



## Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the Occasion of the Eighteenth Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences



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

I am pleased to greet you and all who have gathered in Rome for the Eighteenth Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. You have chosen to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Blessed John XXIII's Encyclical Letter *[Pacem in Terris](#)* by studying the contribution of this important document to the Church's social doctrine. At the height of the Cold War, when the world was still coming to terms with the threat posed by the existence and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Pope John addressed what has been described as an "open letter to the world". It was a heartfelt appeal from a great pastor, nearing the end of his life, for the cause of peace and justice to be vigorously promoted at every level of society, nationally and internationally. While the global political landscape has changed significantly in the intervening half-century, the vision offered by Pope John still has much to teach us as we struggle to face the new challenges for peace and justice in the post-Cold-War era, amid the continuing proliferation of armaments. "The world will never be the dwelling-place of peace, till peace has found a home in the heart of each and every human person, till all preserve within themselves the order ordained by God to be preserved" (*[Pacem in Terris](#)*, 165). At the heart of the Church's social doctrine is the anthropology which recognizes in the human creature the image of the Creator, endowed with intelligence and freedom, capable of knowing and loving. Peace and justice are fruits of the right order that is inscribed within creation itself, written on human hearts (cf. *Rom* 2:15) and therefore accessible to

all people of good will, all “pilgrims of truth and of peace”. Pope John’s Encyclical was and is a powerful summons to engage in that creative dialogue between the Church and the world, between believers and non-believers, which the Second Vatican Council set out to promote. It offers a thoroughly Christian vision of man’s place in the cosmos, confident that in so doing it is holding out a message of hope to a world that is hungry for it, a message that can resonate with people of all beliefs and none, because its truth is accessible to all.

In that same spirit, after the terrorist attacks that shook the world in September 2001, Blessed John Paul II insisted that there can be “no peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness” (*Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace*). The notion of forgiveness needs to find its way into international discourse on conflict resolution, so as to transform the sterile language of mutual recrimination which leads nowhere. If the human creature is made in the image of God, a God of justice who is “rich in mercy” (*Eph 2:4*), then these qualities need to be reflected in the conduct of human affairs. It is the combination of justice and forgiveness, of justice and grace, which lies at the heart of the divine response to human wrong-doing (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 44), at the heart, in other words, of the “divinely established order” (*Pacem in Terris*, 1). Forgiveness is not a denial of wrong-doing, but a participation in the healing and transforming love of God which reconciles and restores.

How eloquent, then, was the choice of theme for the 2009 Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops: “The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace”. The life-giving message of the Gospel has brought hope to millions of Africans, helping them to rise above the sufferings inflicted on them by repressive regimes and fratricidal conflicts. Similarly, the 2010 Assembly on the Church in the Middle East highlighted the themes of communion and witness, the oneness of mind and soul that characterizes those who set out to follow the light of truth. Historic wrongs and injustices can only be overcome if men and women are inspired by a message of healing and hope, a message that offers a way forward, out of the impasse that so often locks people and nations into a vicious circle of violence. Since 1963, some of the conflicts that seemed insoluble at the time have passed into history. Let us take heart, then, as we struggle for peace and justice in the world today, confident that our common pursuit of the divinely established order, of a world where the dignity of every human person is accorded the respect that is due, can and will bear fruit.

I commend your deliberations to the maternal guidance of Our Lady, Queen of Peace. To you, to Bishop Sánchez Sorondo, and to all the participants in the XVIII Plenary Session, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing.