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GLOBALIZATION AS A CHALLENGE
FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Abstract. The aim of the article is to show how globalization contributes to changes in the culture of the United States, especially to social degradation, economic exclusion, lifestyle and participation in the life of the Catholic Church. The article aims to show the challenges facing the Catholic Church in fulfilling its mission in a society immersed in the processes of globalization. The problem of this study can be summarized in the following questions: What impact does globalization have on the contemporary social, cultural, and religious fabric in the United States, what challenges does it pose to the Catholic Church in the twenty-first century? How is the Church to fulfill its mission in American society? These questions can be answered through a physical examination of the documents of the universal Church, a presentation of the teaching of the Church in the United States, and a review of the publications of American theologians and sociologists. After a brief introduction, the impact of globalization on the culture, social and religious structure of U.S. society will be analyzed. Then, the phenomenon of disintegration and social exclusion related to globalization will be analyzed. At the opposite pole of globalization there is another social phenomenon – consumerism as a lifestyle. Finally, the article examines the proposals for pastoral activity of the Church in the U.S.A. in the face of the challenges posed by globalization.

Keywords: globalization; Catholic Church; social disintegration; social-economic exclusion; consumerism; poverty

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization, marked by the worldwide integration of people, governments, and companies, has dramatically transformed countries like the United

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States.¹ Advances in communication, transportation, and digital technologies have facilitated an unprecedented trade, cultural exchange, investment, and information flow. While economically beneficial, globalization often conflicts with the Catholic Church's teaching, emphasizing economic efficiency over social justice, labor dignity, and community cohesion.²

The Church promotes strong, stable communities, while globalization can lead to social fragmentation and weakened community bonds. Consumerism, encouraged by globalization, undermines spiritual values and ethical living. The Church must navigate these challenges while maintaining its commitment to human dignity and ethical principles. Addressing the moral implications of globalization is crucial for the Church to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) emphasizes the importance of economic justice and the moral responsibilities of workers, owners, managers, stockholders, and consumers in ensuring the well-being of the economy. The USCCB stresses that the "economy must exist for the person and economic life should be guided by solidarity and a clear priority for the least among us."³ The Church's role in reminding the faithful of their responsibilities in globalized society is vital to preserving traditional values and promoting long-term solutions, particularly in education. By focusing on long-term, sustainable solutions, the Church can maintain its core values and continue to play a pivotal role in addressing the multifaceted issues posed by globalization. Through education and community engagement, the Church can uphold human dignity and ethical living, reinforcing its mission in a globalized world.

¹ Valentine M. Moghadam, "What Was Globalization?" *Globalizations* 18, no. 5 (2021): 695–706. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1842095>; Rockiner Kenneth Simoonga and Kingford Chimfwembe, "Globalization, Technological Advancement and the Elderly People: A Systematic Review of Literature," *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences* 20, no. 4 (2023): 24–31, <https://doi.org/10.9734/arjass/2023/v20i4454>.

² Jo Renee Formicola, "Globalization: A Twenty-First Century Challenge to Catholicism and Its Church," *Journal of Church and State* (2012), 106–21, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/esr144>; Sheryl Mark-Williams, "Globalization and Its Effects on the Expansion of the Church: Doing and Being Church Among Immigrant in the USA," *The Asbury Journal* 71, no. 1 (2016): 128–44.

³ USCCB, "The Globalized Economy: Challenges to the Church in the U.S." Presentation by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, October 5, 1996, <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/global-issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/global-issues/trade/presentation-on-globalization-and-challenges-to-church-in-us-1996-10-5>.

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2. IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON CULTURE, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS FABRIC

Globalization is a critical economic, cultural, and political phenomenon that has had a profound impact on almost every aspect of life in the modern era. This tumultuous period has led to some of the most radical changes humanity has faced.⁴ Unique identities and traditions of different cultures face suppression and dilution because of the pressures of globalization. Individual cultures also have an innate tendency toward self-preservation, potentially causing them to shun entities deemed too exotic, novel or potentially harmful to their unique identity. Successful attempts at globalization must consider this innate desire for preservation of cultural identity. Sometimes insidiously, however, the global entity may only temporarily adopt aspects of a particular culture, thereby permitting its insertion into that culture for its own gain. This aspect of globalization illustrates the blending of universalism and particularism, where global entities are required to adjust towards the local cultures to succeed.⁵

To understand the change in the U.S. culture, it is important to understand the changing demography of the country. Immigration is a significant player when it comes to population growth, considering the aging population. There has been a rise in the number of foreign-born Americans and their descendants, which is a significant driver of population growth. In 2022, the number of foreign-born workers in the labor force increased by 18.1%.⁶

Interestingly, the White population remains the largest group in the country, estimated at 204.3 million people, but those identifying as multiracial

⁴ Yoichi Shimemura, "Globalization vs. Americanization: Is the World Being Americanized by the Dominance of American Culture," *Comparative Civilizations Review* 47 (Fall 2002): 80.

⁵ Shimemura, 80.

⁶ Justis Antoniolo and Jack Malde, "The Demographic Transition: An Overview of America's Aging Population and Immigration's Mediating Role," Report by Bipartisan Policy Center, 2023, https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/BPC_LIT-Review.pdf.

have increased significantly by 33.8 million people, a 276% increase over the past decade. There has been an increased proportion of Asians, American Indians, and Alaska natives, as well as the Hispanic population, which increased from 16.3% to 18.7% in 2020.⁷ The African American population increased from 38.9 to 41.1 million, however its representation of the total population declined from 12.6% in 2010 to 12.4% in 2020.⁸ These demographic shifts illustrate the impact of globalism on American culture, rooted in Anglo-Saxon history, which have seen the evolution into a multicultural society.⁹

Immigrants often grapple with the challenges of adapting to their new society and find solace in their culture, thereby increasing their hold on the cultural traditions. They find comfort in familiar religious practices, music, cuisine, and literature that create vibrant cultural enclaves within the new communities, and despite the strong pull of nostalgia, most immigrants and their descendants also integrate with the society by embracing the American culture but often also modify or contribute towards its transformation¹⁰.

The long term impact of immigration can be seen through its effect on society's social fabric and even daily practices. Over the past 30 years, immigration has impacted how people eat, speak, and dance.¹¹ These activities have diversified and integrated various immigrant cultures into the mainstream, making the cultural fabric of the country richer and more varied.¹² These changes have led to the emergence of hybrid identities—individuals and sub-cultures that integrate with American society but do not leave their cultural traditions behind. Transnationalism is also a factor that drives cultural change. Many immigrants in the 21st century have strong economic and political ties with their home countries. This dual allegiance influences both their home and host societies.¹³ The Church, because of its consistent adherence to faith, dogma and Tradition that transcends the ever changing cultural tides impacted

⁷ Nicholas Jones et al., "Improved Race and Ethnicity Measures Reveal US Population is Much More Multiracial: 2020 Census Illuminates Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Country," August 12, 2021, United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/improved-race-ethnicity-measures-reveal-united-states-population-much-more-multiracial.html>.

⁸ Jones et al.

⁹ Shimemura, 87

¹⁰ Charles Hirschman, "The Contributions of Immigrants to American Culture," *Daedalus* 142, no. 3 (2013): 26–47, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00217.

¹¹ Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, "Global Shifts: U.S. Immigration and the Cultural Impact of Demographic Change. An Address" in *Conference Series [Proceedings]*, vol. 46 (Boston: Federal Reserve Bank of Boston), 179–88, <https://ideas.repec.org/a/fip/fedbcy2001n46x18.html>.

¹² Suarez-Orozco, 179–88.

¹³ Suarez-Orozco, 179–88.

by globalism, has the potential to tackle the instability of culture resulting from globalization in a way that the government and institutions are not capable of.¹⁴ The onus of the Church, however, is to remain steadfast in these constants.

One of the ways in which globalization has impacted religion is based on cultural exchange and syncretism. Migrants bring their own culture and blend these cultural aspects into daily activities and into their religious practices. Christianity is an exemplar of this phenomenon; originally an alien religion to the Americas, it has been integrated with local or indigenous beliefs. In the U.S., the presence of many immigrant communities has led to a shift in cultural elements, and the incorporation of some of them into practices, allowing people to explore other religions. With the Catholic Church in America, although the form and matter of the Sacraments remain unchanged and consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church, the impact of unique communities can be seen within regional celebrations, including art, architecture, and music.

