

**Intercultural Relations in an Age of Globalization:  
An Invitation for Theological Reflection**  
An INSeCT Report

Introduction

The International Network of Society for Catholic Theology (INSeCT) held its Second Triennial Colloquium, hosted by DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois from 19 to 21 June 2008 on the topic of The Theological Challenge of Intercultural Relations in an Age of Globalization. In attendance were 26 theologians from six continents, representing fourteen Societies for Catholic Theology from twenty countries. This report seeks to offer an organized presentation of the topics and issues raised about globalization and intercultural relations that were discussed during the colloquium. Colloquium participants have read in areas of globalization theory, cultural anthropology, sociology, economics, and other social scientific disciplines, but we are by training theologians and we are seeking to describe and address these issues in light of our expertise and with pastoral concern foremost in mind. Consideration of these kinds of issues can always benefit from insights offered by our colleagues in other disciplines and by other theologians with special expertise in these areas.

The topic for the 2008 colloquium was decided upon through a collective process of deliberation. During the first assembly held in 2005, attended by 25 representatives of these same Catholic theological societies from 19 countries, one of the major areas of consensus reached was that there was an urgent need to develop a new and nuanced contextual analysis of “the signs of the times” in various areas: globalization; intercultural relations; migration; fundamentalism and relativism; secularization; detraditionalization; ecology and respect for the earth.

In preparation for this 2008 colloquium officers of societies were invited in July 2007 to discuss and deliberate with the officers of their societies (and in cases where there is no society, e.g., in El Salvador and Kinshasa with theological colleagues on their faculty) to identify the most pressing signs of the times that merit attention. Answers were received in September, collated, and discussed by the officers of INSeCT at their Steering Committee Meeting, which took place 14-15 September 2007 during the Conference of the European Society of Catholic Theology. The overwhelming consensus was that globalization and intercultural relations deserved special attention at this time, followed by issues associated with fundamentalism and relativism, and ecology. Following this lead, the officers chose the topic *The Theological Challenge of Intercultural Relations in an Age of Globalization*. Participants were again asked to consult and collaborate with the officers of their society or faculty and prepare two statements: one identifying the impact of globalization on their local community and the theological issues being raised by these dynamics; and a second discussing the intercultural challenges and conflicts in your local communities and the theological responses being developed to address these issues. These reports can be found on the INSeCT website.

After the first day of the conference devoted to meeting participants and learning about their societies or faculties, during the morning of the second day there were small group discussions of regional manifestations of globalization (two in English; one in Spanish; and one in French), based on the working papers prepared for the colloquium. In full assembly late in the morning one person from each group reported on their findings and recorded (see the INSeCT website for this information). In the afternoon small groups discussed regional manifestations of intercultural challenges and conflicts. Late in the afternoon in full assembly, the results of these small groups were reported (available on the INSeCT website). In the evening, Robert Schreiter

presented a paper on the topic of the colloquium. In preparing his lecture Schreiter had read the written reports of the participants and his lecture analyzed the interconnection between the dynamics of globalization and interculturality. On the third day of the colloquium, the full assembly deliberated about how to pursue these topics further and to invite further reflection upon these issues among theologians, in particular by the members of our societies and faculties. In other words, how can these research projects be advanced at the grass roots level and how might the results of that work be made available and exchanged through the INSeCT website and publications.

In what follows, we will identify some of the major areas of convergence, disputed topics, and areas of divergence for our collective work. This document represents a statement of the group. Noteworthy disagreements will be indicated in text or in footnotes.

### **Globalization**

Globalization is the term that is used to describe changes that have occurred at an accelerated pace during the late twentieth century in politics, economics, communication technology, and transportation affecting the mobility of peoples. Questions about what constitutes the nature of the dynamics associated with globalization and the extent and quality of its effects remains open for further debate, which we will explore below. In spite of the ongoing deliberations about the nature and evaluation of processes and consequences of globalization, it is clear that certain particular phenomena that characterize this current phase of globalization are a reality, a social fact, which cannot be denied. The overwhelming conclusion of our deliberations is that the dynamics associated with globalization must not be viewed as fate or deterministic over which human agents and communities have no control, but that the factors

that are involved must be assessed and personal and collective agency must be fostered in response to these realities. What is needed are ways to assess the repercussions associated with globalizing dynamics, positive and negative, not in the abstract, but as these affect and are experienced in different local communities and regions, in different nations, on different continents. Globalization affects people in different communities and regions of the world differently.

