

To these, I would also consider the influence of globalization on the life of faith communities. From the above, it should be obvious that globalization is an ambiguous process, operative in today's world, that holds together positive and negative elements. Positive in that globalization works against sectarianism, racism, exclusivism, and any other negative stance that threatens values, cultures, economies, and political structures all around the world. Negative in that communities come under unfair economic, political and cultural pressures exerted by "developed" countries upon their "underdeveloped" neighbors.

From a Christian perspective, the contrast described above is the same contrast faith communities have faced, between the positive outlook on life in community, where people are predestined to depend on each other and to engage in meaningful relationships, and the negative realities of sin, that bring out egoism, egocentrism, power plays,

ethnocentrism, individualism, racism, greed, sexism, and a general hermeneutic of suspicion. I propose though that the Church does have the resources to meet such challenges head on. As people of God, a community that finds her identity "in Christ," the Church should reject the way of life described above, and instead embrace actions such as breaking the denominational boundaries, focusing on community life as an alternative to individualism, involving all members of the community (including the laity) in the life of the Church, and cooperating with other religious communities in the pursuit of peace and the common good.

Along similar lines, Larry Rasmussen discusses globalization as a three-way move: the globalization of conquest and commerce; the globalization of development; and the globalization of "free trade" liberalization (Rasmussen 1999, 126-31). He also pleads for the application of "eco-justice," which is his way of advancing changes in seven dimensions of life: economic, social, institutional, informational, demographic, technological, moral and religious (Rasmussen 1999, 131-33). It is within this context of change that Rasmussen gives contours to the mission of the Church – she is not called to work for "sustainable development" but for "sustainable community." As for how this is attained, Anderson's proposed habitus may provide a process to be undertaken by faith communities at large. In Anderson's words:

> I understand *habitus* to be a practically oriented disposition of the human soul formed from general spirituality, shaped by disciplined meditation and the study of Christian texts, informed by a careful reading of the signs of the times and the practical knowledge necessary for the work of ministry in this time. A habitus is not just about thinking and it is more than skills (Anderson 1997, 44).

As for the principles of living undergoing such habitus, Anderson points out the need to wonder at the mystery of human uniqueness, to recognize the other, to practice hospitality toward the stranger and reconciliation as a way of living with diversity (Anderson 1997, 58). Thus, the aim of Christian mission, in Anderson's view, is not to convert or transform the other but to live peacefully with the neighbor in pursuit of common good and happiness.

## Conclusion

To conclude then, it appears that development and globalization are issues that are radically changing the context for mission, both domestically and internationally. The question of how the Church responds to the changes in the global economy, the ecological urgency, and the political, multi-religious, and multicultural arena remains challenging. As cultures are challenged to change, so do religions. The challenges for the traditional faith communities are the fragmentation brought in by the consumer culture of the globalized society, the religious relativism, and the increased individualization of faith. As for the responses suggested, these are:

- The renewed conscientization and active engagement of faith communities in performing their *traditional* role of providing meaning to life, even within the global system.
- The living out of the *prophetic* role faith communities have to demask injustice – the lacks, irregularities and problems that development and globalization may create.
- The steadfastness faith communities must show in their *revisionist* role, rejecting aspects of global culture that are contrary to the biblical vision of human flourishing (Măcelaru 2017, 49-55; Măcelaru 2014c, 233-36) and advocating for a return of societal values that have been challenged or lost.

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