



12 March 1999

**Address to the Study Week on  
'Science for Survival and Sustainable Development'**

*John Paul II declares that man has the duty to limit the risks to creation by dedicating special attention to the natural environment. The imbalances between the rich and the poor countries must be addressed and international relations should have as their objective 'the promotion of the common good'. All people have a responsibility towards the safeguarding of the creation and in this context 'it is necessary to ensure that everyone, particularly young people who desire a better social life in the midst of creation, is educated in human and moral values'.*

Mr. President,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the study week organised by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the subject of the contribution of science to world development. I thank your President for his kind words and I extend warm greetings to you all, assuring you of my appreciation of the service which you give to the human community. You have chosen to reflect on the serious risks facing the planet as a whole and, at the same time, to consider possible steps for the safeguarding of creation on the eve of the third millennium.

2. In today's world, more and more people condemn the increasing harm caused by modern civilisation to persons, living conditions, climate and agriculture. Certainly, there are elements linked to nature and its proper autonomy, against which it is difficult, if not impossible, to struggle. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that human behaviour is sometimes the cause of serious ecological imbalance, with particularly harmful and disastrous consequences in different countries and throughout the world. It suffices to mention armed conflict, the unbridled race for economic growth, the inordinate use of resources, the pollution of the atmosphere and water.

3. Man has the responsibility of limiting the risks to creation by paying particular attention to the natural environment, by suitable intervention and protection systems considered especially from the viewpoint of the common good and not only of viability or private profit. The sustainable development of peoples calls on everyone to place themselves 'at the service of all, to help them to grasp this serious problem in all its dimensions, and to convince them that solidarity in action ... is a matter of urgency'.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, economic and political considerations and arguments frequently override respect for the environment, making the life of peoples impossible or placing them at risk in some parts of the world. In order that the world may be habitable tomorrow and that everyone may find a place in it, I encourage public authorities and all men and women of good will to question themselves about their daily attitudes and decisions, which should not be dictated by an unlimited and unrestrained quest for material goods without regard for the surroundings in which we live, and which should be capable of responding to the basic needs of present and future generations. This attention constitutes an essential dimension of solidarity between generations.

4. The international community is called to cooperate with the different groups concerned, to ensure that the behaviour of people, very often inspired by exaggerated consumerism, does not disrupt economic networks, natural resources or the safeguarding of the balance of nature. 'Mere accumulation of goods and services, even for the benefit of the majority, is not enough for the realisation of human happiness'.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the concentration of economic and political strength corresponding to special interests generates power centres which frequently act to the detriment of the interests of the international community. This situation leads to arbitrary decisions against which it is often difficult to react, thus exposing entire groups of people to serious harm. Parity and balance require research and decisions to be carried out with transparency, with the aim of serving the common good and the human community.

More than ever, it is important that a political, economic and legal order be established, based on clear moral principles, so that international relations will have as their objective the promotion of the common good, avoiding the manifestations of corruption which seriously damage individuals and peoples, and not tolerating the creation of unfair privileges and advantages which favour the richer countries and social groups, economic activities

developed without regard for human rights, tax havens, and regions exempt from the rule of law. Such an order should have enough authority with national bodies to intervene on behalf of the most disadvantaged regions and to promote social programmes aimed solely at helping these regions to advance on the path of development. On this condition, man will truly be a brother of every man and a co-operator with God in the management of the created order.

**5.** All those who have a responsibility in public life are also called to develop professional and technological training, and to implement training periods, especially for young people, enabling them to take an active part in national growth. Likewise, it is essential to train managers for developing countries and to carry out technological transfers towards these countries. This promotion of social balance, founded on the sense of justice and effected in a spirit of wisdom, will ensure respect for people's dignity, enable them to live in peace, and enjoy the goods produced by their land. Furthermore, a well-organised society will be able to respond more rapidly to catastrophes which occur, in order to give assistance to peoples, especially the poorest and consequently most deprived.

**6.** Your efforts to work out reliable projections constitute a precious contribution to ensuring that individuals, especially those who have the responsibility of guiding the destiny of peoples, fully assume their responsibilities to future generations, removing the threats arising from negligence, gravely mistaken economic or political decisions, or lack of long-term planning.

The strategies to be adopted, as well as the necessary national and international measures, should have as their primary aim the well-being of individuals and peoples, so that all countries will enjoy 'a wider share in the benefits of civilisation'.<sup>3</sup> By means of an equitable sharing of the funds allocated by the international community and low-interest loans, it is important to promote initiatives based on impartial solidarity, capable of supporting correctly targeted activities, a concrete application of the best adapted technologies and research corresponding to the needs of local peoples, thus ensuring that the fruits of technological and scientific progress do not exclusively benefit major companies and the more advanced countries. I therefore invite the scientific community to continue its research to better discern the causes of the imbalances linked to nature and to man, in order to anticipate them and to propose replacement solutions for situations which become intolerable.

These initiatives should be based on a conception of the world which places man at the centre and respects the variety of historical and environmental conditions, making sustainable development possible, capable of responding to the needs of the entire population of the world. This is especially a question of having a long-term perspective in the use of natural resources, ensuring that present resources are not exhausted by irrational and uncontrolled intervention.

**7.** People sometimes have the impression that their individual decisions are without influence at the level of a country, the planet or the cosmos. This could give rise to a certain indifference due to the irresponsible behaviour of some individuals. However, we must remember that the Creator placed man in creation, commanding him to administer it for the good of all, making use of his intelligence and reason. From this, we can be assured that the slightest good act of a person has a mysterious impact on social transformation and shares in the growth of all. On the basis of the covenant with the Creator, to which man is called to turn continually, everyone is invited to a profound personal conversion in their relationship with others and with nature. This will enable a collective conversion to take place and lead to a life in harmony with creation. Prophetic actions, however slight, are an opportunity for a great number of people to ask themselves questions and to commit themselves to new paths. Consequently, it is necessary to ensure that everyone, particularly young people who desire a better social life in the midst of creation, is educated in human and moral values; it is also necessary to develop every person's social sense and attentiveness to others so that all may realise what is at stake in their daily attitudes for the future of their country and the world.

**8.** At the end of our meeting, I ask the Lord to fill you with the spiritual strength needed to continue your efforts in a spirit of service to humanity and with a view to a better future on our planet. To all of you and to your loved ones I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

1 *Populorum Progressio*, n. 1.

2 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 28.

3 *Populorum Progressio*, n. 1.