



Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Professor Mary Ann Glendon, President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on the Occasion of the 13th Plenary Session



To Her Excellency
Professor Mary Ann Glendon
President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

As the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences gathers for its thirteenth Plenary Session, I am pleased to greet you and your distinguished confreres and to convey my prayerful good wishes for your deliberations.

The Academy's meeting this year is devoted to an examination of the theme: "Charity and Justice in the Relations among Peoples and Nations." The Church cannot fail to be interested in this subject, inasmuch as the pursuit of justice and the promotion of the civilization of love are essential aspects of her mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Certainly the building of a just society is the primary responsibility of the political order, both in individual States and in the international community. As such, it demands, at every level, a disciplined exercise of practical reason and a training of the will in order to discern and achieve the specific requirements of justice in full respect for the common good and the inalienable dignity of each individual. In my Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, I wished to reaffirm, at the beginning of my Pontificate, the Church's desire to contribute to this necessary purification of reason, to help form consciences and to stimulate a greater response to the genuine requirements of justice. At the same time, I wished to emphasize that, even in the most just society, there will always be a place for charity: "there is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love" (No. 28).

The Church's conviction of the inseparability of justice and charity is ultimately born of her experience of the revelation of God's infinite justice and mercy in Jesus Christ, and it finds expression in her insistence that man himself and his irreducible dignity must be at the centre of political and social life. Her teaching, which is addressed not only to believers but to all people of good will, thus appeals to right reason and a sound understanding of human nature in proposing principles capable of guiding individuals and communities in the pursuit of a social order marked by justice, freedom, fraternal solidarity and peace. At the heart of that teaching, as you well know, is the principle of the universal destination of all the goods of creation. According to this fundamental principle, everything that the earth produces and all that man transforms and manufactures, all his knowledge and technology, is meant to serve the material and spiritual development and fulfilment of the human family and all its members.

From this integrally human perspective we can understand more fully the essential role which charity plays in the pursuit of justice. My predecessor, Pope John Paul II, was convinced that justice alone is insufficient to establish truly humane and fraternal relations within society. "In every sphere of interpersonal relationships," he maintained, "justice must, so to speak, be 'corrected' to a considerable extent by that love which, as Saint Paul proclaims, 'is patient and kind' or, in other words, possesses the characteristics of that merciful love which is so much of the essence of the Gospel and Christianity" (*Dives in Misericordia*, 14). Charity, in a word, not only enables justice to become more inventive and to meet new challenges; it also inspires and purifies humanity's efforts to achieve authentic justice and thus the building of a society worthy of man.

At a time when "concern for our neighbour transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 30), the intrinsic relationship between charity and justice needs to be more clearly understood and emphasized. In expressing my confidence that your discussions in these days will prove fruitful in this regard, I would like briefly to direct your attention to three specific challenges facing our world, challenges which I believe can only be met through a firm commitment to that greater justice which is inspired by charity.

The first concerns the environment and sustainable development. The international community recognizes that the world's resources are limited and that it is the duty of all peoples to implement policies to protect the environment in order to prevent the destruction of that natural capital whose fruits are necessary for the well-being of humanity. To meet this challenge, what is required is an interdisciplinary approach such as you have employed. Also needed is a capacity to assess and forecast, to monitor the dynamics of environmental change and sustainable growth, and to draw up and apply solutions at an international level. Particular attention must be paid to the fact that the poorest countries are likely to pay the heaviest price for ecological deterioration. In my *Message for the 2007 World Day of Peace*, I pointed out that "the destruction of the environment, its improper or selfish use, and the violent hoarding of the earth's resources ... are the consequences of an inhumane concept of development. Indeed, if development were limited to the technical-economic aspect, obscuring the moral-religious dimension, it would not be an integral human development, but a one-sided distortion which would end up by unleashing man's destructive capacities" (No. 9). In meeting the challenges of environmental protection and

sustainable development, we are called to promote and "safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic 'human ecology'" (*Centesimus Annus*, 38). This in turn calls for a responsible relationship not only with creation but also with our neighbours, near and far, in space and time, and with the Creator.

This brings us to a second challenge which involves our conception of the human person and consequently our relationships with one other. If human beings are not seen as persons, male and female, created in God's image (cf. *Gen* 1:26) and endowed with an inviolable dignity, it will be very difficult to achieve full justice in the world. Despite the recognition of the rights of the person in international declarations and legal instruments, much progress needs to be made in bringing this recognition to bear upon such global problems as the growing gap between rich and poor countries; the unequal distribution and allocation of natural resources and of the wealth produced by human activity; the tragedy of hunger, thirst and poverty on a planet where there is an abundance of food, water and prosperity; the human suffering of refugees and displaced people; the continuing hostilities in many parts of the world; the lack of sufficient legal protection for the unborn; the exploitation of children; the international traffic in human beings, arms and drugs; and numerous other grave injustices.

A third challenge relates to the values of the spirit. Pressed by economic worries, we tend to forget that, unlike material goods, those spiritual goods which are properly human expand and multiply when communicated: unlike divisible goods, spiritual goods such as knowledge and education are indivisible, and the more one shares them, the more they are possessed. Globalization has increased the interdependence of peoples, with their different traditions, religions and systems of education. This means that the peoples of the world, for all their differences, are constantly learning about one another and coming into much greater contact. All the more important, then, is the need for a dialogue which can help people to understand their own traditions vis-à-vis those of others, to develop greater self-awareness in the face of challenges to their identity, and thus to promote understanding and the acknowledgement of true human values within an intercultural perspective. To meet these challenges, a just equality of opportunity, especially in the field of education and the transmission of knowledge, is urgently needed. Regrettably, education, especially at the primary level, remains dramatically insufficient in many parts of the world.

To meet these challenges, only love for neighbour can inspire within us justice at the service of life and the promotion of human dignity. Only love within the family, founded on a man and a woman, who are created in the image of God, can assure that inter-generational solidarity which transmits love and justice to future generations. Only charity can encourage us to place the human person once more at the centre of life in society and at the centre of a globalized world governed by justice.

With these considerations, dear Members of the Academy, I encourage you as you carry forward your important work. Upon you and your loved ones I cordially invoke God's blessings of wisdom, joy and peace.