

Anne-Marie Javouhey and the Holy Will of God:
A Spirituality for our Time ... Part 2
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Reading the Signs of our Times: Globalization

*“To live the spirituality of the will of God
is to hear God speak to us in the events happening all around us.”
(From “The Spirituality of the Will of God” Cluny Connections, Fall 2005)*

This article, the second in a series that examines discerning God’s Will through the signs of the times explores how one group of Cluny Sisters discovered God’s will for them in their response to the effect of globalization on the local level.

Globalization Defined

There are many definitions of globalization depending on your point of view. Simply put, it is the integration of economies and societies around the world. We often think of it only in terms of economics. But driven by international trade, investment and technology, it goes far beyond to embrace the interaction and integration of people, companies and governments of different nations on ever level.

Not New

Globalization is not an entirely new phenomenon. It has been around for thousands of years as people – and later corporations – bought from and sold to one another, often at great distances. The bible story of Joseph tells how his brothers sold him to traders from Egypt. The history of the Middle Ages describes trade along the famed Silk Road that connected China and Europe. So why this apparently sudden interest in and concern about globalization? In May, 2004, Pope John Paul II put it this way: “In the process of world globalization, the gap between rich and poor countries grows ever greater. In the face of populations that live in conditions of unacceptable misery, in the face of those who are in situations of hunger, poverty and growing social inequalities, it is urgent to intervene to safeguard the dignity of the person and to foster the promotion of the common good.” Interestingly, the disparity that Pope John Paul refers to is not to be found only in developing countries. It exists in the major western nations as well as corporations (which seem to have taken on a personhood of their own) scramble for gain to the detriment of the common good and the dignity of the individual.

Two Schools of Thought

There are two schools of thought about globalization. One stresses its benefits, the other its drawbacks. The first points out its positive effects on the economy of developing nations like China and Japan. The second emphasizes the fact that the creation of an

unfettered free market has benefited multinational corporations in the West at the expense of local enterprises, local cultures, and common people, and shows how globalization often increases inequality and environmental degradation. The reality is that although the over-all economy in nations such as India has improved, the misery of the poorest of the poor in that country has increased at the same time. The “trickling down” never seems to trickle down far enough! It was heartening to learn that many of these poor nations banded together at the recent WTO gathering in Hong Kong to forge a common negotiating stance to broker a global trade deal calculated to lift millions out of poverty. It is disheartening to realize that often the rich nations of the West are the ones who block such negotiations because they do not hear Pope John Paul’s call to promote the common good and safeguard the dignity of the person.

From Then to Now

From the very beginning of her response to God’s call, Anne-Marie Javouhey understood the importance of fostering the dignity of every individual. In an era when education was denied most women, she promoted the role of educated women for the well being of society. Whether in Africa in 1822 or India in 1827, the first concern of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny was to open schools for girls even as they fulfilled their mandate to staff the colonial hospitals they had come to serve. Thus, from the moment of their arrival in Pondichery in 1827 schools operated by the Sisters gradually dotted the landscape of south eastern India, eventually spreading west and north.

Cluny Sisters the world over continue to share their founder’s view. Although the commitment to the education of girls in the school setting remains a priority, our Sisters are engaging in new forms of education resulting from their response to globalization. The work of the Sisters in Kalimpong is an excellent example. As the system of globalization has more and more impact upon the ability of the very poor to supply for their basic needs, the Sisters realized that the area was ideally suited to organic farming and the many activities related to it. In fact, the farmers in the many small villages that make up the suburbs of the cities had never abandoned the used of natural manures and pesticides such as neem leaves in farming practices. Capitalizing on current interest in organic products, the sisters have organized local women, teaching them to grow, package, and market a variety of organic products. They have combined the latest marketing and technological skills to offer home-grown organic products that are being sold far beyond the local village. These products are native to the area. “Crispy Corn” – advertised as a fast food minus the junk food ingredients – is fresh cracked corn kernels that have been roasted and sprinkled with salt and pepper. “Pancha Shakti” is a mixture of organically grown wheat, soy beans, maize, gram and ground nuts lightly dry roasted and ground into a powder that, mixed with milk or water, creates a powerful energy booster. Dried mushrooms, honey and lemonla – a concentrated liquid made from fresh lime and sugar – complete the line of products offered by these creative women. Thanks to this initiative, many women have become self-sufficient providers for their families.

My Response

Learning about how these members of my Congregation in India are responding to the effects of globalization in their own area challenged me to question myself about my own response to the issue. First, I realized, I needed to educate myself more about it. Checking out the Internet, I found a whole library of articles on the topic. My education is only a click away! Secondly, it seemed important that I support efforts like Fair Trade Products. By eliminating the middle person in marketing, these products offer a more equitable price to the original provider. So I bought Fair Trade items from the parish social justice committee for our community Christmas gifts. My next step is to try to understand better how globalization works so that I can get involved in the policy choices facing our society in the future.

Small efforts, to be sure, but the mustard seed grows into a mighty tree as we live God's Will in decisions great and small!

Web Links to Fair Trade Products:

Canada

www.transfair.ca

USA

www.fairtradefederation.org

www.fairtradegifts.org

www.equalexchange.com

UK

www.fairtrade.org.uk

Europe

www.eftafairtrade.org

New Zealand

www.fairtrade.org.nz

Australia & New Zealand

www.fta.org.au

Web Links to further information about Globalization

www.oxfam.org

www.ourvoicestogether.org

www.globalexchange.org; www.networklobby.org

www.takeactioncenter.org/action/home.html

www.takeactioncenter.org/action/home.html

<http://www.igc.org/>

<http://www.igc.org/>

<http://www.coc.org/focus/?ID=907>