Globalization has often been seen as the nidus for cultural homogenization, while religion is perceived as a haven from this; this dichotomy contributes to the rise in fundamentalism, which is a major area of conflict of religion with globalization.¹⁵ Below, Figure 2 illustrates the 2020 religious landscape in the U.S., demonstrating that the White Evangelical Protestant, White Mainline protestant, and White Catholic are the majority, accounting for 16%, 14%, and 12%, respectively.¹⁶ Contrarily, the proportion of Christians of color has remained relatively stable, realizing a slight gain in 2020 relative to 2016. In fact, 10% of Catholics in the U.S. identify as Hispanic or other Catholics of color.¹⁷ This increased proportion of Hispanic Catholics are likely to impact religious customs and celebrations in the U.S. as immigrants integrate their culture with their local churches, as noted in the Brazilian example.

The median age of White Catholics is 54 and 42 for Hispanic Catholics. An increasing proportion of youth identify as unaffiliated, another impact of secularism.¹⁸ Overall, 44% identify as White Christians, down from 54% in

¹⁴ Brian Griffiths, "The Challenge of Globalization to the Church," *Religion and Liberty* 17, no. 1 (2010).

¹⁵ Erik Sengers, "Religion, Globalization and Culture," *Comparative Sociology* 8, no. 2 (2009): 314–16.

¹⁶ Robert P. Jones et al., *The 2020 PRRI Census of American Religion*. PRRI report, 2021, <https://www.prii.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/PRRI-Jul-2021-Religion.pdf>

¹⁷ Jones et al.

¹⁸ Jones et al., 12.

2006 and 65% in 1996. White Catholics have decreased from 16% in 2006 to just 11.7% and, in 2020, this percentage is expected to drop further. Primarily, this decline is driven by the increasing proportion of youth identifying as unaffiliated.¹⁹ For those ages 18–29, just 8% identify as White Catholic and 9% Hispanic Catholic. Assuming this trend continues, there will be a significant decline in the number of Catholics in the U.S. in the years to come. Increasingly mixed societies have led to secularization, with religion becoming less central to public life as it is considered a private matter; this trend is seen in the U.S. and Western Europe, where Church attendance has declined concomitant with growth in the number of atheists.²⁰

The increasing pressures of integration often lead to a reactionary rise of traditionalism. This reversion and adherence to traditional Rites, such as the resurgence of the Latin Liturgical Rite Tridentine Mass, rejection of contemporary composers over traditional hymns, and even art and architecture reflect this reaction to change in the Catholic Church. Historically, the Catholic Church in the U.S. embraced the modernizing tide sparked by Vatican II. Increasingly, however, an increasing number of practicing Catholics in the U.S. have shifted toward more conservative forms of worship and toward traditional practices, citing that the Church's mission of salvation has been replaced with a social mission resulting in a casual indifference to the doctrine. Reduced attendance and reaction to the pressures of integration has led to an increasing number of traditional priests and even youth yearning for more orthodoxy, which has led to challenges, including conflict with Pope Francis.²¹ The shift is in line with the Religious Market Theory, which states that religions often find themselves in a market where they need to attract and retain followers, and when attendance declines, the clergy must focus on differentiating themselves or, based on what the people need, change their practices and values.²² Secularization theory also states that as there is more integration, there are more internal conflicts, resulting in some members or clergy reacting

¹⁹ Jones et al.

²⁰ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 392.

²¹ Tim Sullivan, "A Step Back in Time: America's Catholic Church Sees an Immense Shift toward the Old Ways," Associated Press News, April 30, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/catholic-church-shift-orthodoxy-tradition-7638fa2013a593f8cb07483ffc8ed487>.

²² Victor S. Gedzi and George Anderson Jr, "Situating the Religious Market Theory in Ghanaian Religious Context: Merits and Demerits," *African Journal of Religion Philosophy and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2021): 57–75, <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-7644/2020/v2n1a4>; Fenggang Yang, "The Religious Market Theory and Religious Change in the United States and China," *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 8, no. 1 (2021), 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22143955-08010002>.

against the perceived dilution of the tradition thereby pushing for a return towards orthodox practices to ensure authenticity and distinctiveness.²³ Pope Francis focuses on modern values of inclusiveness, a progressive and compassionate approach to Catholicism, and on issues like social justice, environmental stewardship, and mercy over strict adherence to a traditional teaching, which also highlights the role of globalization and how it has impacted one of the largest religious bodies in the world. Thus, globalization has changed the social and religious fabric of the country due to increasing diversity, changing patterns of affiliation, and changing perceptions and values.

3. SOCIAL DISINTEGRATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Globalization is a double-edged sword. One of the consequences is social disintegration, which refers to the breakdown of social bonds, shared values, and community structures. With corporations looking for cheap labor and resources, jobs are often outsourced, which leads to unemployment, economic instability, and weakened social cohesion resulting in harm to individuals and the familial structure. Also, the addition of diverse cultural influences erodes traditional social norms and values, leading to a sense of disorientation and alienation, which contributes further to the fragmentation of communities and the erosion of social capital, undermining the stability and solidarity of society.²⁴ Society has often been characterized by the new costs of coordination, and as society becomes more complex, which is linked to increased independence, there is a rise in the ability to harm each other, which makes planning and regulating society more challenging.²⁵ Globalization leads to deinstitutionalization, which diminishes the role of the nation-state, family, labor structure, and social service institutions, although it does not mean the disappearance of these systems but rather the gradual reduction in their power in controlling and maintaining the social behavior and norms.²⁶ Perhaps the most

²³ Kostanca Dhima and Matt Golder, "Secularization Theory and Religion," *Politics and Religion* 14, no. 1 (2021): 37–53, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048319000464>; Tobias Müller, "Secularization Theory and Its Discontents: Recapturing Decolonial and Gendered Narratives. Debate on Jörg Stolz's Article on *Secularization Theories in the 21st Century: Ideas, Evidence, and Problems*," *Social Compass* 67, no. 2 (2020): 315–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768620917328>.

²⁴ Kasper Vrolijk, "How Does Globalization Affect Social Cohesion?," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (May 5, 2022): 1–35, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4096851>.

²⁵ Jakub R. Stempień, "Six Theorems of the Social Disintegration Theory," *Acta Universitatis Lodzianis. Folia Sociologica*, no. 87 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.18778/0208-600x.87.07>.

²⁶ Stempień, 91.

harmful effect on society from globalization is the potential for further disintegration of society's cornerstone's—marriage, family and community. This disintegration tears at the very fabric of society. The USCCB acknowledges this disintegration, and further reflects on the etiology of social disintegration and the U.S.'s role and responsibility to mitigate unrest and injustice in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*:

We are called to be peacemakers in a nation at war. We are a country pledged to pursue "liberty and justice for all," but we are too often divided across lines of race, ethnicity, and economic inequality. We are a nation of immigrants, struggling to address the challenges of many new immigrants in our midst. We are a society built on the strength of our families, called to defend marriage and offer moral and economic support for family life. We are a powerful nation in a violent world, confronting terror and trying to build a safer, more just, more peaceful world. We are an affluent society where too many live in poverty and lack health care and other necessities of life. We are part of a global community charged with being good stewards of the earth's environment.²⁷

Globalization has led to increased economic inequality, with wealth being concentrated in the hands of a few. This wealth inequality leads to the formation of a transformational capitalist class, which prioritizes profit over social welfare, leading to further economic disparities and social disintegration.²⁸ In the U.S., inequality is a significant issue. The top 10% of households had a wealth of \$6.7 million on average, which accounts for 66.9% of the total household wealth, while the bottom 50% had just \$50,000 on average.²⁹ This income divide has divided society, leaving the middle class feeling left behind and disenfranchised. As noted previously, globalization creates homogenization which often undermines the local faiths and traditions, driven by the per-

²⁷ USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2015): 11.

²⁸ Alexander Anievas, "Theory of the Global State: Globality as an Unfinished Revolution A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and the State in a Transnational World," *Historical Materialism* 16, no. 2 (2012): 190–206, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156920608x296123>; Clifford L. Staples, "A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World," *European Journal of Social Theory*, 8, no. 5 (2005): 533–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431005057028>.

²⁹ Ana Hernández Kent and Lowell R. Ricketts, "The State of U.S. Wealth Inequality," Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, February 7, 2024, <https://www.stlouisfed.org/institute-for-economic-equity/the-state-of-us-wealth-inequality>.

vasive influence of the global corporate cultures, often overshadowing the local cultures.³⁰ Therefore, the perceived needs of individuals in society coupled with their actual needs are exacerbated by this profound chasm in income inequality in the U.S.

