



# The Holy See

---

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE  
EUROPEAN CONGRESS ON THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL DOCTRINE**

*Friday, 20 June 1997*

*Your Eminence,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I would like first of all to express my deep satisfaction with this European Convention on the Church's Social Doctrine, which for the first time has gathered together teachers of this discipline in order to determine the most satisfactory ways to teach and spread it. I thank Cardinal Roger Etchegaray for the kind words with which he has presented this significant event. I am grateful to Mons. Angelo Scola, *Rector Magnificus* of the Pontifical Lateran University, and to Prof. Adriano Bausola, *Rector Magnificus* of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, for their effective collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in preparing this constructive meeting, a source of comfort and of hope.

The Church's social doctrine is one of my keenest concerns, since I am profoundly aware of how generous and qualified the concern of the whole Church must be in proclaiming the Gospel of life, justice and solidarity to contemporary man.

In going deeply into the reasons for this ecclesial involvement, you appropriately paused to commemorate the 30th anniversary of *Populorum progressio* of my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, and the 10th anniversary of *Sollicitudo rei socialis*. These two Encyclicals, with their demanding message, are a timely and patent warning not to abandon the work-place, where the development of the whole man and of every man is being constructed according to parameters that are not only economic but also moral.

2. In your daily service as teachers of the Church's social doctrine, the question often recurs: "How should the truth entrusted to Christians be proposed in the present historical and cultural

situation?" The clearest and most impelling need emerging today is to promote a "new evangelization", a "new *implantatio evangelica*", also with reference to social assistance. Pope Paul VI, in fact, urged people to overcome the gap between Gospel and culture by an inculturation of the faith capable of reaching and transforming, through the power of the Gospel, the criteria of judgement, decisive values, and lines of thought proper to every society. His main intention, particularly timely if we consider the situation in Europe, aimed at highlighting with renewed effort the importance of Christian faith for history, culture and human coexistence.

Beginning with Jesus Christ, man's only salvation, it is possible to show the universal value of our Christian faith and anthropology and their importance in every aspect of life. In Christ, the human being is offered a specific, individual and supportive interpretation of his reality, open to transcendence.

Starting precisely from this anthropology, the Church's social doctrine cannot be presented as an ideology or "third way" like other political and social proposals, but precisely as a specific moraltheological knowledge that originates in God and is communicated to man (cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 41). In this mystery it finds the inexhaustible source for interpreting and guiding human events. The new evangelization, to which the whole Church is called, must therefore fully integrate the Church's social doctrine (cf. *ibid.*), to be in a better position to reach and question the European peoples in the concrete context of their problems and situations.

3. Another viewpoint, from which to understand the wide horizons of your formative commitment hinged on the Church's social doctrine, concerns Christian ethics.

In the present-day culture of contemporary Europe, there is a strong tendency to "privatize" ethics and to deny the Christian moral message its public importance. The Church's social doctrine in itself represents a rejection of such privatization, because it sheds light on the authentic and decisive social dimensions of the faith, illustrating the ethical consequences.

As I have affirmed on various occasions, in the perspective outlined by the Church's social doctrine, we must never cease to stress humanity's essential link with the truth, and the primacy of ethics over politics, economy and technology.

Through her social doctrine, the Church thus questions the European continent, which is experiencing a complex and troubled season at the level of political and economic integration and social organization, on the moral quality of her civilization, an inescapable prerequisite for building a future based on true peace, freedom and hope for every people and every nation.

4. In the face of the many difficult challenges of the present time, the Church, in her evangelizing activity, is called upon to develop an intense and tireless work of formation in social responsibility. I am convinced that you will not fail to make your qualified contribution to it, since this work's basic

structure is the Church's social doctrine. In that light it will be possible to show how the full meaning of the human and Christian vocation also includes the social dimension. The Second Vatican Council clearly recalls this when it says in *Gaudium et spes*: "The gifts of the spirit are manifold: some men are called to testify openly to mankind's yearning for its heavenly home and keep the awareness of it vividly before men's minds; others are called to dedicate themselves to the earthly service of men and in this way to prepare the way for the kingdom of heaven" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 38).

In this perspective, education in social involvement appears as the development of an authentic Christian spirituality, which by its nature is called to enliven every human activity. Its essential element will be the effort to live the deep unity between love of God and love of neighbour, between prayer and action. Thus your teaching should constantly return to this, dear teachers of the Church's social doctrine. Yours is a contribution that must always be an organic part of the Christian community's pastoral action.

5. A satisfactory education in social involvement implies a twofold and unitive requirement: to have a thorough knowledge of the Church's social doctrine on the one hand and, on the other, to be able to discern concretely the effects of the Gospel message on man's fulfilment in the different circumstances of his earthly existence. This twofold requirement becomes particularly urgent if one considers the theme of development, which you have addressed during the Convention's work. In fact, while the current processes of economic globalization present many positive aspects, they also reveal worrying tendencies to leave the neediest countries and even entire regions on the fringes of development. It is the world of employees above all that is obliged to face the frequently dramatic consequences of imposing changes in production and the distribution of goods and economic services.

The sector most favoured in the processes of economic globalization seems to be the one commonly called "private" because of its dynamic entrepreneurial dimension. The Church's social doctrine recognizes that it certainly has a significant role in promoting development, but at the same time reminds each one of his responsibility to be keenly sensitive to the values of the common good and social justice, and always to act accordingly. The lack, at international level, of adequate structures to regulate and direct the current processes of economic globalization, does not diminish the social responsibility of business people working in this context. The plight of the poorest persons and nations requires each one to assume his own responsibilities so that favourable conditions for the authentic development of all can be created without delay.

Peoples have a right to development: it is therefore the organization of economic, political and social structures and the very principles governing the distribution of work implemented so far that need to be reviewed and corrected, in accordance with each person's right to work within the framework of the common good. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace continues to focus attention on this urgent need, entering into an explanatory dialogue with qualified representatives

of the various economic and social categories, such as entrepreneurs, economists, trade unionists, international institutions, and the academic world.

As I thank the President and all his co-workers in this dicastery for their generous dedication, I sincerely hope that their commitment will effectively contribute to sowing the seed of the civilization of love in the furrows of human events. I hope that the teachers present here will become the expert trainers of the new generations, sustained by faith in Christ, the Redeemer of every man and the whole of man, by their constant contact with the problems of the modern age, by a mature pastoral experience and by the wise use of the modern media.

May my Blessing comfort you in your work.

© Copyright 1997 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

---

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana