If we are concerned with social justice, we must reflect on the challenges confronting the organization of power in this age of globalization. There are several key principles of Catholic social thought that offer guidance for an evaluation of current international economic structures and the work for a more just global order.

In *One Hundred Years (Centesimus Annus)*, Pope John Paul II reminded us that there are certain essentials for human life such as food, water, healthcare, education, and more that must not be simply subordinated to the laws of the market. All people have a basic human right to those essentials given them by God.

How can we organize our globalizing world to produce and distribute these goods efficiently and, at the same time, guarantee that people in poverty without access to markets have their rights honored, not violated? There are many discussions in modern Catholic social thought of the appropriate roles for governments and corporations in society. Many different combinations are possible and fuel our political debates. The key test that must be kept front and center in all these possible arrangements is, “Does this set of societal roles and relationships provide for the basic needs of each and every person and promote the common good of the whole human family?”

The principle of subsidiarity, first articulated by Pope Pius XI in the 1931 encyclical *The Reconstruction of the Social Order (Quadragesimo Anno)*, requires that decisions be taken at the level of social organization, that is, closest to the needs and aspirations of the people and capable of providing for them. What kind of trade and financial policies will satisfy this principle within the international financial institutions (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization) and not impose oppressive conditions for poor countries that violate subsidiarity?

Finally, there is a little noticed principle in Catholic social thought put forward by Pope Leo XIII in his 1891 encyclical *On the Condition of Labor (Rerum Novarum)*. It reminds us that agreements between unequal partners are not necessarily fair just because they have been entered into by mutual consent. Pope Paul VI applied that principle “with equal force to contracts made between nations” in *The Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)* in 1967. The development of a global trading system must be based on more than treaty agreements. It must enshrine the commitment to justice in its global rules: justice that guarantees that all, especially those in poverty, have what they need to survive and develop, not just that all have an opportunity to compete.

Can we imagine and create an alternative, more just set of global relationships that embody principles of Catholic social thought such as these to replace the harsh dominance of wealth and power politics described in this issue? As people of faith, can we work for anything less?

**Reflection Questions**

- How are basics such as food, water, health care and education viewed in Catholic social thought, and in our society? Why are there different perspectives on these essentials?
- What key question is suggested about appropriate roles for governments and corporations in this globalized world? Should we and can we get more citizens asking this question?
- Developing countries have decisions made for them about subsidies for their small farmers, about how much they can spend on social services such as health care, and on other issues critical to their citizens. How does this violate the principle of subsidiarity and undermine democracy in these poor countries?

**Prayer**

We believe in a world where all people have their basic needs met, where all people have a voice in creating the common good, and all nations are served by international structures. As people of faith, we commit to work to co-create this world. Amen.