Materialism is a significant challenge in the U.S. and results from the growing inequality creating a false sense of deprivation among many people in the U.S. even with a high economic status whose self-worth is based on the materials they own.³¹ Although 12.6% of Americans live below the Federal Poverty line, 80% still own air conditioners and at least one car and 33% have a computer or other items that would be considered a luxury elsewhere. This means that while people lack money for essentials like food, it is often considered to reflect their desire to live as per the existing societal standards, potentially spending more on non-essentials as food and basic shelter.³² Furthermore, social media has driven materialistic tendencies through immediate, constant, and unrealistic comparisons perpetually in the faces of individuals via social content. This increases stress and reduces life satisfaction, which further increases materialistic tendencies.³³ Through materialism, as wants are perceived as needs, those unable to financially compete often experience negative feelings about themselves, fear comparison-related embarrassment, and socially isolate. As face-to-face interactions declined, social engagements and communication declined leading to further societal deterioration.³⁴

Social disintegration has impacted the Church's ability to fulfill its mission. The increase in global consumer culture has led to a decline in religious participation and commitment, especially among younger adults. The Church's traditional values often clash with the secular values promoted by

³⁰ Amy Young Evrard, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2017).

³¹ Martin Greenwood, "Materialism and Poverty in America," The University of Manchester, April 29, 2021, <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/global-social-challenges/2021/04/29/materialism-and-poverty-in-america>.

³² Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, "The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better," in *Sunday Best: 80 Great Books from a Lifetime or Reviews*, ed. John Carey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022).

³³ Phillip Ozimek et al., "Materialism in Social Media—More Social Media Addiction and Stress Symptoms, Less Satisfaction with Life," *Telematics and Informatics Reports* 13 (2024), 100117, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teler.2024.100117>.

³⁴ Chigusa Kita, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other (Review)," *Technology and Culture* 53, no. 4 (2012): 960–61, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.2012.0157>; Johnson Chun-Sing Cheung, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other," *Journal of Social Work Practice* 27, no. 4 (2013): 471–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2013.769209>.

the media, which results in further decline in attendance and participation in Church activities.³⁵ Among those who identify as Catholics, just 23% attend almost every week, 10% occasionally, 32% seldom, and 18% never attend, showing a significant decline.³⁶ In addition, since 2020, while the amount donated has increased post-pandemic, there were fewer donors.³⁷ There remains a gap in voluntary financing in the U.S. Catholic Church as there is a lack of spiritual engagement. Those individuals who see donating to the Church as tithing, a spiritual obligation, are more likely to fund the Church in comparison to others. Most people were more willing to donate to charities, but the median amount donated has decreased, showcasing a significant shift in the values in the modern era.³⁸ In 1990, tithing was considered to still be the biggest philanthropic donation in the U.S. Catholic Church. Since then, the amount donated has decreased significantly, by more than 50%, and, during the pandemic this was further reduced by 29%.³⁹ This shift in values has made it increasingly more difficult for the Church to maintain the same level of social service activities in American society as it historically had.

The Catholic Church has focused on social justice, preferential options for the poor, and works of mercy. With the reduction in fiscal capital (donations) and human capital (parishioners) the Church's ability to serve and retain people will be further diminished.⁴⁰ The Church's teaching also stresses the importance of communal life and mutual support, but these values are eroded by increasing cultural homogenization. Social capital in the U.S. has declined, and the weakening of community bonds is observed in the U.S. resulting in

³⁵ Jeffrey M. Jones, "Church Attendance Has Declined in Most U.S. Religious Groups," Gallup, March 25, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/642548/church-attendance-declined-religious-groups.aspx>.

³⁶ Jones.

³⁷ Michelle Boorstein, "Donations to Catholic Parishes Steady, Post-Pandemic, but by Far Fewer Donors," *The Washington Post*, February 9, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2023/02/09/catholic-pandemic-covid-charity-giving>.

³⁸ Brian Starks and Christian Smith, *Unleashing Catholic Generosity: Explaining the Catholic Giving Gap in the United States* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Institute of Church Life, 2013), 1–32, https://mcgrath.nd.edu/assets/96494/unleashing_catholic_generosity.pdf%22%3Eunleashing_catholic_generosity.pdf.

³⁹ Raj Hegde, "Catholic Fundraising at a Crossroads," DonorboxBlog July 24, 2024, <https://donorbox.org/nonprofit-blog/catholic-fundraising-at-a-crossroads>; Catholic parishes across the US are facing difficulty and Catholic, weekly offertory is trending downward.

