

# Globalization and a Spirituality Of The Covenant

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## **Globalization, Multiculturalism, and ASC Charism**

This international symposium is dedicated to looking at the charism of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ in light of two of the most significant social factors shaping our world today: globalization and multiculturalism. What does a spirituality of the Blood of Christ have to say to each of these realities? In what way would they lead us in discipleship to Jesus Christ?

I wish to explore these questions in three presentations. In this first presentation, I want to look at the phenomenon of globalization as it affects our world today, and how a spirituality of the covenant might be a response to it. In the second presentation, multiculturalism will be the principal theme; a spirituality of the heart of Christ will be examined as one way of living in a multicultural world. The third presentation turns to the image of Mary, as Woman of the New Covenant, to serve as a guide for living the ASC charism in the world of today.

In order to set the scene for this first presentation, I would like to begin by a description of globalization. On that basis we can then turn to seeing how a spirituality of the covenant can serve as a response to its effects in the world today.

### **Globalization**

When the Cold War ended at the beginning of the 1990's, there was a brief time in which there seemed to be no overarching way of interpreting the world. Francis Fukuyama famously declared that we stood at the "end of history." However, by mid-decade it was clear that a new framework for seeing the world was emerging: that of globalization.

Just what is globalization? One can describe it as revolving around two axes. The first axis is interconnectedness. Advances in communications technologies in the last quart of the twentieth century have made possible the development of a communications network that allows people and institutions to be in contact with one another at a level and a pace that was previously unthinkable. The symbol and reality of this interconnectedness is embodied in the Internet and the World Wide Web. The interconnections already possible make the flow of information and of capital quick and easy. It is this interconnectedness that most characterizes the contemporary form of globalization.

But there is another side to this interconnectedness. This is exclusion, something which has been reflected upon especially by those who do not benefit from globalization, but experience being disadvantaged and even oppressed by it. In communications, globalization presumes access to a telephone. While the development of the mobile telephone is changing the picture of exclusion in

communications rapidly, large parts of the world still do not have access or cannot afford access. It has been estimated that forty-two percent of the world's population has never placed a telephone call. That is the face of exclusion.

In the economic interconnectedness created by globalization, many of the world's poor have had their livelihood disrupted by powerful globalized economic forces coming from the outside. In some instances, people are actually worse off economically than they were before. Moreover, they are robbed of whatever little autonomy and control over their own lives which they may have had. Recent studies suggest that a number of poor countries (such as China, India, and Vietnam) have improved their lots under globalization. But there is also a large number (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) whose lot has only worsened. Economic globalization, in the form of neo-liberal capitalism, has improved the lot of the rich and some of the poor, but the gap between the rich and the very poor, even within countries, has been made only wider.

The other axis around which globalization revolves is space. The advances in communications technologies have diminished the importance of time for organizing the world. The only people who have lots of time now are the poor and the elderly, the unemployed, and those who are made to wait. With globalization space is, on the one hand, compressed. Think, for example, of the amount of information which can be put on a microchip. The counterpart on the human scale is the global city. There are now more than four hundred cities in the world with a population of more than a million people. Mexico City has more people than the entire continent of Australia.

On the other hand, space has expanded, or been deterritorialized. Political boundaries mean little for the flow of information and capital. The concept of citizenship or belonging is changing. The wealthy population in a poor country may well identify more with their rich counterparts in another country than the poor citizens of their own country right next to them. A recent study in Latin America showed that those youth there who have access to the Internet are more likely to share values with their peers in North America than with their own parents.

Globalization affects especially four spheres of life. The first is communications. Beyond what has already been said about the flow of information across political boundaries, it should also be noted that these communications technologies also democratize communication and access to information. It is increasingly difficult to maintain control of communication and access to information in a hierarchical fashion in the face of the Internet. It is also changing the mobilization of public opinion. The campaign to ban landmines, which led to some 120 nations signing a treaty precisely to do that, was put together entirely on the Internet. It is also increasingly used to shame transnational corporations into more ethical and ecologically responsive behavior.

The second sphere is economics, perhaps the most visible face of globalization. With the interconnectedness of globalization, the world is increasingly in a single, interlocking economic system, commonly known as neo-liberal capitalism. As has already been noted, one is either inside or excluded from this system. At this point in time, it is presented as inevitable and unstoppable, creating a shift in production in society comparable to that of the Industrial

Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But history suggests also that periods of growing interconnectedness can come to a halt. The First World War and the Great Depression represented such an end to a period of greater interconnectedness--marked also by advances in communication and transportation technologies between 1850 and 1914.

The level of antiglobalization protest which has now become routine in the world points to the fact that the economic dimension of globalization, as it is currently being lived out, cannot continue unchecked. It must be made more humane. This will be one of the major issues facing globalization in the next decade.

The third sphere is the political. While the nation-state has been weakened by globalization, it is not about to disappear. There is at the moment very little balance of military and political power in the world. The United States exercises the greatest of both of these kinds of power. But it is also evident that, despite its power, it cannot immediately have its way in the world either. Arrangements which can create better balance are sadly lacking at this point in our history.

Fourth and finally, there is the sociocultural sphere. with interconnectedness has come here, too, concentrations of power. Much of this power, in terms of news reporting and cultural production of entertainment, is again centered in the United States. Such homogenization of cultural goods (in clothing, food, music, and the arts) seems once again to rob local settings and local populations of autonomy over their own lives.

This, in a nutshell, is a picture of globalization at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is marked by paradox, indeed deep ambivalence. It has enriched the lives of some, both economically and culturally. But it has impoverished still further the lives of many others, even widening the gap between the well-off and the desperately poor. Moreover, a closer look at the processes of economic and social globalization reveals that globalization has no goal of its own other than its own self-reproduction: that is to say, the goal of globalization is more interconnected--and more exclusion.

### **The Church's Task in Meeting Globalization**

What should the Church be doing in the face of globalization today? In the past few years, Pope John Paul II has been addressing globalization more and more directly. He recognizes the deeply ambivalent nature of globalization, harboring both risks and possibilities. I would like to suggest here, by way of setting the stage for a discussion of a spirituality of the covenant, three things which we as Church people might do to address globalization in our immediate context.

First of all, we need to work toward achieving greater communion and solidarity in our immediate settings. These have been the principal themes in Pope John Paul's treatment of solidarity. To quote from his 2000 World Day of Peace message, "Globalization, for all its risks, also offers exceptional and promising opportunities...to become a single family built on the values of justice, equity, and solidarity."

We need first and foremost to reach out to those immediately around us, for it is at the grassroots level that the disruptive effects of globalization are felt most acutely. Migration to urban areas for economic reasons has disrupted family life. Sudden unemployment created by economic shifts pushes some to the very edge of survival. The speed of social change can create a feeling of anomie, especially among the young, which is then assuaged by alcohol, drugs, and sexual promiscuity.

But efforts to attain a “solidarity without exclusion,” as the Pope calls it, is not of itself entirely sufficient. This leads to the second thing we must do in the face of globalization. We must also move toward addressing the cause of the disruptions in the first place. As people of faith, we must unmask the ideological values which drive globalization, and the idolatrous patterns of living which sustain it. The hoarding of huge wealth in a world of the poor, the deciding of all issues solely on their economic merit, and the measuring of human beings by their capacity to produce and to consume--this does not make for a healthy and equitable world.

Globalization apes religion in an idolatrous manner. Money replaces God as the object of our adoration. “Structural adjustment” is the necessary sacrifice of the poor. The “Good News” is that competition will make for a better life. The best commitment is to have no lasting commitments at all. These new “religious absolutes” must be combated. Their destructive tendencies for social life must be uncovered.

The third thing we need to do as a Church is provide a coherent spiritual path for living in a rapidly changing world. That spiritual path involves two things. First of all, it provides still points in a rapidly changing world where Gospel values are rooted, and not swept away in constant innovation and change. For the poor, these provide a source of hope in a situation which often seems hopeless. Second, this spiritual path is a road which seeks justice, the only long-term basis for a world of communion and solidarity. As members of the family of the Blood of Christ we need to draw upon the resources of our spirituality to provide such a spiritual path. It is to this spirituality that we now turn.

### **A Spirituality of the Covenant**

In 2000, the Theological Commission of the Union of Superiors General in Rome, issued a study on globalization, entitled “Inside Globalization: Toward a Multi-Centered and Intercultural Communion.” It is one of the best I have seen in trying to set forth the theological dimensions of responding to globalization.

In turning to the spirituality needed to face the challenges of globalization today, the document says, “We are living at exactly the right time to discover the global and international nature of the Covenant” (no. 39). The document goes on to explore how the biblical concept of the covenant can serve as a basis for understanding the catholicity of the Church, that is, the capacity of the Church to be at once particular and universal, inclusive of diversity yet bound in a communion of unity. It calls upon religious institutes to be “servants of the Covenant” (nos. 41-44) in order to serve these important dimensions of the Church.

For us in the Precious Blood family, the symbol of the covenant is not new. It is foundational to our spirituality. In the Scriptures, covenants between God and Israel are sealed in the blood of the victims offered in sacrifice. The central symbol of such sacrifice for us--Jesus' shedding his blood on the cross--would make no sense without the background of the covenant with God. Similarly, our understanding of how God is reconciling the world through Christ and the blood of his cross (Col 1:20) can only be understood against the background of God's covenant with us, and God's desire to draw us into that "new and everlasting covenant" of the forgiveness of sins and the inauguration of the Reign of God (Luke 22:20).

A good deal has already been written about the covenant and the Blood of Christ, especially in recent years. What I would like to focus upon here is one possible perspective on the meaning of covenant for you as Adorers of the Blood of Christ, especially in light of the challenge of globalization. I present this perspective in two parts: first, by recalling the meaning of covenant in the Bible; and second, what the blood of the covenant can mean for us today.

### **The Biblical Meaning of Covenant**

Exegetes tell us that the idea of covenant in the Bible has its roots in the treaties which were made between peoples in the Middle East. What was distinctive about Israel's experience of covenant was that God was always the initiator of the covenant with Israel. The relation between God and Israel was not that of equal partners. Rather, covenant represented the special care and regard God had for Israel. Israel was God's chosen people. Being chosen meant being special and favored, but it also meant special responsibilities for Israel, both to God and to its neighbors.

As we reflect on the meaning of covenant, we can never lose sight of this special aspect of covenant: that covenants come from God. What that means is that we can only come to understand fully what covenant means if we see that relationship, as much as is humanly possible, from God's perspective.

Seeing the covenant from God's perspective reveals to us two dimensions of what it means when God draws near to us. First of all, God's drawing near allows our brokenness to come into full focus for us. In the history of God's dealing with Israel, God draws near, God makes Himself felt, in times of crisis, when the ordinary routine of our days breaks down. We are shaken into a new attention, as it were. We cannot continue to live our routine as though nothing extraordinary was happening to us. It is at these moments when our vision is forced into wider perspective, whether we want that to happen or not. All of the things we ordinarily count upon simply cannot hold our world together. We become profoundly and painfully aware of the fragile nature of our very existence.

Israel's experience of covenant usually began in such an experience of its own brokenness. The experience of loss, of lack of safety, of fear opens up Israel's awareness of itself so as to make it more attuned to itself and to God. This opens the possibility of a new relation with God.

Second, the experience of covenant from God's perspective is an invitation to see that broken world with the vision of God. This is a shift in perspective for us. Up to this point we have seen our own limitations and failures from the perspective of the broken dreams we have had of ourselves. Now we see that same world from God's perspective. That perspective opens up for us a new horizon of hope which reframes, as it were, the whole picture. In the midst of that very brokenness arises an energy and a resolve that will lead us to transformation. We often want to concentrate on this part of the covenant because it fills us with joy, gratitude, hope, and peace. But its power for us is not understandable if we do not remember the brokenness out of which it has risen. God's initiative, God's invitation, lives us up to a new plane of existence, of having life abundantly.

To remind us of how these two perspectives work in covenant, let us recall briefly some of the covenants recorded in the Bible. Genesis 8:20--9:17: Noah and His Family. The first covenant we have in the Bible is with Noah and his family. God's anger has destroyed the entire world by a great flood. Now, as the waters subside, God makes a covenant with Noah and his family, never again to destroy the world in this way. Noah and his kin are reminded that they were made in God's image. They must respect life, never killing another human being, and respecting and caring for the earth.

When Noah and his family stepped from the ark, they must have had the feeling of people in trauma, just having survived a terrible event. They realize that they are the only survivors. With the flood waters still receding, they have trouble trusting the ground under their feet. They have difficulty orienting themselves. The feeling of their own fragile nature must have weighed heavily upon them.

God chooses not to dwell on that brokenness, but instead creates a new foundation under them--not only promising never to allow their world to perish by flood again, but also re-creating the world once more. People who have had the experience of the utter loss of their familiar world (as happens in the case of war) know the unspeakable pain of returning to what had been their homes, only to find that they can never return to their old way of life. Their only hope of survival is building again, re-creating their world, but knowing at the same time that it can never be the same.

Genesis 15: The Promise to Abraham and Sarah. Abraham and Sarah found themselves on the threshold of old age without any children. In that culture (as in many cultures still today) to grow old without offspring meant that there would be no one to care for them in their decline. Moreover, they would not be remembered after their deaths, which meant passing utterly into oblivion. All the networks of relations which make us human would be severed. They faced the fear which haunts us all as human beings: the fear of being utterly alone.

God invites them, however, into a new perspective--God's own vision of the future. They would not only have descendants, but they would be numbered as the stars of heaven. Abraham and Sarah would be remembered and invoked for generations unending.

Exodus 12: The Passover of the Lord. In the night when the final plague beset Egypt, God rescued the Hebrew slaves by enjoining them to mark their doors with a lamb's blood. They were to stay indoors as death swirled through the streets. In the morning, when danger had passed, God would rescue them.

Many of us have experienced those moments of extreme danger, when all we can hope for ourselves, or offer one another, is safety for one night. protection from danger is something which people in well-to-do societies presume. But much of the world is not afforded such protection. Safety is apportioned in small and uncertain quantities. Perhaps we can be safe but for one night; tomorrow brings new dangers.

That was the experience of the Hebrew slaves that night. To be safe is one of the deepest human needs, a need which is often transgressed in the experience of much of the world. God's action that night was a promise never to abandon those slaves, never to leave them without hope of safety.

Exodus 24: Making a New People. The story of the rescue of the Hebrew slaves continues. Like many refugees, like many people struggling to be free, it is clear what the Hebrew slaves want to get away from. But just what they are going toward has only the vaguest outline in their minds. They get to the other shore of the Red Sea, but then find themselves wandering in the desert.

This is the experience of many people today, who have had to struggle to overthrow oppression, but discover that living as a free people makes demands upon them which are new and unfamiliar. Those who could lead them in the struggle to resist cannot help them in the reconstruction of their society. Such has been the experience of peoples emerging from authoritarian regimes today.

God does not forget the Hebrews. In that most unlikely and inhospitable of places, God gives them a new future, forcing them into a new people who belong to God in a special way. That promise, that hope, is sealed in blood. As a people, they will still slip and fall, but seeing things from the perspective of God's vision for them gives hope and strength.

Luke 22: A New Covenant at the Last Supper. In that final meal with his disciples, Jesus offers a new covenant, even as he knows that they are about to betray and abandon him. What courage and trust it takes to make such a promise in the face of abandonment! the promise of that new covenant is rooted in the forgiveness of sins. That forgiveness means many things, but one meaning is certain: that the wrongdoing of the past no longer determines the future. This future does not pretend that the past never happened, but rather that the future is not beholden to the past. One thing about that future is certain: that the full circle of what the world can become will not be revealed to us until Jesus once again drinks of the cup with his disciples in the Reign of God, when all has been reconciled to God in Christ.

