Labor Day in the New Millennium

‘The globalization of solidarity’ … Blessed John Paul II
Part One


Without doubt, globalization is a fact of economic and political life in the Third Millennium. For the past decade the annual Labor Day statements issued by the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops testify to the present urgency of the question for achieving justice for workers.

The contemporary papal social encyclicals of Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI specifically highlight the ethical dimensions of economic globalization and its impact on labor.

The “globalization of solidarity” stands as a leitmotif in the social teaching of Blessed John Paul II.

Among events of the Great Jubilee, May 1, 2000 marked the celebration of the Jubilee of Workers. On that occasion, the late Holy Father stated: “Globalization is a reality present today in every area of human life, but it is a reality which must be managed wisely. Solidarity too must be globalized.”

In concert with the late Holy Father’s jubilee theme of “the globalization of solidarity,” the Labor Day 2000 statement of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops was entitled, “A Jubilee for Workers: Challenges and Opportunities for the New Millennium.”

Cardinal Roger Mahony, then the chairman of the Domestic Policy Committee of the U.S. Catholic Conference, opened the statement by citing a seminal insight from Blessed John Paul II’s encyclical Laborem Exercens (“On Human Work,” 1981). That passage encapsulates a principle at the core of Church social doctrine: “[H]uman work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question (LE n. 3).”

The Labor Day 2000 statement closed with an admonition: “It is worth remembering on this Labor Day --- this Jubilee for Workers --- that a person is more valuable for what she or he is than for what they have, for the work they do rather than for what they possess.”

Thus Catholics as believers and citizens “must join together --- workers and employers, entrepreneurs and union leaders, tradespeople and policy makers --- to build a society that respects each person and their work. This is our continuing challenge and our necessary work as we begin this new millennium.”

Prior to the Great Jubilee the late Holy Father’s extensive writings on social justice had already addressed the exigency to respond to globalization with a Gospel-inspired moral vision for the new millennium.

Blessed John Paul II’s 1998 “Message for the World Day of Peace” sets forth the concept of “Globalization with solidarity.” In an economy of global markets, his 1998 Message called for “a globalization in solidarity, a globalization without marginalization.” [Section 3] Globalization in solidarity enjoins “a clear duty in justice, with serious moral impli-
cations in the organization of the economic, social, cultural and political life of nations.”

Again, in *Ecclesia in America* (“The Church in America,” 1999), Blessed John Paul II addressed the topic of “the globalization of solidarity.” [EIA n. 55] This post-synodal apostolic exhortation which followed the Synod for America states: “The globalized economy must be analyzed in the light of the principles of social justice, respecting the preferential option for the poor who must be allowed to take their place in such an economy, and the requirements of the international common good.”

In addition to creating “an authentic globalized culture of solidarity,” the Church of the American continent is called upon “to cooperate with every legitimate means in reducing the negative effects of globalization, such as the domination of the powerful over the weak, especially in the economic sphere, and the loss of values of local cultures in favor of a misguided homogenization.”

In continuity with the teaching of his predecessor, the ethical dimension of globalization continues as a recurrent theme in the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI.

The present Holy Father’s papal address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences at its 13th Plenary Session on April 28, 2007 referred to the specific challenge of global problems.

A year later, in his May 3, 2008 address at the 14th Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences Pope Benedict XVI set forth “the inter-relationships between four fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching: the dignity of the person, the common good, subsidiarity and solidarity.”

The Holy Father explains that “[t]hese key realities, which emerge from the living contact between the Gospel and concrete social circumstances, offer a framework for viewing and addressing the imperatives facing mankind at the dawn of the twenty-first century, such as reducing inequalities in the distribution of goods, expanding opportunities for education, fostering sustainable growth and development, and protecting the environment.”

In *Sacramentum Caritatis* (“The Sacrament of Charity,” 2007), Pope Benedict XVI expounds on the nature of “The Eucharist as a Mystery to Be Lived.” In this context, his post-synodal apostolic exhortation on “The Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church’s Life and Mission” engages the question of globalization and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor at a worldwide level. [SC n. 90]

Under the section entitled “The food of truth and human need,” the Holy Father affirms that “[w]e must denounce those who squander the earth’s riches, provoking inequalities that cry out to heaven (cf. Jas 5:4).”

Linking living the mystery of the Eucharist to the promotion of justice and charity, Pope Benedict XVI writes: “The Lord Jesus, the bread of eternal life, spurs us to be mindful of the situations of extreme poverty in which a great part of humanity still lives: these are situations for which human beings bear a clear and disquieting responsibility.”

Pope Benedict XVI’s 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (“Charity in Truth”) centered on the issue of the global economy and authentic human development. The question of labor and the phenomenon of globalization is an integral element in the structure of the encyclical.

*Caritas in Veritate* commemorated the 40th anniversary of Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (“On the Development of Peoples,” 1967). At this point in history, the Holy Father judges that “systems of protection and welfare, already present in Paul VI’s day, are finding it hard and could find it even harder in the future to pursue their goals of social justice in today’s profoundly changed environment.” [CIV n. 25]

A negative effect of global markets is the temptation to deregulate the labor market. Consequently, Pope Benedict XVI criticized the trend to downsize “social security systems as the price to be paid for seeking greater competitive advantage in the global market, with consequent grave dangers for the rights of workers, for fundamental human rights and the solidarity associated with the traditional
forms of the social State."

Caritas in Veritate calls attention to the deleterious societal effects on systems of social security by "cuts in social spending often made under pressure from international financial institutions ..." The circle of protection for citizens in need of support or at risk is narrowed "by the lack of effective protection on the part of workers' associations." Such dramatic social and economic changes are obstacles faced by trade union associations in effectively undertaking "their task of representing the interests of workers."

Blame, at least as a partial factor, for creating this deterioration in the social fabric can be attributed to those governments, which, "for reasons of economic utility, often limit the freedom or the negotiating capacity of labor unions."

From the perspective of the constant moral summons for over a century of Church social teaching on justice on behalf of workers, the challenge of globalization places a new urgency in conscience for defending the rights of workers and for advocating "new forms of cooperation at the international level, as well as the local level."

The Holy Father closes this section on authentic human development and globalization by forcefully stating a foundational moral principle for economic justice --- "... the primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity: 'Man is the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life.'"

Here the Holy Father quotes the teaching on economic and social life in the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes, 1965). The Pastoral Constitution states: "In the sphere of economic and social life, too, the dignity and entire vocation of the human person as well as the welfare of society as a whole have to be respected and fostered: for man is the source, the focus and the end of all economic and social life." [GS n. 63]

The Council further described economic development in the service of the human person: "The ultimate and basic purpose of economic production does not consist merely in the increase of goods produced, nor in profit nor prestige: it is directed to the service of man, of man in his totality, taking into account his material needs and the requirements of his intellectual, moral, spiritual, and religious life; of all men of whatever race or from whatever part of the world." [GS n. 64]

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