



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE
ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

Your Excellencies,

*Dear Friends,*1. It has always been my pleasure to receive the Members of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, together with certain of their Consultors, on the occasion of their Plenary Assembly. This year however its coincidence with my Apostolic Visit to India prevents me from doing so. Nevertheless, your President, Archbishop Francis-Xavier Van Thûân, has informed me of the programme of your Assembly, and with this Message I wish to greet you and invoke God's blessing on your work. In its now long history, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace has played an important role in promoting the social teaching of the Church. Founded at the request of the Second Vatican Council, it is called to bring to the whole of God's People a fuller knowledge of their part in furthering the progress of the human family, especially of its poorer members, through the pursuit of social justice among peoples and nations (cf. *Motu Proprio*, 6 January 1967). Its scope has always been, and remains more than ever, global. On the eve of the Great Jubilee, you continue to show your determination to remain faithful to this mission.2. The recent efforts of the Pontifical Council to spread an awareness of the social teaching of the Church have been directed to making leaders, both ecclesiastical and civil, ever more mindful of their obligation to promote the dignity of each human person by addressing such questions as the elimination of extreme poverty and the promotion of an effective approach to human rights. You have successfully brought these concerns directly to different parts of the world by seeking the help of the local Churches in organizing seminars on the Church's social teaching, within very specific contexts. By doing this in Africa, Asia and Latin America, you are giving full expression to the spirit of the Great Jubilee, which is meant to be a time of liberation, and of the restoration of equity and peace among peoples (cf. *Lev 25*). You have done so in an evangelical spirit, because true freedom, justice and peace are gifts of a loving God who seeks the collaboration of those whom he created in love. I encourage you in your efforts to make the practice of the social teaching of the Church an ever more deeply felt commitment among the faithful. In the same spirit, you have both supported and promoted efforts in regional and international forums to help the poorest countries free themselves from the burden of debt and underdevelopment, and you have supported efforts to bring an end to internal conflicts.3. Last year, I entrusted the Pontifical Council with the task of producing "a compendium or approved synthesis of Church social doctrine" which would show the connection between it and the new evangelization (*Ecclesia in America*, 54). Such a document will help the Church's members to understand better the importance of this teaching. The Jubilee offers an excellent occasion for such a publication. The very concept of the Jubilee commemorating the birth of Jesus includes proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freeing the oppressed

and giving sight to the blind (cf. Mt 11:4-5; Lk 7:22), releasing people from their debts, and restoring land (Lev 25:8-28), questions which the Pontifical Council has been effectively addressing during the years of preparation for this great event.⁴ At this Plenary Assembly you will be considering the current environmental crisis in the light of the social teaching of the Church. The question of the environment is closely related to other important social issues, insofar as the environment embraces all that surrounds us and all upon which human life depends. Hence the importance of a correct approach to the question. In this regard, reflection on the biblical foundations of care for the created world can clarify the obligation to promote a sound and healthy environment. The use of the earth's resources is another crucial aspect of the environmental question. A study of this complex problem goes to the very heart of the organization of modern society. Reflecting on the environment in the light of Sacred Scripture and the social teaching of the Church, we cannot but raise the question of the very style of life promoted by modern society, and in particular the question of the uneven way in which the benefits of progress are distributed. The Pontifical Council will render a valuable service to the Church, and through the Church to all of humanity, in promoting a deeper understanding of the obligation to work for greater justice and equity in the way people are enabled to share in the resources of God's creation.⁵ On the occasion of your meeting, I gladly invoke divine blessings on each of the Council's Members and Consultors. I thank you all for the considerable help that you give to the Holy See on the basis of your specific skills and your rich and varied experience in many parts of the world. May the grace and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you and the members of your families. With my Apostolic Blessing. *From the Vatican, 4 November 1999* **IOANNES PAULUS II**