Solid ground under our feet. Not left alone and forgotten. Safe at least for one night. Belonging to a new and special people. A future which is not determined by the past. These are the hopes

and aspirations which arise out of profound experiences of brokenness, of failure, of limitation, of dead-end situations. The full glory and possibility which unfolds when we see the world from God's perspective can only be appreciated if we have first experienced our brokenness in full focus. It is this twofold perspective--of brokenness and hope--which forms our experience of covenant and the spirituality which flows from it.

### **A Spirituality of Covenant in the Face of Globalization**

What does a spirituality of the covenant look like today, especially in the light of the phenomenon of globalization (cf. nos. 36-60 of the USG document)? Religious institutes such as the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, which are at once local and transnational, reflect in a special way the catholicity of the Church in the face of globalization. That means a capacity to acknowledge and affirm difference without compromising unity. It is a commitment to inclusion and not leaving peoples behind, especially the poor, because of the rapid forces of globalization.

I would like to reflect on three aspects of a contemporary spirituality of the covenant: commitment, connection, and communion. These three ideas help us face globalization with the resources of our spirituality.

### **Covenant as a Commitment to Life**

A theme which Pope John Paul II has made central to the past ten years of his pontificate has been a commitment to the sanctity of life. Especially in his encyclical *Evangelium vitae* he has meditated upon life as a gift from God, and as the basis of the dignity of the human person. That meditation begins with the story of Abel, whose blood cried out from earth. *Evangelium vitae* contains the Pope's most profound meditation on the Blood of Christ.

The theme of life certainly resounds through all the biblical stories of the covenant. Covenants always promise new life, new well-being. In the face of globalization, when the life of the poor, especially poor women and children, is cheapened, a spirituality of the covenant can provide prophetic witness against those who would reduce the dignity of human life to the capacity to produce and to consume. When people are subordinated to economic processes, human dignity is not maintained. A covenant spirituality looks out especially for those whose lives are diminished or threatened by globalization.

Covenant is about life. It is also about commitment itself, a commitment which does not waver or disappear at the first sign of adversity. For the wealthier parts of the world which have benefited most from globalization, commitment has experienced a diminishment. To stay too long committed to one person or relationship is read as foregoing new possibilities which might prove more beneficial or more pleasurable. In cultures with a wealth of options, it becomes harder to convince people of the value of commitment as a value in itself.

A spirituality of covenant includes a sense of commitment, grounded in the commitment God makes to us in offering us a covenant. Constant innovation may produce for some a better life, but it cannot be at the cost of those enduring values which make human life worthwhile.

The spirituality of covenant is about even more than embracing the value of commitment. It is about what we commit ourselves to, to whom we are committed, both as individuals and as a religious institute such as the Adorers of the Blood of Christ. Where do our commitments lie, especially in the midst of the changes which globalization is bringing about in our world. The days of this symposium will be a good time to examine those commitments and what they entail for us.

### **Covenant as Connection**

Covenant is about connection, about relationships. In our discussion of the covenant God made with the Hebrew slaves in the desert (Ex 24), we spoke of the importance of belonging. We have all experienced at one time or another how uncomfortable it is to come into a situation and to be made not to feel to belong. If we find ourselves marginalized on a regular basis, that feeling of not belonging wears down our souls, and erodes our capacity to love and to trust.

One of the profound experiences of the poor in a globalized world is that of exclusion, of being made to feel that they do not belong. Exclusion has become one of the defining characteristics of globalization in the poor countries of the world today. They are simply being left behind. Women in both rich and poor societies experience marginalization by men and by the structures of society. A characteristic of a covenant spirituality is inclusion, not exclusion, of being special because we all are made in the image of God.

Secondly, a spirituality of the covenant is about identifying the wrong or bad connections in our world. These are relationships in our lives which are death-dealing and destructive, rather than life-giving. In wealthy societies, the plethora of choices and the possibilities offered to us can lead to fleeing into addictive behaviors and addictive relations--fleeing into alcohol, drugs, promiscuous sex, and overwork. A spirituality of the blood of Christ is a spirituality committed to life, and this spirituality is evident in our sense of covenant.

