



## Address to the Plenary Session on the Subject 'Globalisation: Ethical and Institutional Concerns'



*The Pope observes that 'the market economy seems to have conquered virtually the whole world' and emphasises that the Church looks to the Academy 'for the insights which will make possible a better discernment of the ethical issues involved in the globalisation process'. He adds that it is necessary to 'avoid reducing all social relations to market factors' and thus states that globalisation must 'serve solidarity and the common good'. There are dangers that cultural deconstruction brought by globalisation will have damaging effects on human communities, and that biomedical discoveries will not be subject to sufficient control. An ethical approach to globalisation is required which will recognise the 'inalienable value of the human person' and the 'value of human cultures'.*

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences,

1. Your President has just expressed your pleasure at being here in the Vatican to address a subject of concern to both the social sciences and the Magisterium of the Church. I thank you, Professor Malinvaud, for your kind words, and I thank all of you for the help you are generously giving the Church in your fields of competence. For the seventh plenary session of the Academy you have decided to discuss in greater depth the subject of globalisation, with particular attention to its ethical implications.

Since the collapse of the collectivist system in Central and Eastern Europe, with its subsequent important effects on the Third World, humanity has entered a new phase in which the market economy seems to have conquered virtually the entire world. This has brought with it not only a growing interdependence of economies and social systems, but also a spread of novel

philosophical and ethical ideas based on the new working and living conditions now being introduced in almost every part of the world. The Church carefully examines these new facts in the light of the principles of her social teaching. In order to do this, she needs to deepen her objective knowledge of these emerging phenomena. That is why the Church looks to your work for the insights which will make possible a better discernment of the ethical issues involved in the globalisation process.

2. The globalisation of commerce is a complex and rapidly evolving phenomenon. Its prime characteristic is the increasing elimination of barriers to the movement of people, capital and goods. It enshrines a kind of triumph of the market and its logic, which in turn is bringing rapid changes in social systems and cultures. Many people, especially the disadvantaged, experience this as something that has been forced upon them, rather than as a process in which they can actively participate. In my Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, I noted that the market economy is a way of adequately responding to people's economic needs while respecting their free initiative, but that it had to be controlled by the community, the social body with its common good.<sup>1</sup> Now that commerce and communications are no longer bound by borders, it is the universal common good which demands that control mechanisms should accompany the inherent logic of the market. This is essential in order to avoid reducing all social relations to economic factors, and in order to protect those caught in new forms of exclusion or marginalisation.

Globalisation, *a priori*, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it. No system is an end in itself, and it is necessary to insist that globalisation, like any other system, must be at the service of the human person; it must serve solidarity and the common good.

3. One of the Church's concerns about globalisation is that it has quickly become a cultural phenomenon. The market as an exchange mechanism has become the medium of a new culture. Many observers have noted the intrusive, even invasive, character of the logic of the market, which reduces more and more the area available to the human community for voluntary and public action at every level. The market imposes its way of thinking and acting, and stamps its scale of values upon behaviour. Those who are subjected to it often see globalisation as a destructive flood threatening the social norms which had protected them and the cultural points of reference which had given them direction in life. What is happening is that changes in technology and work relationships are moving too quickly for cultures to respond. Social, legal and cultural safeguards – the result of people's efforts to defend the common good – are vitally necessary if individuals and intermediary groups are to maintain their centrality. But globalisation often risks destroying these carefully built up structures by exacting the adoption of new styles of working, living and organising communities. Likewise, at another level, the use made of discoveries in the biomedical field tend to catch legislators unprepared. Research itself is often financed by private groups and its results are commercialised even before the process of social control has had a chance to respond. Here we face a Promethean increase of power over human nature, to the point that the human genetic code itself is measured in terms of costs and benefits. All societies recognize the need to control these developments and to make sure that new practices respect fundamental human values and

the common good.

4. The affirmation of the priority of ethics corresponds to an essential requirement of the human person and the human community. But not all forms of ethics are worthy of the name. We are seeing the emergence of patterns of ethical thinking which are by-products of globalisation itself and which bear the stamp of utilitarianism. But ethical values cannot be dictated by technological innovations, engineering or efficiency; they are grounded in the very nature of the human person. Ethics cannot be the justification or legitimation of a system, but rather the safeguard of all that is human in any system. Ethics demands that systems be attuned to the needs of man, and not that man be sacrificed for the sake of the system. One evident consequence of this is that the ethics committees now usual in almost every field should be completely independent of financial interests, ideologies and partisan political views. The Church on her part continues to affirm that ethical discernment in the context of globalisation must be based upon two inseparable principles:

- First, the inalienable value of the human person, source of all human rights and every social order. The human being must always be an end and not a means, a subject and not an object, nor a commodity of trade.
- Second, the value of human cultures, which no external power has the right to downplay and still less to destroy. Globalisation must not be a new version of colonialism. It must respect the diversity of cultures which, within the universal harmony of peoples, are life's interpretive keys. In particular, it must not deprive the poor of what remains most precious to them, including their religious beliefs and practices, since genuine religious convictions are the clearest manifestation of human freedom. As humanity embarks upon the process of globalisation, it can no longer do without a common code of ethics. This does not mean a single dominant socio-economic system or culture which would impose its values and its criteria on ethical reasoning. It is within man as such, within universal humanity sprung from the Creator's hand, that the norms of social life are to be sought. Such a search is indispensable if globalisation is not to be just another name for the absolute relativisation of values and the homogenisation of life-styles and cultures. In all the variety of cultural forms, universal human values exist and they must be brought out and emphasised as the guiding force of all development and progress.

5. The Church will continue to work with all people of good will to ensure that the winner in this process will be humanity as a whole, and not just a wealthy elite that controls science, technology, communication and the planet's resources to the detriment of the vast majority of its people. The Church earnestly hopes that all the creative elements in society will cooperate to promote a globalisation which will be at the service of the whole person and of all people. With these thoughts, I encourage you to continue to seek an ever deeper insight into the reality of globalisation, and as a pledge of my spiritual closeness I cordially invoke upon you the blessings of Almighty God.

1 Cf. nn. 34, 58.

