



11 April 2002



**Address to the Plenary Session on the Subject
'Intergenerational Solidarity'**

John Paul II observes that globalisation has 'revolutionised the system of social interactions and relations' and has both negative and positive results. He goes on to say that 'solidarity between generations must receive greater attention' and adds that political and economic leaders must strive to ensure that globalisation does not widen the gap between the rich and the poor. People should be brought more fully into the processes of government and there should be a shared worldwide effort to achieve the 'universal common good'. Invoking 'respect for basic anthropological and spiritual values', the Pope affirms that market laws should be subjected to solidarity 'so that individuals and societies are not sacrificed by economic changes at all levels and are protected from the upheavals caused by the deregulation of the market'.

Mr. President,

Your Excellency,

Distinguished Academicians,

1. I am delighted to welcome you on the occasion of the eighth general assembly of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. In particular, I greet Mr. Edmond Malinvaud, your President, to whom I express my gratitude for his expression of respect on your behalf. I thank Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo and all who coordinate the work of your Academy. With your interdisciplinary richness, you have chosen to continue your reflection on the subjects of democracy and globalisation, thus beginning your research on inter-generational relations. Such a step is valuable for developing the Church's social teaching, for educating peoples and for the participation of Christians in public life in every kind of responsibility for social life.

2. Your analysis also aims at shedding light on the ethical dimension of the decisions that the leaders of civil society and every human being must make. The increasing interdependence among people, families, businesses and nations, as well as among economies and markets – known as globalisation – has revolutionised the system of social interactions and relations. If it has positive developments, it also harbours disturbing threats, notably the exacerbation of inequalities between the powerful economies and the dependent ones, between those who benefit from new opportunities, and those who are bypassed. This fact invites you to think about the subject of solidarity in a new way.

3. In this connection, with the progressive lengthening of the span of human life, solidarity between generations must receive greater attention, with special care for the weaker members of society, children and the elderly. Formerly, in many places, solidarity between generations was a natural family attitude; it also was a duty of the community which had to exercise it in a spirit of justice and equity, making sure that each person have his just share in the fruits of work and in all circumstances live with dignity. The industrial age saw States set up

social welfare plans to assist families, giving special attention to the education of youth and to pension funds for retirees. It is fortunate that a sense of responsibility has developed in people thanks to a real national solidarity, so as not to exclude anyone and to give access to a social benefits coverage to all. One can only rejoice at this progress even though it benefits only a small portion of the world's population.

In this spirit, it is first of all the responsibility of the political and economic leaders to do everything possible to ensure that globalisation will not take place to the detriment of the least favoured and the weakest, widening the gap between rich and poor, between rich nations and poor nations. I invite people who have the responsibility of government and those who make the decisions that affect society to be particularly careful by reflecting on future long-term decisions and by thinking how to create economic and social balances, by putting in place systems of solidarity that take into account the changes caused by globalisation and by keeping these methods from further impoverishing substantial parts of peoples, or even, of whole countries.

4. At the global level, collective decisions must be taken and carried out in a process encouraging the responsible participation of all people, called to build their future together. In this perspective, the fostering of democratic models of government will allow the population as a whole to take part in the administration of the *res publica*, 'on the basis of a correct conception of the human person',¹ and with respect for basic anthropological and spiritual values. Social solidarity implies putting aside the simple pursuit of particular interests, which must be evaluated and harmonised 'in keeping with a hierarchy of balanced values; ultimately, it demands a correct understanding of the dignity and the rights of the person'.² Thus it is only right to give great importance to educating the younger generations in a spirit of solidarity and a real culture of openness to the universal and attention to all people, regardless of their race, culture or religion.

5. The leaders of civil society fulfil their mission when they seek above all the common good with absolute respect for the dignity of the human person. The importance of the questions our societies have to face and the challenges for the future should stimulate a common will to seek the common good for the harmonious and peaceful development of societies and the well being of all. I invite the administrative bodies that serve the human community, inter-governmental or international organisms, to support the work of the nations with rigour, justice and understanding, in view of the 'universal common good'. Thus in a gradual way the modalities of a globalisation will be guaranteed that is no longer imposed but controlled.

Actually, it corresponds to the political sphere to regulate the market, to subject market laws to solidarity, so that individuals and societies are not sacrificed by economic changes at all levels and are protected from the upheavals caused by the deregulation of the market. Once again, therefore, I encourage social, political and economic leaders to go further in the way of cooperation among persons, businesses and nations, so that the stewardship of our earth will be at the service of persons and peoples and not just of profit. Men and women are called to leave behind their selfishness and show each other greater solidarity. In its journey to greater unity, solidarity and peace, may today's humanity pass on to the coming generations the goods of creation and the hope of a better future!

As once again I express my esteem and gratitude for your service to the Church and humanity, I invoke upon you the assistance of the risen Lord and wholeheartedly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, your families and all your loved ones.

¹ *Centesimus Annus*, n. 46.

² *Ibid.*, n. 47.