



Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Sixteenth Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences



Dear Members of the Academy,

I am pleased to greet you at the beginning of your Sixteenth Plenary Session, which is devoted to an analysis of the global economic crisis in the light of the ethical principles enshrined in the Church's social doctrine. I thank your President, Professor Mary Ann Glendon, for her gracious words of greeting and I offer you my prayerful good wishes for the fruitfulness of your deliberations.

The worldwide financial breakdown has, as we know, demonstrated the fragility of the present economic system and the institutions linked to it. It has also shown the error of the assumption that the market is capable of regulating itself, apart from public intervention and the support of internalized moral standards. This assumption is based on an impoverished notion of economic life as a sort of self-calibrating mechanism driven by self-interest and profit-seeking. As such, it overlooks the essentially ethical nature of economics as an activity *of* and *for* human beings. Rather than a spiral of production and consumption in view of narrowly-defined human needs, economic life should properly be seen as an exercise of human responsibility, intrinsically oriented towards the promotion of the dignity of the person, the pursuit of the common good and the integral development – political, cultural and spiritual – of individuals, families and societies. An appreciation of this fuller human dimension calls, in turn, for precisely the kind of cross-disciplinary research and reflection which the present session of the Academy has now undertaken.

In my Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, I observed that “the current crisis obliges us to re-plan our

journey, to set ourselves new rules and to discover new forms of commitment” (No. 21). Re-planning the journey, of course, also means looking to comprehensive and objective standards against which to judge the structures, institutions and concrete decisions which guide and direct economic life. The Church, based on her faith in God the Creator, affirms the existence of a universal natural law which is the ultimate source of these criteria (cf. *ibid.*, 59). Yet she is likewise convinced that the principles of this ethical order, inscribed in creation itself, are accessible to human reason and, as such, must be adopted as the basis for practical choices. As part of the great heritage of human wisdom, the natural moral law, which the Church has appropriated, purified and developed in the light of Christian revelation, serves as a beacon guiding the efforts of individuals and communities to pursue good and to avoid evil, while directing their commitment to building an authentically just and humane society.

Among the indispensable principles shaping such an integral ethical approach to economic life must be the promotion of the common good, grounded in respect for the dignity of the human person and acknowledged as the primary goal of production and trade systems, political institutions and social welfare. In our day, concern for the common good has taken on a more markedly global dimension. It has also become increasingly evident that the common good embraces responsibility towards future generations; intergenerational solidarity must henceforth be recognized as a basic ethical criterion for judging any social system. These realities point to the urgency of strengthening the governance procedures of the global economy, albeit with due respect for the principle of subsidiarity. In the end, however, all economic decisions and policies must be directed towards “charity in truth”, inasmuch as truth preserves and channels the liberating power of charity amid ever-contingent human events and structures. For “without truth, without trust and love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power, resulting in social fragmentation” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 5).

With these considerations, dear friends, I once more express my confidence that this Plenary Session will contribute to a more profound discernment of the serious social and economic challenges facing our world, and help point the way forward to meet those challenges in a spirit of wisdom, justice and authentic humanity. I assure you once more of my prayers for your important work, and upon you and your loved ones I cordially invoke God’s blessings of joy and peace.