⁴⁰ Starks and Smith, 2013.

growing individualism.⁴¹ This has also impacted the principle of solidarity. Due to its lack of power and importance, the Church fails to build cohesive communities, which further worsens social bonding. In short, globalization and its impact have led to the deinstitutionalization of the Catholic Church and reduced its influence on society, and hence making her less effective and leading to social integration because of value loss and increasing divide among the people.

Poverty stems from factors like economic inequality, lack of education, and political instability. While efforts to address it continue, the Catholic Church faces criticism for its charity approach. The decline in education and moral values is another concern. Catholic schools have dwindled due to costs, scandals, and secularism, further diluting traditional teachings. The Church's role is crucial in promoting ethical and socially responsible behavior to combat globalization's negative effects. It must boldly embrace its identity and invest in education. The challenges the Church faces are immense, from regaining trust after scandals to confronting societal shifts toward secularism and consumerism. Yet, its mission remains vital in fostering communities and guiding individuals toward deeper spiritual fulfillment. Ultimately, the Church's commitment to human dignity, social justice, and community life is essential in addressing the multifaceted issue of poverty, both economic and moral. By focusing on long-term, sustainable solutions and maintaining its core values, the Church can continue to play a pivotal role in a rapidly changing world.

4. CONSUMERISM AS A LIFESTYLE

Consumerism in the U.S. has become a defining characteristic of society, driven by the constant pursuit of material goods and the belief that personal happiness and social status can be achieved through consumption. The increase in this perception has led to numerous social and environmental challenges, like growing personal debt, environmental degradation, and a shift from community-centered values to materialistic and individualistic values.⁴²

⁴¹ Elizabeth Morrow and Lindsay Scorgie-Porter, *An Analysis of Robert D. Putnam's Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (London: Routledge, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781912282319>.

⁴² Kailashpati et al., "Rise in Consumerism and Its Impact on Sustainable Development," *Adhyayan: A Journal of Management Sciences* 13, no. 2 (2023): 37–41, <https://doi.org/10.21567/adhyayan.v13i2.06>.

Globalization has amplified this view and spread the Western consumer culture worldwide, which has also had a deepening impact within the U.S. as global market integration has allowed companies to ensure the widespread availability of diverse products that encourage consumers to buy more. In addition, digital media and advertising also increase the awareness of customers on various products, and social media influences their lifestyle decisions, which amplifies their desires to create a similar lifestyle as seen in social media that is surrounded by material wealth, creating a culture in which consumption is equated to happiness.⁴³

U.S. consumer debt increased to \$17.1 trillion in 2023, a 4.4% increase from 2022.⁴⁴ Most debt is unsecured credit card debt, with high variable interest rates. While the growth of debt has slowed from 7% to 4.4%, the increase is still a concerning trend, demonstrating the willingness of Americans to use debt to fund a consumerism-based lifestyle.⁴⁵ Debt is linked to materialism, increased financial worry, and as well as an increased risk of uncontrolled and risky purchases.⁴⁶ Individual debt and money-management skills are directly linked.⁴⁷ Materialism is considered to have many negative consequences including increasing reports of unhappiness, lower self-actualization, the growing insatiable demand for a higher salary, depletion of natural resources, increased intolerance, neglect of the common good, and economic crisis.⁴⁸

⁴³ Arun Kumar and Mrinalini Pandey, "Social Media and Impact of Altruistic Motivation, Egoistic Motivation, Subjective Norms, and EWOM toward Green Consumption Behavior: An Empirical Investigation," *Sustainability (Switzerland)* 15, no. 5 (2023): 4222, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15054222>; Monali Neve and Rahul Trivedi, "Materialism and Media Usage: To Study the Role of Media in Increasing Materialism among Youths with Special Reference to Social Media Exposure," *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology* 29, no. 7, Special Issue (2020); Mohammad Hamdi Al Khasawneh et al., "Investigating the Impact of Social Media Marketing on Research Online and Purchase Offline for Fashion Luxury Brands," *International Journal of Business Excellence* 32, no. 1 (2024): 25–49, <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBEX.2024.135933>.

⁴⁴ Chris Horymski, "Experian Study: Average U.S. Consumer Debt and Statistics," Experian, February 14, 2024, <https://www.experian.com/blogs/ask-experian/research/consumer-debt-study>.

⁴⁵ Horymski.