Third and finally, a spirituality focused on connections is a spirituality committed to the work of reconciliation. In a much fragmented world, be it in families in wealthy societies, or the experience of dislocation among the poor, humanity cries out for the healing grace of God's reconciling touch. The alienated, the separated, the lost in our midst need to be brought near in the Blood of Christ (cf. Eph 2:12ff.); the two need to be made one again.

Put simply covenant as connection means that we must go to the heart of all our relationships. How are they rooted, ultimately, in our fundamental relation with God? Are they a source of life and hope for us? Or do they keep us in a bondage which is not life-giving? Does the quality of community life as ASCs give us strength, deepen us in love, and fill us with hope as a covenant people?

## **Covenant as Communion**

“Communion” has been a key theological concept to describe the mystery of the Church since the Extraordinary Synod of 1985. It is a concept redolent with many meanings. I wish to touch on only a few of the meanings here with regard to covenant.

The idea of covenant itself, first of all, is intended to end in communion. That is to say, the goal of covenant is communion with God, of being united to God in a way which we can now only dimly imagine. Our potential communion with God is rooted in the communion within God, in the Holy Trinity, that communion of Father, Son and Spirit. Our own experience of covenant reaches its highest possible fulfillment in our entering into that communion with God.

Covenant and communion are related in a second way. As Pope John Paul has noted in *Novo millennio ineunte*, communion does not mean the disappearance of difference (cf. no. 43). Difference should not be made an absolute category, but difference does have a place in God’s plan. It is a reflection of the fullness of creation. In that apostolic letter, the Holy Father notes the importance of “making room for one another,” that is, of experiencing difference as a gift. It is a sign of the abundance of life. Covenant does not mean the erasure of difference, but a celebration of the variety of God’s creation.

In the sociocultural sphere, globalization often means homogenization, the erasure of local difference by the icons of global entertainment and consumption. Part of a spirituality of the covenant is keeping faith with the local, with those who are made to feel different. It is not siding with the popular and the powerful, but embracing all of God’s creation as it has been given to us.

Third, covenant is about hope. One of the aspects we saw in the biblical development of covenant is that the covenant’s promise always gave hope of something new, something barely imaginable at the present time and within present suffering. Hope is how God draws us out of suffering into the future. To live the spirituality of covenant as hope, we must be in touch with the wounds of the people with whom we walk, and try to imagine what God has in store for those same people as they walk in faith. Many of the poor bear the burdens of globalization without experiencing its benefits. Hope may be what keeps them going. As we walk with them, we too must discern the glimmerings of hope on the horizon.

Fourth, covenant for us dedicated to a spirituality of the Blood of Christ finds special expression in the phrase in I Cor 10:16: “the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?” At the heart of that sharing is the sense of participation, of being part of what is happening. In a globalized world, where individuals and communities experience the onrush of globalizing forces as the loss of autonomy and control over their own lives, to be able to participate--to have a say--is part of the experience of being human. Our cup of blessing that sharing in the Blood of Christ--sharing in the suffering, sharing in the hope of the heavenly banquet.

## **Conclusion**

To live a covenant spirituality in the face of globalization is to live boldly. Bold living does not shrink from engaging in the experience of suffering, which is the lot of so much of our world. We engage in the suffering of the world not out of a presumption of our strength but out of the love Christ showed forth in the pouring out of his blood on the cross.

A spirituality of the covenant is also bold in its hope and confidence into the transforming power of God's love. Where God's love is leading us, we can now only vaguely imagine. It will certainly be to a new place. As we stand now with those who suffer and those who hope, we must try to give an account of the things we hope for, as the Letter to the Hebrews admonishes us. Covenant gives us strength in suffering, and assurance in hope. It does not forget our suffering, but transfigures it, as the wounds of the Risen Christ were transfigured. It lures us on to that fullness to be found only in the Reign of God, when God will be all in all.

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What has been your experience of globalization? Its positive aspects? Its negative aspects?
2. When have you experienced brokenness in your life as an ASC, and when did you discover new hope?
3. Explore one of the themes of a covenant spirituality—commitment, connection, communion—in your life as an ASC.

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