



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY WEEK  
ORGANIZED BY THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES**

*Friday, 27 October 1989*

*Your Excellency,  
Mr President,  
Distinguished Members of the Academy,*

1. It gives me great pleasure to greet all of you who have participated in the Study Week organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the theme "Society for Development in a Solidarity Framework". The topic which you have addressed is indeed complex, and will certainly require the sort of further study which only eminent scientists like yourselves can provide. Nonetheless, the topic is one of vital importance for the solution of one of the most urgent problems facing today's world: that of a development which can take place within a framework of genuine solidarity among peoples and States.

2. The Church has always had a special concern for the full development of peoples, as is evident from the impressive body of her social doctrine. This is particularly true in our own day, when this issue has taken on such immense proportions. Indeed, throughout its long history, mankind has never known an era of prosperity even vaguely comparable to that which the world in this second half of the twentieth century has come to enjoy. And yet, this prosperity, on closer analysis, has proved to be distorted and unbalanced. It is a prosperity which benefits but a small proportion of mankind, while leaving the majority of the world's inhabitants in a state of underdevelopment.

Development has thus given rise to very serious problems which the Church could hardly fail to address. These problems are not only of the political and economic order; they likewise involve the moral order. In effect, what is at stake is man himself. And the Church's primary duty is to make her voice heard in every problem where man comes into play – in his dignity as a human person;

in his right to free association in view of a better and more humane growth; in his right to freedom.

3. In essence, the Church has chosen to intervene in the problem of development for two reasons. First, she desires *to proclaim God's plan for mankind* as that plan emerges from Christian Revelation, which has its culmination and definitive expression in the teaching of Jesus. But the Church also desires to offer a "reading" of the problem of development *in the light of the Gospel and the natural moral law* which she has the duty both to safeguard and to apply to changing historical situations. In doing this, she hopes to make evident the distortions and injustices which do harm to human persons, to indicate their causes, and to point out those principles and courses of action necessary for a balanced and just development. This, in fact, is precisely what Pope Paul VI attempted to do in 1967 with his great Encyclical "[Populorum Progressio](#)". In the twenty years that have passed since that important document was issued, great changes have taken place in the world. In some areas, signs are present which allow some hope of resolving the problem of development. Yet, in other areas, the lack of progress towards development has reached truly catastrophic proportions. For this reason, I considered it my duty to take up the teaching of Pope Paul VI and to develop it further in my Encyclical "[Sollicitudo Rei Socialis](#)" of 30 December 1987. I am very pleased that this Study Week echoes an important theme of that Encyclical.

In the Encyclical, I noted that the conditions of developing countries "have become notably worse" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II [Sollicitudo Rei Socialis](#), 16) because of "a too narrow idea of development, that is a mainly economic one" (*Ibid.* 15). The developed countries bear responsibility for this, for they "have not always, at least in due measure, felt the duty to help" countries that are cut off from the world of prosperity (*Ibid.* 16). I felt it necessary to "denounce the existence of economic, financial and social mechanisms which, although they are manipulated by people, often function almost mechanically, thus accentuating the situation of wealth for some and poverty for the rest" (*Ibid.*). Moving beyond merely political or economic readings of the situation – as important and as valuable as these may be – and making a theological reading of those mechanisms or processes, I went on to speak of certain "structures of sin". Two factors in particular have contributed to creating, fostering and reinforcing these "structures", thus making them even more capable of conditioning human conduct: an exclusive desire for profit and the thirst for power which aims at imposing one's own will upon others. "Obviously, not only individuals fall victim to this double attitude of sin; nations and blocs can do so too. And this favours even more the introduction of the 'structures of sin' of which I have spoken. To diagnose the evil in this way is to identify precisely, on the level of human conduct, the path to be followed in order to overcome it" (*Ibid.* 37).

4. What, then, is the path to be followed?

It is the Church's task to awaken consciences and invite them to face the fact that today, like Lazarus at the door of the rich man, millions of people are in dire need while a great part of the world's resources are employed in areas which have little or nothing to contribute to the improvement of life on this planet. The Church has forcefully affirmed that solidarity is a grave

moral obligation, for nations as well as for individuals.

The virtue of solidarity finds its deepest roots in Christian faith, which teaches that God is our Father and that all men and women are brothers and sisters. From this belief flows Christian ethics, an ethics which excludes every form of selfishness and arrogance and seeks to unite persons freely in pursuit of the common good. Christian ethics gives rise to the conviction that it is unjust to squander resources which might be necessary for the lives of others. Today a new awareness of this moral imperative is needed, given the present conditions of such large portions of the human race.

Solidarity also leads to the collaboration of all social groups, which are thus called to look beyond the horizons of their own self-interest, making solidarity a “culture” to be fostered in the formation of the young and made evident in new patterns of behaviour. Indeed, only a widespread “culture of solidarity” will permit that exchange of goals and energies which seems so necessary if a truly humane level of life upon this earth is to be reached.

5. Practically speaking, what must be done if the principle of solidarity among individuals and peoples is to take more widespread root? The Church, for her part, cannot offer technical solutions to the problem of underdevelopment as such, since she has neither the mission nor the ability to state those contingent ways and means by which human problems of the political and economic order can and should be resolved. At this point, the role of the sciences comes into play.

It is here that we find the real significance of this Study Week and of other similar undertakings aimed at developing the directions charted by the Encyclical. Their object is to analyse and study more intensively – making use of an interdisciplinary and scientifically tested approach – the cultural, economic and political causes of underdevelopment; to identify with a rigorous and precise analysis the processes that perpetuate underdevelopment; and to suggest models of development which can be considered workable in present historical circumstances. Such analysis seeks to indicate the ways and proper times to intervene, the conditions, means and tools necessary for passing from underdevelopment to a balanced development, that is, a “development in a solidarity framework”.

6. Among the many problems which must be taken into consideration, there is one in particular which I would like to bring to your attention. It is the problem of the international debt, a debt which weighs heavily, at times with devastating consequences, upon many developing countries. It is not a problem which can be seen in isolation from others; rather the debt problem is intimately connected with a host of other issues, such as those of overseas investment, the equitable working of major international institutions, the price of raw materials, and so forth. I would only observe that this problem, in recent years, has become a symbol of already existing imbalances and injustices whose burden is often borne by the poorest segments of the population, and it points to an apparent inability to reverse a baneful process which seems at times to take on a life

of its own.

The Holy See has already had occasion to address this problem on an official level (Cfr. Pont. Commissionis "*Justitia et Pax*": "*At the Service of the Human Community: on Ethical Approach to the International Debt Question*, die 27 dec. 1986). And yet, the Church continues to hear pleas of her Pastors in those countries which labour most under this enormous burden, a burden which seems without reprieve and which gravely compromises the very possibility of a free and positive development.

I have underlined the importance of this issue because, once it is dealt with equitably, competently and in a spirit of authentic solidarity, it has the potential to become a genuine symbol and model of creative and effective resolve in the face of the other complex and pressing issues of international development.

The solutions to these problems are neither simple nor close at hand; yet, once they are discerned with wisdom and courage, they foster hope for a world where solidarity would no longer be merely a word, but an urgent task and a conviction which bears fruit in action. The virtue of solidarity, practised at a deep and authentic level, will demand of all parties both a willingness to be involved and a deep respect for others. Only in this way will the great potential resources of the developing countries *be transformed* into a concrete reality that has much to offer to the entire world.

Distinguished Members of the Academy and eminent Professors: I have only wished to point out some of the more pressing issues and ideas which you have been discussing during this Study Week. In expressing my hopes that your labours have been fruitful, I invoke upon all of you abundant divine blessings.

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