⁴⁶ Ragna B. Garðarsdóttir and H. Dittmar, "The Relationship of Materialism to Debt and Financial Well-Being: The Case of Iceland's Perceived Prosperity," *Journal of Economic Psychology* 33, no. 3 (2012): 471–81, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joep.2011.12.008>.

⁴⁷ Garðarsdóttir and Dittmar.

⁴⁸ Helen I. Duh, "Antecedents and Consequences of Materialism: An Integrated Theoretical Framework," *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies* 7, no. 1 (2015): 20–35, [https://doi.org/10.22610/jeb.v7i1\(j\).560](https://doi.org/10.22610/jeb.v7i1(j).560).

The Catholic Church is not opposed to globalization, but it voices concern for the potential negative manifestations of this phenomenon on society, including migration, xenophobia, global conflict, economic inequality, and the underlying factors contributing to poverty. The USCCB especially recognizes that U.S. economic and military power has led to injustices abroad and fueled consumerism and indifference at home. Market standards threaten to replace morality, restructuring American culture around utility, productivity, and cost-effectiveness, while moral questions are overshadowed by materialism and marketing.

The Catholic Church has often articulated that this phenomenon is antithetical to the teachings on human dignity, common good, and social justice and she also emphasizes the spiritual dangers of this process. The papal encyclicals highlighted the groundwork for this by addressing the injustices of the industrial age and advocating for rights and equitable distribution of resources. After the Second World War, the Church increasingly raised its concerns about the moral implications of consumerism.⁴⁹ Pope John Paul II acknowledged that excessive preoccupation with material goods and their acquisition could lead to alienation of the human person and stifle their spiritual growth. Furthermore, he noted that materialism would lead to the objectification of individuals and often create value based on their possessions instead of their inherent dignity, which is a reductionist view that can be used to exploit and neglect the vulnerable and marginalized⁵⁰. Bishop Robert Barron criticizes modern civilization for its focus on industrialization, mechanization, and material gain, arguing that while these advancements have made life more convenient, they lead to a soulless, superficial society that fails to satisfy deeper human longings.

⁴⁹ Antonio Azevedo, "Recognizing Consumerism as an 'Illness of an Empty Soul': A Catholic Morality Perspective," *Psychology and Marketing* 37, no. 2 (2020): 250–59, <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21267>; Fredrik Portin, "Consumerism as a Moral Attitude: Defining Consumerism through the Works of Pope Francis, Cornel West, and William T. Cavanaugh," *Studia Theologica – Nordic Journal of Theology* 74, no. 1 (2020): 4–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0039338X.2020.1751278>.

⁵⁰ Jesse Russell, "The Catholic Neoconservative Misreading of John Paul II *Centesimus Annus* Revisited," *Political Theology* 21, no. 3 (2020): 172–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2019.1701285>.

The Church further asserts that consumerism would lead to environmental exploitation and degradation, which would harm future generations, and advocates for adopting a simple and more sustainable way of living.⁵¹ The Church in the U.S. has focused on addressing the issue, but without much tangible success as consumerism is rampant in society. Regardless of the pervasiveness of materialism, the Church remains committed to meet society where it is at. She does understand the need to increase her engagement with the younger generation while adopting modern tools and platforms, like social media, to ensure that the message is more accessible and relevant to the new demographics and populations.⁵²

5. PROPOSALS AND CONCLUSIONS

To achieve the salvific mission in American society amidst globalization, the Catholic Church must first take accountability for the issues that have led to the deteriorating control she holds in society and her position. The Church must address spiritual, social, technological, and ethical dimensions of society to counter the issues and address all the issues to increase the trust people have in her. While it is critical to embrace inclusivity and diversity, it is also important to ensure that local cultures and prevailing values are not forgotten. Ensuring dialogue and cooperation between people of different backgrounds and beliefs to create a system that is more welcoming is important. There is an obligation to understand the needs of society in this tumultuous time exacerbated by globalization; and local parishes and community programs need to survey and identify the requirements, and views and help strengthen the grassroots efforts by providing support and resources that are requisite for this support. Furthermore, the Church must continue to work on improving the educational and social service-programs that would address moral poverty and

⁵¹ Isidro Pereira Lamelas, "The Canticle of the Creatures by Francis of Assisi (1181/82–1226) and the Care of Our Common Home," *Religions* 15, no. 2 (2024): 184, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020184>; Y. I. Muliarchuk, "From Anthropocentrism to Care for Our Common Home: Ethical Response to the Environmental Crisis," *Anthropological Measurements of Philosophical Research*, no. 19 (2021): 88–96, <https://doi.org/10.15802/ampr.v0i19.236023>.

