



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO THE ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Friday, 25 April 1997

Mr President,

Dear Academicians,

1. I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the plenary session of the *Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, dedicated to a *reflection on the theme of work*, already begun last year. The choice of this theme is particularly appropriate, for human work “is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question” (*Laborem exercens*, n. 3). The deep economic and social transformations we are experiencing make the theme of work more and more complex and it has serious human repercussions, for it gives rise to anxieties and expectations in many families and many persons, especially the young.

I thank your President, Professor Edmond Malinvaud, for his courteous words and for the availability he is showing to the very young *Pontifical Academy*. I renew my gratitude to you all for the generosity with which in this institution you put your expertise not only at the service of science, but also of the Church’s social doctrine (cf. *Statutes*, art. 1).

2. In fact *the service which the Magisterium must give* in this area has become more demanding today, because it must address a situation in the contemporary world that is changing with extraordinary speed. Of course, *the Church’s social teaching*, to the extent that she proposes principles based on the natural law and the Word of God, does not vary with the changes of history. However, these principles can be constantly clarified, especially in their concrete applications. And history shows that the *corpus of social doctrine* is continuously enriched with new perspectives and aspects in relation to cultural and social developments. I am pleased to stress the *basic continuity and dynamic nature* of the Magisterium in social matters at the time of the 30th anniversary of the Encyclical *Populorum progressio*, in which Pope Paul VI, on 26 March 1976 after the Second Vatican Council and on the way opened by Pope John XXIII, proposed a penetrating reinterpretation of the “social question” in its world dimension. How can we fail to recall

the prophetic cry he uttered, making himself the voice of the voiceless and the most underprivileged peoples? Paul VI wanted in this way to awaken consciences and show that the objective to reach was integral development through the advancement “of every man and of the whole man” (cf. *Populorum progressio*, n. 14). To mark the 20th anniversary of that document, I published the Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, in which I returned to the theme of solidarity and examined it in greater depth. During these last 10 years, many social events, especially the collapse of the communist systems, have considerably changed the face of the earth. Given the speed of social change, it is right today to verify and evaluate continuously. This is the role of your academy which, three years after its foundation, has already made some enlightening contributions; its progress is particularly promising for the future.

3. In your current research, the detailed study of *labour laws* is of great interest, especially if one considers the current trend of “market instability”. This is a topic which the Magisterium has addressed several times. Personally, I reminded you last year of the moral principle according to which the demands of the market, deeply marked by competition, must not “go against the primordial *right of every man to have work* through which he can earn a living for himself and his family” (Address of 22 March 1996, n. 3; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, n. 14, 3 April 1996). Returning to this topic today, I would like to stress that when she enunciates this principle, the Church does not at all mean to condemn the deregulation of the market in itself, but asks that it be envisaged and implemented with respect for *the primacy of the human person*, to which economic systems must be subject. History amply demonstrates the failure of regimes characterized by planning that is harmful to civil and economic freedoms. But nevertheless, this does not justify models that are diametrically opposed to them. For, unfortunately, experience shows that a market economy, left to unconditional freedom, is far from bringing the greatest possible advantages to individuals and societies. It is true that the amazing economic vitality of certain newly industrialized countries seems to confirm the fact that the market can produce wealth and well-being, even in poor regions. But in a broader perspective, one cannot forget *the human price* of these processes. Above all, one cannot forget the persistent scandal of serious inequalities between the different nations and between persons and groups within each country, as you emphasized at your first plenary session (cf. *The study of the tension between human equality and social inequalities from the perspective of the various social sciences*, Vatican City, 1996).

4. There are still too many poor people in the world who have no access to the least portion of the opulent wealth of a minority. In the framework of the “globalization” of the economy, still called “internationalization” (cf. *Centesimus annus*, n. 58), if the easy transfer of resources and production systems, effected only in virtue of the criterion of maximum profit and unbridled competition, increases opportunities for employment and well-being in certain regions, at the same time it ignores other less privileged regions and can aggravate *unemployment* in countries with a longstanding industrial tradition. The “globalized” organization of work, profiting from the extreme privation of developing peoples, often entails grave situations of exploitation that mock the

elementary demands of human dignity.

With regard to these orientations, it is essential that political activity assure a balanced market in its classical form by applying the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, according to the model of the *social State*. If the latter functions moderately, it will also avoid a system of excessive assistance that creates more problems than it solves. On this condition, it continues to be an *expression of authentic civilization*, an indispensable tool for the defence of the most underprivileged social classes, often crushed by the exorbitant power of the “global market”. Indeed, today we profit from the fact that new technologies make it possible to produce and trade almost without restriction in every part of the world, to reduce unskilled manpower and impose on it numerous constraints, by relying, after the end of the “blocs” and the gradual disappearance of borders, on a new supply of poorly paid workers.

5. Moreover, how is it possible to underestimate the risks of this situation, not only according to the demands of social justice, but further, according to the broadest perspectives of civilization? In itself, a balanced and well-regulated world market can bring with prosperity the development of culture, democracy, solidarity and peace. But one can expect very different effects from an *unbridled market* which, under the pretext of competitiveness, prospers *by exploiting man and the environment to excess*. This type of market, ethically unacceptable, can only have disastrous consequences, at least in the long term. It tends to confirm, generally in the material sense, the living cultures and traditions of peoples; it eradicates fundamental and common ethical and cultural values; it risks creating a great void of human values, “*an anthropological void*”, quite apart from most dangerously compromising *the ecological balance*. So how is it possible not to fear an explosion of deviant and violent behaviour which would create powerful tensions in the social body? Freedom itself would be threatened, and even the market which had profited from the absence of hindrances. All things considered, the reality of “globalization”, viewed in a balanced way with its positive potential and the fears it raises, is a call not to postpone the harmonization of *the “demands of the economy” with the demands of ethics*.

6. It should nevertheless be recognized that within the framework of a “world” economy, the ethical and juridical regulation of the market is objectively more difficult. Indeed, to achieve it effectively the domestic political initiatives of the different countries do not suffice; what is needed is an “increased co-ordination among the more powerful countries” and the consolidation of a *democratic global order* with agencies where “the interests of the whole human family be equally represented” (*Centesimus annus*, n. 58). Agencies, at the regional or world level, are not lacking. I am thinking in particular of the United Nations Organization and of its various agencies providing social assistance. I am also thinking of the role played by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. It is urgent that, in the field of freedom, a culture of “rules” should be reinforced which is not limited to a mere commercial function but takes charge, through reliable juridical tools, of *the protection of human rights* in all the parts of the world. The more “global” the market, the more it must be balanced by a *“global” culture of*

solidarity, attentive to the needs of the weakest. Unfortunately, despite grand declarations of principle, this reference to values is increasingly jeopardized by the resurgence of *selfishness* among *nations or groups*, and at a deeper level, by a widespread *ethical and cultural relativism*, which is a threat to the perception of man's very meaning.

7. But here — and the Church will never tire of repeating it! — is the Gordian knot to be cut, the crucial point on which economic and political perspectives must be focused, to explain their foundations and the possibility of their convergence. It is therefore right that you have included in your agenda, together with the problems of employment, those of *democracy*. The two problems are inevitably linked. In fact, democracy is only possible “on the basis of a correct conception of the human person” (*Centesimus annus*, n. 46), which involves the recognition of the right of each person to take an active part in public life with a view to achieving the common good. But how can someone who is not properly protected at the economic level and even lacks the basic necessities be guaranteed participation in democratic life? When even *the right to life* from conception to its natural end is not fully respected as an absolutely inalienable right, democracy is undermined and the formal rules for participation become an alibi that conceals *the tyranny of the strong over the weak* (cf. *Evangelium vitae*, nn. 20 and 70).

8. Dear Academicians, I am most grateful for your reflections on these essential subjects. At stake is not only an ever more pertinent ecclesial witness, but the construction of a society that fully respects *the dignity of man* who can never be considered an object or a commodity, because he bears *God's image* within him. The problems facing us are immense, but future generations will ask us to account for the way in which we have exercised our responsibilities. Further, we are accountable to the Lord of history. The Church therefore relies very much on your work, marked by scientific rigour, attentive to the Magisterium and, at the same time, open to dialogue with the multiple tendencies of contemporary culture.

I invoke an abundance of divine Blessings upon each one of you.

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