

## INTRODUCTION: THE CHALLENGE OF GLOBALIZATION TO SOCIAL ETHICS

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By now, globalization is by no means a new topic. Economists and observers of international politics have been debating aspects of global interdependence for many years. In some ways analyzing the phenomenon of globalization is like hitting a moving target as new aspects of global networks and linkages are constantly appearing: political, social, technological, economic, financial and cultural in nature. We learned about new implications of globalization, for example, as we digested the events of September eleventh and pondered what it meant to awaken to a world where international terrorism is a major preoccupation. In the wake of these events, it seems even more urgent for ethicists to add their voices to the debate over globalization in both its positive and normative aspects.

Globalization is notoriously difficult to define. It elusively resists being pinned down or simplified into a conceptually coherent bundle of ideas or observations. My favorite candidate defines globalization as “everything and its opposite,” a quip that calls attention to the rival construals, countervailing forces and ethical dilemmas unleashed when national borders come to seem suddenly irrelevant. Any adequate treatment of the deeply ambiguous phenomenon of globalization, of course, must take into consideration a number of disturbing questions raised by “the new economy”: Who exactly is benefitting most from rapid economic integration; which social groups are being left behind by the “digital divide;” and whether the pace of change and growth is socially and environmentally sustainable. What social ethicists most keenly seek to know is whether and how the goals of free trade and genuine social progress can be pursued simultaneously. Prompted by the motivations of religious values and similar normative concerns, we ask the key question: What institutional changes and policy responses might allow us to tap the positive aspects of globalization while minimizing the destructive elements of our venture into these uncharted waters?

The papers that follow proceed from the standpoint of Catholic social thought. The master concept of the Catholic church’s social teaching is