⁵² Bryce Ashlin-Mayo, "Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age: Spiritual Growth through Online Education," *International Journal of Christianity & Education* 23, no. 2 (2019): 237–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056997118822963>; Ocheniua F. Opade, "Perspectives on Digital Evangelism: Exploring the Intersection of Technology and Faith," *African Journal of Culture, History, Religion and Traditions* 6, no. 2 (2023): 15–24, <https://doi.org/10.52589/ajchrt-idap2p2m>.

promote family values. The Church could regain trust and foster a sense of community and belonging through this approach. The Catholic Church is also required to be more transparent and accountable for its failures, adhere to the highest ethical standards, and develop robust measures for accountability and governance, which would help to further regain trust. Understanding the needs of the people and how modern society has changed, including communication, is also critical, which means digital technologies must be more readily used and accepted in preaching. Already, through internet search platforms, society has access to secular answers to their problems. Often these answers are spiritually and morally corrupt. Should they not also have access in that space that is spiritually morally sound that could solve their dilemmas, which would help further strengthen the influence of the Church? While embracing secularism, the Church needs to design her curriculum in a way in her schools where the focus is on ensuring that the education quality is the highest and where there is no discrimination of any kind. The funding available should be aimed at community development and propagation of the Faith based on thoughtful, well-organized strategic planning rather than reactionary spending in response to the tides of globalization. Overall, the Catholic Church needs to transform her approach, image and strategic plan while ensuring she aligns with the traditional values of salvation and finds herself relevant in the modern, global, materialistic society.

Globalization, characterized by worldwide integration, has dramatically transformed countries, including the U.S. Advances in communication, transportation, and digital technologies have facilitated unprecedented trade, cultural exchange, and information flow. While economically beneficial, globalization often conflicts with the Catholic Church's teachings, emphasizing social justice and community over economic efficiency. It promotes consumerism and undermines spiritual values, leading to social fragmentation. To address this, the Church must adapt, regain trust, and focus on long-term solutions like education to maintain its commitment to human dignity and traditional values.

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GLOBALIZACJA JAKO WYZWANIE DLA KOŚCIOŁA KATOLICKIEGO W STANACH ZJEDNOCZONYCH AMERYKI W XXI WIEKU

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie, w jaki sposób globalizacja przyczynia się do zmian w kulturze Stanów Zjednoczonych, zwłaszcza do degradacji społecznej, wykluczenia ekonomicznego, stylu życia i uczestnictwa w życiu Kościoła katolickiego. Artykuł ma na celu pokazanie wyzwań stojących przed Kościołem katolickim w wypełnianiu swojej misji w społeczeństwie pogrążonym w procesach globalizacji. Problem niniejszego opracowania można ująć w następujących pytaniach: jaki wpływ globalizacja ma na współczesną tkankę społeczną, kulturową i religijną w Stanach Zjednoczonych, jakie wyzwania niesie ona dla Kościoła katolickiego XXI wieku oraz w jaki sposób Kościół ma wypełnić swoją misję w społeczeństwie amerykańskim? Odpowiedź na te pytania da się uzyskać poprzez analizę przedmiotową dokumentów Kościoła powszechnego, przedstawienie nauczania Kościoła w Stanach Zjednoczonych oraz przegląd publikacji amerykańskich teologów i socjologów. Po krótkim wprowadzeniu zostanie przeanalizowany wpływ globalizacji na kulturę, strukturę społeczną i religijną społeczeństwa USA. Następnie zostaną poddane analizie związane z globalizacją zjawisko dezintegracji i wykluczenia społecznego. Na przeciwnym biegunie globalizacji znajduje się inne zjawisko społeczne – konsumpcjonizm jako styl życia. Finalnym elementem struktury artykułu jest analiza propozycji działalności pastoralnej Kościoła w USA wobec wyzwań, jakie niesie ze sobą globalizacja.

Słowa kluczowe: globalizacja; Kościół katolicki; dezintegracja społeczna; wykluczenie społeczno-ekonomiczne; konsumpcjonizm; ubóstwo