In order to begin to evaluate globalization and to invite theological, ethical, and practical responses, regionally and in local communities, we need to establish the major spheres of life influenced by globalization that must be examined. These specific topics were identified in the papers and in the discussions:

1. The Economics of Globalization

Manifestations and issues surrounding the economics of the current phase of globalization received special attention during our deliberations and established a larger frame of reference for our discussion of particular topics. The development of new forms of global markets and international trade occasioned by the growth of multinational corporations as well as more recent and commonplace practices of reallocation of jobs, identified as offshoring and outsourcing, all of which are associated with an increasingly global economy, have had numerous consequences around the world.

These dynamics associated with the actions of corporations and governments affect individual people, families, communities, and nations in diverse ways, for some offering increased opportunities and for others new constraints and challenges, for everyone insecurity and volatility. The economics of globalization adversely affects the scarcity of basic needs

(food, water, fuel), the conditions of human labor (wages, unemployment, migration), and social security issues associated with health care availability and insurance and retirement pensions all are affected by the economics of globalization. These phenomena take on particular shape in specific locales. These merit much greater attention and response.

The scarcity of food, water, and energy in certain sectors of the world and also within particular subgroups and regions within given societies—all reflective of the unequal distribution of the world's resources—are made more complex by global economic dynamics. The perennial demands for these basic needs have compounded with the increase of the population of the world and the influence of market forces and disproportionate wealth on the distribution of these goods. Moreover, the increasing demand for energy, especially in fossil fuels, has influenced regional conflicts (e.g., Nigeria Delta region), environmental debates (e.g., drilling offshore and in national parks, global warming and the ozone depletion caused by Chlorofluorocarbons [cfc]), but also international global dynamics associated with the politics of the Middle East (in Iraq, Iran, and so on) in relation to western governments. In addition, local regions change their farming and production priorities to meet global market demand in order to maximize profits for corporations and support close relationships between governments and the private economic sector, often multinational corporations, instead of establishing priorities based on local needs or most urgent global needs. This is encountered in different ways in different parts of the world.

Besides new patterns of distributing the resources of the earth in light of new patterns of commerce and consumption being formed by new economic forces, globalization has had a profound impact on issues pertaining to human labor. There has been a globalization of the workforce. This is in part attributed to offshoring where an entire business relocates its entire business process in manufacturing, production, or serving to other countries, such as China, or

India, or the Philippines. Another contributing factor is outsourcing where certain business boards and managers reassign specific manufacturing or production processes or services from local work forces to a third party in another part of a given country, or more often to another part of the world, often where there are lower wages, less desirable working conditions, and fewer to no benefits like health care, childcare, and pension programs provided. The practices of offshoring and outsourcing are chosen to lower costs and increase profits for corporate executives and stockholders. This regularly means those corporations and local policies that can produce goods and services with the cheapest work force with the lowest amount of social safety network, such as health insurance, childcare assistance, retirement policies are those who receive larger contracts. Good jobs with fair wages and benefits in certain countries and economically developed regions of countries decrease whereas low paying jobs increase in various countries with higher unemployment, not only in service sectors, but also among skilled laborers, but without promising potential employees wage justice and a social security network associated with health care insurance and pensions. Often the threat of offshoring or outsourcing is used to instill fear among union members and work forces in negotiations for future contracts. These factors have contributed to the rise of migrant workers, but also longer term patterns of migration within countries and between countries and continents. More attention will be given to issues of the displacement of peoples below.

The perception and reality of crises in the areas of food (for example, rice), water, and fuel shortage crises alongside of the rise of unemployment, fluctuating income, deterioration of the social security net, and migration have all contributed to increased social unrest and violence in various settings. The volatility in markets and work opportunities and social safety net has led

to a heightened sense of anxiety and insecurity about filling present needs and about the larger prospects for future prosperity.

Globalization, especially in terms of its economic features, may be assumed to function as a descriptive and value-neutral way of analyzing global dynamics. However, this assumption must be challenged. Often economic globalization is associated with a particular neo-liberal approach to markets and trade and the distribution of goods and services around the world and a political mandate to promote this one neo-liberal economic paradigm. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fragmentation of Marxist Socialism, neo-liberal economics may appear to be the only game in town, but in fact, there are many more options operative in the world. There is a need for more discriminating, differentiating approaches to the economic realities and options. Particular neo-liberal approaches must be assessed and criticized when imposed as the only model, and situated within a larger framework showing alternative and mixed economic models at work.

Any assessment of the economics of globalization must recognize that there are asymmetries at work. This point was stressed by the Spanish-speaking group. Such asymmetries are evident in terms of trade and the labor force: “Global flows are marked by strong inequalities and injustices, and bilateralism is rarely reciprocal.” Brazil, the Amazon, Chile, and El Salvador all provide examples of this asymmetry, but other examples can be found in relation to situations in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. Moreover, long standing asymmetries influence how the debt by countries in the southern hemisphere is being dealt with by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The globalization of markets and economics must be judged not only on the basis of the production of wealth for shareholders

and the wealthy of the world, but must be evaluated in terms of the qualities of life of all of those involved, above all by those who are poor and at the margins of society.

## 2. Migration and the Displacement of Peoples

The impact of the economics of globalization, such as evolving global market forces and trade patterns, but also the increased ease of purchasing and delivery of goods and services across international boundaries, has contributed to increased migration and the displacement of peoples. Migration is often motivated by the quest for human well being, especially in search of gainful employment in order to improve economic conditions to meet basic needs for oneself and one's family, if not to achieve some modicum of prosperity. In addition, migration takes place as a response to social conflict and the desire to escape regional violence, disease, and prejudice. It has always had a profound impact on family life and often results in the loss of regional and family connectedness, memories, and identity.

The older phenomenon of migration has more recently been associated with the longer history of colonization. Newer forms of migration in the twentieth century have been influenced by the phenomena associated with the facets of globalization associated with the globalization of the economy, the increased accessibility to information about other contexts made possible by the internet and global communication, and the new possibilities for transportation.

What characterizes this new phase of migration and immigration? Newer patterns of migration include the following features.

- Children and Orphans: As a result of ongoing conflict and warfare, whether shaped by international forces, or by ethnic, tribal, or religious ideologies, and as a result of pandemic scourge of HIV Aids in certain parts of the world, there has been an increase



number of orphans and children especially in the southern hemisphere who are migrating. This contributes to parentless children migrating in search of gainful employment and to escape the ravages of violence and disease.

- Women: There are likewise increasing numbers of women migrating. Often illegal migrant women are providing child care, serving as domestic workers, as well as working in various service and small manufacturing sectors of the economy. Some speak of the feminization of immigration.
- Men often migrate across continental or national borders to meet the needs of seasonal work or to find work in trade or business. The increase migration of men is sometimes attributed to the flat or declining possibilities for finding a job in their homeland, which is sometimes exacerbated by international trade agreements that stifle movements for a living wage and increased benefits.
- Family life suffers. Women and men migrants often leave their parents and extended families in order to find financial resources to support their kin back home, but the toll on these family relations is great.

The life of a migrant worker entails the diminishment of freedom. The older phenomenon of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from Africa to the U.S. is a *sui generis* example of forced migration that has had long lasting, trans-generational consequences. Twentieth century forms of migration, illustrated by the situation in the United States of migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean and in Central Europe with migrants from Turkey and Eastern Europe are forms of migration borne of economic hardship and regional conflict and war, which has sometimes resulted in people be identified as illegal immigrants. The more recent situation of Hispanic migrants in the U.S. provides one particularly important example of migration as

victims of globalization. There are other important instances of migration, such as the movement of Turks into Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, and other parts of Europe, and people from Arabic communities with large Muslim populations experiencing difficulties in Western context, limited freedom, and prejudice. A distinct and particularly dire phenomenon is associated with women from Asia and Eastern Europe are forced by conditions or physically to move to other parts of the world and are forced to be involved in the sex trade. The push and pull of labor markets can affect migration patterns. These offer examples of forms of limited freedom, resulting in new forms of economic hardship, compounding the loss of communal and familial ties and memories. The status of illegal immigrants illustrates the criminalization of migration practices. The question is raised whether certain forms migration, with its limitation on human freedom, can be identified as modern form of slavery.

