



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

MEETING WITH THE PEOPLE OF DETROIT

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Hart Plaza, Detroit
Saturday, 19 September 1987

Dear Friends,

1. I am happy that, almost at the end of my second pastoral visit to the United States, I am able to address such a large number of people in this well-known industrial city of Detroit. I greet all of you most cordially: Christian leaders and leaders of other religions; civic leaders from the federal, state and municipal government: people of various races and ethnic backgrounds, fellow Catholics; Christian and non-Christian brothers and sisters; men and women of good will!

I feel that I must *thank the Lord our God* for this wonderful occasion. Detroit is a place where work, hard daily work - that privilege, duty and vocation of the human person (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Laborem Exercens*, 9) - is a truly distinctive characteristic of urban life. This is indeed *a city of workers*, and very many of you here - men and women, younger people and older people, immigrants and native-born Americans - earn your living and that of your families in and around Detroit through the work of your hands, your mind, indeed your whole person. And many of you suffer from the problems that not infrequently characterize the work situation in an industrial urban setting.

This is why I would like to make reference to a subject which, as you are well aware, is close to my heart. This subject is *social progress and human development* in relation to the requirements of justice and to the building of a lasting peace, both in the United States and throughout the world.

Of course, dear friends, dear people of Detroit and this whole area, it is *you* I have primarily in mind in dealing with such a subject - you who have been created in the image and likeness of God, you who have been redeemed by the blood of the Saviour, you who are children of God and brothers and sisters of Christ, you who for all of these reasons possess an incomparable dignity. But in looking at you, assembled here in Hart Plaza, *I see beyond you all the people of this country and the peoples of the whole world*. I see all the men and women who, like you, are confronted every day anew with the obligation and the challenge to provide for their livelihood and for the livelihood of their family through their own work. Work means any activity, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or whatever its circumstances, by which a human being earns his or her daily bread and contributes to science and progress, civilization and culture (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Laborem Exercens*, 1) . Human work is such a fundamental dimension of human existence that one cannot speak about it without touching upon all its aspects.

2. *Social progress and human development are the concern of all*. They are of particular concern to the Church. From the very beginning of her existence in time, the Church has endeavoured to fathom the total richness of the message which Jesus Christ proclaimed both by his words and his actions. Sent by the Father to assume our humanity and bring salvation to all, the Lord Jesus provided us with the key to understanding our humanity. He taught us about our origin and destiny, which are in God. He taught us the transcendent value of all human life and the supreme dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God (Cfr. *Gen.* 1, 27). He taught us that human life is fulfilled in knowing and loving God, and in loving our neighbour according to the measure of God's love for us. He invited us to follow him, to become his disciples. He summoned us to be converted in our hearts by entering into the mystery of his Passion, Death and Resurrection. He revealed that we are God's partners in bringing creation to fulfilment. And he now fashions us into a chosen people, a communion of faith with a commitment to his Kingdom.

In fidelity to Christ, the Church has endeavoured *to bring his message to bear on all aspects of life*, throughout the changing circumstances in the course of the centuries, bringing out from the heritage of the Gospel "both the new and the old" (*Matth.* 13, 52). New challenges affecting the life of every person individually and of society as a whole have presented themselves at every turn on the path of humanity through history. In trying to meet those challenges, the People of God have always turned to the message of Jesus, in order to discover the principles and the values that would ensure solutions in consonance with the dignity and destiny of the human person.

Throughout her history, the Church has listened to the words of Scripture and has sought to put them into practice, in the midst of different political, economic and social circumstances. This has been a truly common effort. Individual Christians have struggled to be faithful to the Gospel inspiration in their daily lives; centres of learning have contributed their specialized studies; groups and associations have addressed issues of particular concern; communities have developed practical initiatives; individual bishops and episcopal conferences have provided guidance; and the *Magisterium* of the Church has made pronouncements and issued documents. In a continuous interaction the Church has thus developed a tradition of thought and practical guidelines that are

called *the social teaching of the Church*. This social teaching has recently been expressed in documents of the Second Vatican Council and in writings of the Popes, who have systematically addressed the rapid changes in contemporary society.

Also today, the various categories of the People of God - according to their respective calling - continue to address the social problems in their various historical and cultural settings.

3. Today, dear friends, on this last day of my second extended visit to the United States of America, I would urge you to continue *your personal involvement in that neverending quest for justice and peace*. Under the guidance and inspiration of the Church's *Magisterium* - which is that of the Pope and of the bishops in union with him each one of you is called to make a contribution. Each one of you must be instrumental in promoting a social order that respects the dignity of the human person and serves the common good. Each one of you has an irreplaceable contribution to make to secure a social order of justice in peace. In your country today, participation at different levels of economic, social and political life has greatly intensified the awareness of the unique dignity of every human person and at the same time reinforced your sense of responsibility to yourselves and to others. As Christians you find in your faith *a deep motivation for your social responsibility and involvement*. Do not let this hour pass without renewing your commitment to action for social justice and peace. Turn to the Gospel of Jesus Christ to strengthen your resolve to become instruments for the common good! Learn from the Gospel that you have been entrusted with the justice and peace of God! We are not merely the builders of justice according to the standards of this world, but we are the bearers of the life of God, who is himself justice and peace! Let your endeavours to achieve justice and peace in all the spheres of your lives be a manifestation of God's love!

In a setting similar to this one some eight years ago in New York's Yankee Stadium, I proclaimed *the Gospel challenge contained in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus*. You are all familiar with this marvellous lesson in social responsibility which Jesus left us. Knowing your faith and your openness to challenge, I now ask you today: What have you done with that parable? How many times in the past eight years have you turned to that parable to find inspiration for your Christian lives? Or have you put it aside thinking that it was no longer relevant to you or to the situations in your country?

4. In any modern society, no matter how advanced, there will always be situations, some old and some new, that summon your Christian sense of justice to action. Our Lord has said: "The poor you will always have with you" (*Matth. 26, 11*). *You must therefore discover the poor in your midst*. There is poverty among you when the old and the weak are neglected and their standard of living constantly declines. There is poverty when illness takes away the wage earner from a family. There is material need and suffering in those areas or groups where unemployment risks becoming endemic. There is poverty in the future of those that cannot enjoy the benefits of basic education.

Some modern technological developments contain the potential for new hardships and injustice and must therefore be part of our concern. The introduction of robotics, the rapid development of communications, the necessary adaptation of industrial plants, the need to introduce new skills in management - these are but some of the factors that, if not analysed carefully or tested as to their social cost, may produce undue hardship for many, either temporarily or more permanently.

These are just a few *areas where our social responsibility is challenged*. Others include the situation of marriage and family life and the factors that threaten their underlying values; the respect for the sacredness of unborn human life; the situation of newly arrived immigrants; open or disguised expressions of discrimination based on “race, origin, colour, culture, sex or religion” (Pauli VI *Octogesima Adveniens*, 16). To the degree that its social conscience is sensitive, every community will discover where instances of injustice or threats to peace still exist or are potentially present.

But the very attempt to look at some of the challenges in the domestic scene brings us to another important consideration regarding progress and human development. I am referring *to the international dimension*.

5. Without implying in any way that domestic or national problems do not exist any more - and they most certainly do - it becomes ever more evident that such local or national problems, and their solutions, are fundamentally linked with realities that transcend the boundaries of countries. Not only do decisions taken by one nation affect other regions of the world, but the solution to many domestic problems can no longer be found except on an international, and even, a worldwide level. All major problems that concern the life of the human person in society have become world problems. Any decision that is envisaged in the political, economic or social sphere must be considered within the context of its worldwide repercussions. What now most deeply affects any debate on social progress and human development is the *fact of worldwide interdependence*.

Already twenty years ago, in 1967, Pope Paul VI wrote, at the very beginning of his Encyclical Letter “On the Development of Peoples” (*Populorum Progressio*): “Today the principal fact that we must all recognize is that the social question has become worldwide” (Eiusdem *Populorum Progressio*, 3). In following years, *this affirmation of Paul VI was further vindicated by a succession of events*. There was the emergence on the political scene of peoples who, after centuries of colonial domination and dependence, demanded ever more forcefully their rightful place among the nations and in international decision-making. A worldwide economic crisis brought home the fact that there exists an increasingly interdependent economy. The continuing existence of millions of people who suffer hunger or malnutrition and the growing realization that the natural resources are limited make clear that humanity forms a single whole. Pollution of air and water threatens more and more the delicate balance of the biosphere on which present and future generations depend and makes us realize that we all share a common ecological environment. Instant communication has linked finance and trade in worldwide dependence.

The poorer nations of the world are inclined to view this interdependence as a continuing pattern of economic domination by the more developed countries, while the latter sometimes view interdependence as the opening up of new opportunities for commerce and export.

Interdependence clearly demands that relations between nations be seen in this new context and that *the social question needs an appropriate ethic*. Nobody can say anymore: "Let others be concerned with the rest of the world!" The world is each one of us!

6. When I addressed the participants of the sixty-eighth session of the international Labour Organization on 15 June 1982, I was able to state: "There is a common good which can no longer be confined to a more or less satisfactory compromise between sectional demands or between purely economic requirements. New ethical choices are necessary; *a new world conscience must be created*; each of us, without denying his origin and the roots of his family, his people and his nation, or the obligations arising therefrom, must regard himself as a member of this great family, the world community... This means that the worldwide common good requires *a new solidarity without frontiers*" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Genavae, ad eos qui LXVIII conventui Conferentiae ab omnibus nationibus de huwano labore interfuere habita*, 10, die 15 iun. 1982: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, V, 2 (1982) 2262).

The Church's social teaching sees this new solidarity as a consequence of our faith. It is the attitude, in the international reality, of those who heed the Lord's commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jo. 15, 12). It is the consequence of our faith in the mystery of creation: that God has created every human person in his own image and likeness. Every human being is endowed with the same fundamental and inalienable dignity. Every individual is called to acknowledge this fundamental equality within the unity of the human family. Everyone is invited to respect the common destiny of everyone else in God. Everyone is asked to accept that the goods of the earth are given by God to all for the benefit of all.

For the disciple of Christ, *solidarity is a moral duty stemming from the spiritual union of all human beings* who share a common origin, a common dignity, and a common destiny. In creating us to live in society, in a close network of relations with each other, and in calling us through redemption to share the life of the Saviour not merely as individuals but as members of a pilgrim people, *God himself has created our basic interdependence and called us to solidarity with all*. This teaching is formulated in an incomparably effective manner in *the parable of the Good Samaritan*, who took care of the man who was left half dead along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. We all travel that road and are tempted to pass by on the other side. Referring to the Samaritan who was moved by compassion, Jesus told his listeners: "Go, and do the same". Today, Jesus repeats to all of us when we travel the road of our common humanity: "Go, and do the same" (Cfr. *Luc. 10, 37*).

7. In speaking to you about social progress and human development, I feel impelled to stress the international dimension because of the objective need to promote *a new worldwide solidarity*.

There is also another reason why I am especially mindful today of the larger international scene. You know well that the Bishop of Rome and the Holy See follow closely *international activities* and therefore have a *special interest in the work of the United Nations Organization* in New York. I would have liked very much to visit once again its headquarters, as I did in 1979, and as Pope Paul VI did in 1965. I regret that I am not able to accept at this time the kind invitation which the Secretary General of the United Nations has extended to me for a new visit. The interest of the Catholic Church in this international organization is linked to the importance of the issues that it treats and to the reasons for which it was founded. To work for *the establishment and maintenance of a just and lasting peace is a goal that deserves support and collaboration*. This is in fact why the United Nations Organization was created in the first place, in that bright daylight which followed the long drawn-out night of the Second World War. I pray that despite its inevitable shortcomings it will be able *to fulfil ever more effectively its unique role of service to the world*, a service that the world truly needs.

The United Nations deals with *disarmament and arms control* - the control of nuclear weapons in the first place, but also biological, chemical and conventional weapons. Its patient, painstaking, and sometimes even frustrating dedication to this cause of paramount importance for the world and all its people is recognized and appreciated as being an incentive and support for the bilateral negotiations by the superpowers for arms reduction. Here it is indeed a question that must be addressed with an unflinching commitment, extreme lucidity and a clear sense of the value of human life and the integrity of creation.

The United Nations is also concerned with many of the *other conditions for true peace*. It is fitting here to reflect on some of them in relation to the international dimension of the social question.

In the first place, I would like to single out the concern for *human rights*. You remember, I am sure, that the United Nations adopted, more than forty years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The basic inspiration of this important document was the recognition that the way towards a peaceful and just world must necessarily pass through the respect for each human being, through the definition and recognition of the basic human rights, and through the respect for the inalienable rights of individuals and of the communities of peoples. The adoption of the Universal Declaration was followed over the years by many declarations and conventions on extremely important aspects of human rights, in favour of women, of children, of handicapped persons, of equality between races, and especially the two international covenants on economic, social and cultural rights and on civil and political rights, together with an optional protocol. In 1981 the General Assembly also adopted a solemn declaration against every form of religious intolerance. The United Nations must also be given proper credit for having set up the Commission for Human Rights as a monitoring organ to follow carefully the positive and negative developments in this important field. The *commitment* of the United Nations *to human rights* goes hand in hand with its commitment *to peace*. Experience has taught that disrespect or lack of respect for human rights, oppression of the weak, discrimination because of sex, colour, origin, race or religion create

conflict and jeopardize peace. Here again, what concerns human beings in any one place affects all human beings everywhere.

Through the different specialized institutions and programmes, the United Nations develops its *commitment to a more just and equitable international society*. This work and commitment include the struggle against diseases and illiteracy; action undertaken for the advancement of women; protecting the rights of children and the handicapped; the development of international law; the peaceful use of atomic energy; the protection and preservation of famous monuments which belong to the cultural patrimony of humanity; the defence of the environment; the struggle against hunger, malnutrition and underdevelopment; and the defence of the homeless.

8. The existence and activities of the United Nations Organization, its achievements and also its failures, underline in a dramatic way *the need for reinforcing international authority* at the service of the global common good. It is already a sign of great progress that the importance of global social issues and the need for effectively promoting peace are becoming more universally recognized. It is also *a sign of hope* that an international organization, formed by the great majority of states, tries, within the limited means at its disposal and notwithstanding internal and external difficulties, to increase the awareness of worldwide problems and their appropriate solutions.

It is also a marvellous challenge for all the peoples and nations of the world - now that every day we become more aware of our interdependence - to be called upon by the urgent demands of a new solidarity that knows no frontiers. Now that we move towards the threshold of the third millennium of Christianity, we are given the unique chance, for the first time in human history, *to make a decisive contribution to the building up of a true world community*. The awareness that we are linked in common destiny is becoming stronger; the efforts to reach that goal are being multiplied by men and women of good will in a diversity of activities-political as well as economic, cultural as well as social. People in all walks of life, and nations and governments alike, are being challenged in the name of our common humanity, in the name of the rights of every human being and in the name of the rights of every nation.

In order to succeed and give the correct answer to the many demands that the *de facto* interdependence of all nations makes upon the sense of solidarity of all, we must create a just balance between the constraints put by interdependence upon the nations and the call for effective solidarity addressed to all the nations. In the life of every nation, social progress and human development are ensured by the respect given to the rights of the human person. The human person's very existence in dignity and his or her rightful participation in the life of the community are safeguarded by the deep respect that every person entertains for the dignity and the rights of every fellow human being. In the same way, respect for the rights of peoples and nations must safeguard the existence in liberty of every nation and thus make possible its rightful and effective participation in all aspects of international life. Without this, it would be impossible to speak about solidarity. In order to be capable of global solidarity *nations must first of all respect the human*

rights of their citizens and in turn be recognized by their people as the expression of their sovereignty: secondly, *nations must respect the full rights of their fellow nations* and know that also their rights as a nation will not be disavowed.

9. Dear friends: America is a very powerful country. The amount and quality of your achievements are staggering. But virtue of your unique position, as citizens of this nation, *you are placed before a choice and you must choose*. You may choose to close in on yourselves, to enjoy the fruits of your own form of progress and to try to forget about the rest of the world. Or, as you become more and more aware of your gifts and your capacity to serve, you may choose to live up to the responsibilities that your own history and accomplishments place on your shoulders. By choosing this latter course, you acknowledge *interdependence*, and opt for *solidarity*. This, dear friends, is truly *a human vocation, a Christian vocation*, and for you as Americans it is *a worthy national vocation*.

10. In drawing attention to the need for an ever greater social consciousness in our day, I also wish to draw attention to *the need for prayer*. Prayer is the deepest inspiration and dynamism of all social consciousness. In speaking to the bishops of America in 1983 I stated: "It is indeed in prayer that a social consciousness is nurtured and at the same time evaluated. It is in prayer that the bishop, together with his people, ponders *the need and exigencies of Christian service*... Through prayer the Church realizes the full import of Christ's words: 'This is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another' (*Jo. 13, 35*). It is in prayer that the Church understands the many implications of the fact that justice and mercy are among 'the weightier matters of the law' (*Matth. 23, 23*). Through prayer, the struggle for justice finds its proper motivation and encouragement, and discovers and maintains truly effective means" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Episcopos Civitatum Foederatarum Americae Septemtrionalis occasione oblata eorum visitationis "ad limina"*, 6, die 3 dec. 1983: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VI, 2 (1983) 1237).

Finally, to you the Catholic people of Detroit and all this area I repeat the words with which Paul VI concluded his message to the Call to Action Conference that was held eleven years ago in this very city of Detroit: "In the tradition of the Church, any call to action is first of all a call to prayer. And so you are summoned to prayer, and above all to a greater sharing in Christ's Eucharistic Sacrifice . . . It is in the Eucharist that you find the true Christian spirit that will enable you to go out and act in Christ's name". And for all of you dear friends, people of every religion, race and ethnic group, I ask God's help so that you may be *ever more aware of global interdependence and ever more sensitive to human solidarity*.

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