The Keys to Humanize Globalization
John Paul II’s Proposals for Life in Global Village

ROME, JUNE 16, 2001 (Zenit.org).- Are anti-globalization protests, violent or otherwise, sufficient to make the new phenomenon more just?

"To rebel against the present international imbalance is sacrosanct," said Jacques Delors, Catholic, Socialist and former president of the European Commission, as quoted in ZENIT's June 9 analysis. "But an alternative is not offered by breaking shop windows. It is time for proposals."

John Paul II has spent time and energy over the last few years doing just that: offering proposals, based on Christian social doctrine, to confront the problems of globalization. Here are some of the points he raises.

"Human event" and "sign of our times"

Globalization is, first of all, a human event. Therefore, "globalization, a priori, is neither good nor bad," the Holy Father said. "It will be what the people make of it" (John Paul II, April 27, address at Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences).

Globalization has not only an economic, but also a cultural and political dimension. It is a reality that stems from those factors that have altered what philosopher Karl Popper called "paradigms" or "eras" of humanity, which are fundamentally of a technological character: in this case, the new means of communication.

In this connection, it is important to distinguish between globalization and neo-liberalism. This economic system, based on the freedom of enterprise which, impelled by the desire for profit and regulated by free competition, determines production and prices, at times becomes a genuine ideology and moves like a fish in water in the context of globalization. However, this is not globalization.

The Christian view of reality gives John Paul II an added element of analysis: If we are faced with a human phenomenon, this means that it is a "sign of our times" in which one must discover "the positive aspects" and avoid "the dangers" (John Paul II's address to participants in UNIV 2001 University Congress, April 9, 2001).

Keys to humanize globalization

If globalization is a "human event," the principles that will guide the ethics in the era of the global village must be sought, therefore, in the person himself and in the principles that regulate social interaction.

John Paul II offers three fundamental principles on which the social doctrine of the Church pivots:
1) Globalization of human rights

For John Paul II, the first principle that must govern globalization is "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" (John Paul II, address at Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences, April 27).

The question regarding human dignity can be expressed in concrete terms: What roles do the weakest, the handicapped, the elderly and the unborn have in society?

This is the "culture of life" proposed by John Paul II. "This is a particularly pressing need at the present time, when the 'culture of death' so forcefully opposes the 'culture of life' and often seems to have the upper hand" ("Evangelium Vitae," No. 87).

Hence, the globalization of the economy must be followed by the globalization of genuine human rights.

2) Solidarity: preferential option for the poor

The need to globalize solidarity stems, necessarily, from the fundamental principle of respect for the dignity of the person. The principle of solidarity, exactly as enunciated by Christian social doctrine, is a wager on the preferential option for the poor. It affirms that "the more that individuals are defenseless within a given society, the more they require the care and concern of others, and in particular the intervention of governmental authority" ("Centesimus Annus," No. 10).

When he met with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, on April 7, 2000, the Holy Father said that "the increase of interdependence in the world has given these challenges (wars, persecutions, disasters, epidemics) a global dimension that requires new ways of thinking and new types of international cooperation to address them effectively."

"This means making solidarity an integral part of the network of economic, political and social interdependence which the current process of globalization is tending to consolidate" (John Paul II, Message for World Day of Peace, Jan. 1, 2000, No. 17).

John Paul II responds to the globalization of the economy with the globalization of solidarity. This was also the conclusion reached by the continental Synod of Bishops, which served to prepare for the Jubilee Year.

3) Subsidiarity

Subsidiarity is the revolutionary ethical principle of Christian social doctrine for the era of globalization.
The Pope warned that in this global village the "smaller social units -- whether nations themselves, communities, ethnic or religious groups, families or individuals -- must not be namelessly absorbed into a greater conglomeration, thus losing their identity and having their prerogatives usurped. Rather, the proper autonomy of each social class and organization, each in its own sphere, must be defended and upheld" (address at Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences, Feb. 24, 2000).

In this connection, John Paul II stresses the "value of human cultures."

"Globalization must not be a new version of colonialism," he says. "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" (address at Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences, April 27).

According to the Pontiff, the integration that impels globalization to be useful for progress in the dignity and rights of man, including his own consolidation and permanence, cannot do without the constant quest for "social, legal and cultural safeguards -- the result of people's efforts to defend the common good -- [which] are vitally necessary if individuals and intermediary groups are to maintain their centrality. But globalization often risks destroying these carefully built structures, by exacting the adoption of new styles of working, living and organizing communities."

The importance of this principle is such, and ignorance of it so grave, that John Paul II has requested that public opinion be "educated in the importance of the principle of subsidiarity for the survival of a truly democratic society (address at the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences, Feb. 24, 2000).

Holiness: the Christian's commitment

With these three fundamental principles of Church social doctrine which are the basis of others, John Paul II has offered nonnegotiable elements to humanize globalization.

To those who think that this is an overwhelming task, the Pope gives a concrete response. "To promote a global culture of those moral absolutes that are the rights of the person," he told participants in the UNIV 2001 University Congress, April 9, 2001, "it is necessary that each Christian begin with himself, making the effort to reflect in each of his own thoughts and actions the image of Christ, because the world is changed by holiness."