What kind of work do migrants do? In many cases migrants, often women, do work that is dirty, dangerous, and distained. They care for the sick, the elderly, and children. They work in sanitation with dangerous chemicals and human waste. They are required to do the work in the service sector of the economy that people deride. Men are often engaged in physical labor and are given limited opportunities for training and education to find a better job with higher pay.

### 3. Personal and collective formation of identity, agency, and culture

Globalization is contributing to new awareness and forms of self-identity and subjectivity for individuals and groups. This topic received great attention and raised great concern throughout the colloquium. Individuals and groups are involved in a process of cultural evolution resulting in the formation of new mentalities. This transformation has been brought

about by new communication technologies, more people with access to television, the emergence of the internet, and the increasingly widespread use of cell phones, which has resulted in new forms of information-based exchange and communication. Likewise, the increased mobility brought about by transcontinental transportation has influenced migration, but also travel to different continents and new cultures has been made more widely accessible.

Economic globalization has established consumer practices of advertising and branding of products geared to certain target audiences and the promotion of particular identities associated with certain commodities. McDonalds, Levi Jeans, Starbucks, and Verizon cell phones now seem ubiquitous and have been used as illustrations and metaphors of a certain cultural leveling or homogenization created by neo-liberal market processes associated with globalization. There is no doubt that powerful market forces shape desires and can bring about a certain moral malformation about what constitutes the good life. However, globalization as a cultural process is neither unilateral (from North to South) nor homogenous (the McDonaldization of the world).

Globalization has provided an opportunity to learn about the peoples and practices of diverse cultures around the world. This has inaugurated a new age of discovery of diverse peoples and cultural worlds previously unknown or stereotyped. The new awareness of the diversity of cultures is often associated with a repudiation of a monolithic cultural maturation process and the promotion of a doctrine of multiculturalism that affirms the legitimacy of diverse cultures coexisting. Such a doctrine of multiculturalism often assumes a facile approach to discourse, practices, and policy issues, developed to foster openness to multicultural diversity and modes of behavior and discourse, but it often operates with hidden assumptions that undermine genuine diversity and fails to take into account how cultural differences affect

organization, work, decision making, the state, and power relations. Is there a way to promote intercultural communication that can promote mutual learning between cultural groups and enrichment and conflict negotiation and reconciliation without imposing a certain doctrine of multiculturalism that disregards genuine differences, is conflict averse, and that fails to address genuine intercultural grievances? This was a question we returned to repeatedly throughout our time together.

The economic and cultural factors associated with globalization seem to diminish a sense of human freedom and agency and a loss of a sense of identity. Many aspects of economic and cultural life seem beyond the control of individuals, life partners, families, and communities. In fact, the economic and cultural elements involved in globalization are the result of human decisions and represent human interests and the influence of powerful nations, corporations, and elites within societies. How can communities, in particular churches, other religious groups, and other voluntary associations promote the cultivation of certain forms of agency in this new era? How can groups cultivate new formation practices that help individuals and groups discern and filter the flood of messages being sent out on the airwaves? How can groups bond together in strategic ways to foster resistance to hegemonic forces at work through market forces in the world and advance social transformation in the interest of a genuine common good?

The cultural dynamics associated with globalization are related to historical forces connected to modernization, secularization, and detraditionalization, which will be treated in the second part of this report. What is particularly noteworthy in this context is that globalization has contributed to an unprecedented awareness of religious pluralism, on the one hand, and a new appreciation of the lack of internalized pluralism in certain forms of religion, e.g., in

Christian or Islamic thought, on the other. This is currently being debated in terms of fundamentalism and relativism, syncretism and inculturation.

#### 4. Larger questions, disputed topics

4.1 One major question that was discussed and debated was how are we to assess globalization? What aspects are life-giving and what are death-dealing? How do we judge the quality of life? Life span? Infant mortality rate (between birth and one year of age)? Life expectancy at birth? Employment ratio? Basic needs being met? Literacy Rate, and Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Education Rate? Poverty Ratio? Malnutrition Ratio? What percentage of the population is defined as dependent (under 15 and over 65) relative to those between 15 and 65? What about measuring the life of ecosystems and the planet? What are the statistics about the human condition? How can the information provided by the UN Development Reports be of help in evaluating globalization patterns? Should these statistics be problematicized? What do the statistics reveal, what do they conceal? Are there other ways of measuring the quality of life? Who decides what is a good quality of life? What is the impact of globalization on political structures? How do we judge personal and collective human agency relative to statistics—whether people have a sense of their own destiny? Does globalization contribute or hinder this formation of agency, discernment of goods, and the pursuit of the common good? Or does it foster fatalism and greater inequalities? To what extent and in what ways should the churches be resisting globalization? How can and should it foster globalization? The church has been and continues to be an agent of globalization and forced homogenization. How are we to assess the church's role in the process of globalization?

4.2 Are the problems associated with globalization accurately identified, are they real, or are they being over-emphasized and polemicized? This question elicited a number of responses by

participants who argued that the negative consequences are real, death-dealing, associated with neo-liberalism and western economic powers, and are reproducing colonizing dynamics on the world stage. This is a form of violence and it promotes resistance and violence in turn.

4.3 There are numerous ethical issues involved in globalization. Ultimately an ethics of life provides the most comprehensive frame of reference for addressing the phenomenon of globalization.

4.4 Globalization is having a profound impact on the church: new experiences of catholicity, new experiences of racial and ethnic conflict.

### **Intercultural Relations**

Culture, like the term globalization, has a variety of meanings depending on one's historical context, theological or social scientific discipline, and theoretical orientation. Culture is generally understood to pertain to the meaning conveyed by a given group's symbols, narratives, ritual and social practices that offer individuals and communities a sense of identity and orientation in life. People are shaped by cultural traditions of beliefs and practices and by intercultural relations, by the cultural beliefs and practices of other groups. As a result, cultural traditions and intercultural relations are sites of struggle and conflict and ongoing negotiations, as much as they are or can be sources of discovery, inspiration, and solace. Cultures are often the source of continuity in personal and social life, but they can also at the same time be the matrix of change, upheaval, innovation, reform, and fusion of traditions of practice and belief. Cultures are the product of human imagination and collective practices of memory, narrative, ritual, and polity. Cultures are not only or primarily associated with national identities, but also with regionalism, ethnic and racial factors, religious cultural traditions, scientific, social, and

political ideologies and worldviews, and generational differences as well as contrasting viewpoints within contemporary youth culture (e.g., pop culture, hip hop culture, indie culture).

The discussion of intercultural dynamics among the colloquium participants was animated. These discussions followed from particular challenges in local, regional settings posed by where the participants were from: in India, the Philippines, and Malaysia, in South Africa, Benín, Nigeria, and Kenya, in Australia, in Latin American situations in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and El Salvador as well as in the Caribbean islands, in Western and Eastern Europe—France and Germany, Belgium and Poland, and in Canada and the United States. These are representative situations, of course, but there are other recent or currently contested intercultural scenarios and conflicts that merit attention, which the participants were mindful of, such as the situation in the Sudan, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the Balkans, Turkey, Northern Ireland, in the Middle East, as well as in other situations in South East Asia and East Asia.

#### 1. Multiculturalism and Migration Revisited

There were a number of topics and themes that emerged while discussing these various intercultural matrixes. One of these topics has already been raised in the previous discussion of immigration, that is, the debate surrounding the theoretical assumptions operative in the use of the term multiculturalism to describe the aim or value associated with the promotion an inclusive and open attitude toward cultural diversity and intercultural relations in a given context. The difficulty of using this term is that it is often assumed that the group that is in the majority is often the arbiter of what cultural expressions and practices are valued and promoted and what cultural differences are deemed unacceptable or problematic. The promotion of multiculturalism can be viewed as the politically acceptable way to promote intercultural harmony at the expense

of intercultural honesty concerning intercultural tensions and open conflict about cultural expressions and practices and the history of intercultural grievances. The fact of cultural diversity may be acknowledged, but forms of discrimination and segregation (ghetto-ization) are operative in regions around the world (for example, Hispanics in the U.S. context).

