



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE COMMITTEE OF PRESIDENCY OF  
THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS\****

*22 March 1979*

*Mr President, Madam, Gentlemen,*

I thank you heartily for your visit! It is a mark of deference to the pontifical ministry which has recently been entrusted to me, and an opportunity to stress the efforts that your Institute and the Holy See are making, at different levels, of course, and according to specific competences, to promote respect and the practical exercise of the fundamental rights of the human person.

At this short meeting, I am happy to express my esteem to the International Institute for Human Rights, founded nearly ten years ago by Mr René Cassin. The three great directions fixed for your patient work are plainly of topical interest: to teach human rights wisely and perseveringly, to promote researches in this field, to arouse the awareness of public opinion, tactfully and opportunely.

Your work interests the Catholic Church and, I must say, it interests all Christians who are clearly conscious of the sacred character of every human person, so strongly emphasized from the first pages of the Bible: "God created man in his own image" (Gen 1:27).

In these days of the fortieth anniversary of the election of Pius XII to Peter's See, allow me to stress that this Pope incessantly urged Catholics to collaborate actively with men of good will in organizations called to protect human rights, such as the United Nations and so many other well-deserving institutions. Speaking of "the world community in formation" to participants in the eleventh Plenary Assembly of "Pax Romana" on 25 April 1957, he declared: "A Christian cannot remain indifferent to the evolution of the world... Not only can he, but he must work at the coming of this community." Impartial history obliges us to recognize that, in twenty years, Pius XII brought

about considerable progress in the reflection of the Church on the inviolable character of the person, the dignity of the family, the prerogatives and limits of public authority, the rights of ethnic minorities, the right to public expression of opinions, the right to political freedom, the right of refugees, prisoners, the persecuted, the right to a religious education, the right to private and public worship of God (cf. Christmas Broadcast 1942, AAS 35, 1943, p. 9). It emerges from his messages that the human person can never be sacrificed to a national or international political interest, whatever it may be.

John XXIII then developed these themes widely, in his admirable encyclicals *Mater at Magistra* and *Pacem in terris*, among others. Paul VI took them up again and studied them deeply in innumerable documents which characterize his pontificate: let it be enough to mention his address to the Diplomatic Corps on 14 January 1978, and also the message he published on 26 October 1974, together with the Synod Fathers, dedicated to the Church's commitment in the defence and promotion of human rights. Such a commitment springs from the Gospel, where there is the deepest expression of man's dignity and the most pressing motive for efforts to promote his rights. And the Church, as you know, conceives this task in the framework of her mission in the service of the full salvation of man, redeemed by Christ, as I have just set forth in my first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*.

May these few words be light and comfort for you! It is good to tell one another again that priority attention of minds and hearts to the dignity of the whole human person, on the plane of teaching and concrete and multiform action, is a work which should cause increasing unanimity of all men of good will.

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