## 2. Secularization and Detraditionalization in Intercultural Contexts

Concerns about the impact of secularization and detraditionalization on local cultures received a great deal of attention during the sessions devoted to intercultural issues. One underlying question concerned the widely debated topic whether secularization theories offered a viable or the best framework for analyzing religion and culture.<sup>1</sup> Theories of secularization seek to explain certain cultural dynamics about the viability and influence of religious beliefs and practices in relation to processes of modernization. How are religious traditions and practices correlated with the rise of modern science and technology, liberal ideology as reflected in democratic societies and free-market capitalism, and the Marxist theory in communist societies? Will religious beliefs and practices become increasingly marginalized, become a matter of private personal life, not the public realm, and is the practice of religion in decline and will it come to an end? Many governing assumptions that were operative in the development of secularization theories are no longer accepted. The differentiation of religion from politics, science, and economics is widely recognized, but not the decline of religion, not the privatization of religion, and not the inevitable end of religion. It is increasingly affirmed that there is no one logic and structure and essence for modernization that will unfold in various contexts around the world and likewise there is not one secularizing process. Modernization and secularization are pluriform. Because of the challenges to secularization theories, some prefer to speak of the



contemporary period as post-secular, while the category secular and secularization theories remain in use.

The future of religion may not be perceived in jeopardy, but there is a great deal of concern about the vitality and influence of religious beliefs and practices on personal and social life in various sectors of the world. This discussion takes one form in Europe. The declining influence of religion in Europe is still in evidence and was symbolized in the recent public debate about whether there should be any mention of God and the European history of religion—especially Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—in the Treaty of Lisbon formulated by the nations in the European Union. The French version of secularity has long been associated with *laïcité*, anti-clericalism, and a certain disenchantment concerning the role of religion in social institutions and individual lives, which is more recently reflected in the law banning the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols, such as headscarfs by Muslim women, in publicly funded schools. The decline and relatively low percentage of people practicing religion in Europe must be weighed against the growing influence of new religious movements, the remaining vitality of Christianity in certain countries, such as Ireland and Poland, and the recent sociological studies that indicate certain religious beliefs remain important for significant percentages of Europeans (World Value Survey and European Value Survey).<sup>2</sup> “Believing without belonging” (Grace Davie’s formulation) has been used and widely accepted to describe certain trends in Europe (and beyond), but others have wondered whether Europeans may in fact be more religious than they are willing to acknowledge because of their perception of the cultural working assumptions about the secularity of European society.<sup>3</sup> The end of the Cold War, the downfall of the Soviet Union, and the development of the European Union raise large questions about the future of Christianity and of religious beliefs and practices as the borders of Europe expand in the East and

in the South. There are particular questions raised about the transitions that are currently underway in places like Poland where Christianity played a central cultural role in bringing about the collapse of communism, but whether it will continue to have such an important role as this society evolves is very much in question.

The practice of religion in North America, and in the United States in particular, has never followed the European pattern. Non-establishment of the church and state is not disestablishment. The percentage of people in the U.S. who continue to attend religious worship and are actively involved in religious cultures remains significant. What is noteworthy, however, in both Europe and in the United States, is that there is considerable evidence that religious traditions, and other cultural traditions, are not being handed on with the same degree of effectiveness to younger generations as in previous periods in history. Some scholars have chosen to speak of detraditionalization to describe religious illiteracy or selective knowledge of religious traditions, especially among younger people, as an indication of generational changes.<sup>4</sup> Some have suggested that young people are religious consumers who chose from various traditions, whereas others have suggested they are religious producers who are drawing from religious traditions to create their own religious worldview through tinkering or bricolage.<sup>5</sup> Modernization, secularization, detraditionalization are occurring differently in Benin, Belgium, Brazil, and Boston.

Apathy and even hostility toward religion represent a particular cultural option that can be identified with a number of positions. A specific culture of scientific and technological rationality, often found in academic settings, and associated with empirical assumptions, is in evidence with recent proponents of atheism (e.g., Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens). Nihilistic claims, historically identified with the death of God philosophy of Friedrich

Nietzsche, has found currency among postmodern forms of deconstruction and discourse theory associated with Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Alternately, protest atheism as a practical response to the lethal power of religion in violent situations around the world is also once again finding currency.

The increasing influence of forms of Christianity, especially Pentecostalism, in the global south and the ascendance of Islam around the world make the question about the decline and end of religion no longer compelling. Even professed secular philosophers, like Jürgen Habermas, have acknowledged that we live in a post-secular world and that religious traditions must be recognized for their role in secular discourse. Religious symbols and narratives continue to play a role in the lives of individuals and groups. But the question is what role is religion to have in the everyday personal lives of people and in the public sphere?

### 3. Religious Pluralism

Increasing encounters between individuals and groups of people from different religious traditions and the greater accumulation of knowledge about these religions has occurred throughout the modern period as new patterns of migration took place and greater possibilities for intra-continental and transcontinental travel arose. The compression (shrinking the limits) of time and space associated with globalization brought about by new modes of communication (most noticeably through television and the internet) and through intercontinental travel has dramatically contributed to a new heightened awareness of religious pluralism. This has fostered discovery, exchange, and collaboration among members of diverse religions, but encounters with new and at times seemingly strange and foreign peoples, beliefs, and practices has also fanned old prejudices and fueled greater insecurities and in some cases hostilities and marginalization

(again fostering territorial and cultural ghetto-ization). This received considerable attention during our conversations and a number of concrete scenarios and examples were discussed in the small groups and in the full assembly. They include the following.

- Post-colonial assessments of indigenous religious traditions. The encounter between Christian missionaries and ancient civilizations in Asia, Latin America and Africa is being reevaluated with the aftermath of the many situations of colonialism. Specifically, how Western Christianity was preached, planted, and took root in southern soil is in the process of being scrutinized. The questions being raised certainly entail an historical examination of conscience: How did Christians comport themselves in relation to members of traditional Asian religions, African Traditional Religion, and Pre-Columbian religious traditions? But looking to the future, how do we understand the inculturation of Christian in these cultures today where other living religious traditions and recovered memories of living traditions that have been out of use, are and can still be vital? Must Christian appreciation and selective reception of traditions of belief and practice be repudiated? Must syncretism and multiple religious belonging be dismissed as incompatible with authentic Catholic faith? This is a question that takes on new significance not only in the southern hemisphere, but also in the north where there is a new receptivity to venerable traditions from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The growing influence of Afro-Brazilian religion in Uruguay, Argentina, and other countries of the area, offers one example.
- Pentecostalism. The rise of Pentecostalism and new Christian groups (“sects”) in the global south is now often considered one of the most significant new religious trends. The comparative investigation of the basic beliefs and practices of the various forms of

Pentecostalism is now beginning.<sup>6</sup> The increasing influence of Pentecostalism is related, on the one hand, to the emergence of Charismatic expressions in other Christian communions, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, and various Protestant traditions. On the other hand, the so-called gospel of wealth and prosperity has been associated with Pentecostal-like characteristics—strong emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, animated worship services, and dramatic confrontation with destructive powers, while also embracing dubious beliefs about material wellbeing as a consequence of religious faithfulness.

- The increase of Anti-Semitism in Europe. Synagogues and Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated. There have been acts of hostility toward Jews, sometimes through public demonstrations by neo-Nazi groups and at other times by acts of individuals destroying property, and through verbal and physical abuse.
- The ascendance of Muslim extremists among various indigenous groups and global networks of groups has been an assault not only on the lives and well being of people from every continent, but has also been detrimental to the authentic and peaceable practice of Islam by faithful Muslims. As reprehensible as acts of terrorism are, the critique of “western culture” and “western imperialism” that fuels much of this violence merits careful analysis and evaluation.
- The rise of militant Islam by relatively small numbers of Muslims has contributed to the escalation of antagonism toward Muslims in general and toward migrants from Turkey and the Middle-East to the West.

3.5 More broadly one can identify situations of intercultural conflicts that have a racial or ethnic component frequently also have a religious dimension as well. This is evident in the

Bosnia conflict, where Islam, Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions of Christianity have been viewed as a dynamic and symbolic condition and factor. The relation is also evident in Rwanda with the Tutsis and the Hutus, but not so in the conflict in the post-election violence in Kenya in 2008 and in the delta region of Nigeria. How do cultural symbols and myths, including religious forms, function in situations of tribal, ethnic, and racial conflict?<sup>7</sup>

4. A set of issues was raised about the credibility of the church in the public realm, for the lives of individuals, local communities, and broader social issues. The church has often been identified with cultural imperialism in the past and continues in the present. How do church officials operate in relation to divisive cultural issues globally and regionally? In what situations and why do they promote cultural conflict and polarization, on the one hand, and dialogue and collaboration, on the other? Are there limits to dialogue and collaboration in situations of cultural diversity?

5. There are a variety of other topics that were raised that merit mention.

5.1 With the advance of computer technology and improved modes of communication the question is whether there is a certain culture of communication technology associated with increased usage of phones, texting, e-mails, and blogs in the late twentieth century.

5.2 The issue of race remains as important as ethnicity in intercultural relations. This was raised as an important topic for analysis in El Salvador, Brazil, and in the U.S.

5.3 To what extent are generational cultures or youth sub-cultures fostering networking across national and continental boundaries?

5.4 How do gender issues factor into cultural dynamics of education, conflict, and conflict mediation? How does the debate about stability and change in gender roles in situations of work, marriage and partnership, and parenting contribute to larger cultural strife and change?

5.5 What role does the “war” or polarization of progressive and conservative cultures in a given culture and provide a basis for international coalitions of cultural forces? How do particular issues concerning women’s rights, civil rights, the rights of homosexuals serve as distinctive cultural issues or as contributing to larger cultural dynamics?

5.6 There needs to be follow-up investigations of the aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, and similar kinds of efforts in Northern Ireland, Guatemala and elsewhere? How have the results of the commission been received? To what extent do people express their rejections of these efforts through migration?

5.7 The culture of crime associated with organized crime, drug trafficking, and selling of arms merits further investigation. This perverse and in some places pervasive culture has become an intercultural network that works in various nations in Latin America, in Asia, in the Middle East as well as in major cities in North America and Europe. This pernicious culture is as destructive and ruthless as various militias.

6. A number of questions emerged:

6.1 What is the connection of these intercultural issues and (the recent wave) of globalization?

6.2 In our expectations for celebrating difference in diversity, are we expecting too much, too quickly?

6.3 What does our discourse reveal about cultural difference?

6.4 How do we understand truth? How are our understandings of truth based on certain experiences or assumptions about unicity and plurality?

6.5 Do particular communities see diversity as a gift and as an opportunity for intercultural gift exchange or as a challenge to be avoided?

**Conclusion**  
**An invitation to develop regional theologies in response to these issues**

The colloquium ended with participants struggling with these questions: How can we advance further research and discussion on these important and urgent topics that will only grow in significance? How can we promote the development of theological responses drawing on all the theological disciplines to these issues that will be of service to the social mission of the church in the world? We reached the agreement that our collective deliberations should be prepared in this written form and shared with our respective societies and faculties. We are especially mindful of the fact that in these areas theologians do not have any special expertise, but that they draw from and depend upon the expertise of our colleagues in other disciplines—the social sciences in particular in these cases—and people who work in related fields of pastoral work and in the area of politics, social agencies, and business. Some of our theological colleagues have been working in these areas and have been publishing important works in these areas. We came to the conviction, however, that the members of INSeCT need to promote a wider discussion and deliberation in our societies about these subjects in special sessions and possibly as conference themes during the annual conventions of our societies. It is likewise hoped that theologians will, in time and when appropriate, foster wider forums of collective deliberation and discernment with representatives of the entire people of God, people with special expertise, bishops, priests, pastoral ecclesial leaders, and theologians, with the aim of reaching pastoral mandates in the local and regional church on these issues. What is most important is for individual theologians and groups of theologians representing societies of Catholic theology, and when possible in partnership with ecumenical and interfaith colleagues, to foster the highest quality of theological reflection on these topics and to make their findings



available to other societies and the universal church. The International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology represents the call and the need for the global church to learn from local theologians and local churches from regions around the world.

Prepared by Bradford Hinze, Fordham University, 2008

---

<sup>1</sup> José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); idem., *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2002); Timothy A. Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein, eds., *Religion in an Expanding Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Heelas, Scott Lash, and Paul Morris, eds. *Detraditionalization* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996); See also Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context* (Louvain: Peeters Press, Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> See the Pew Forum: <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=140>

<sup>7</sup> Marc Howard Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).