



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO AN INTERNATIONAL GROUP OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS  
ATTENDING THE "UNIV '98" CONGRESS**

*Tuesday, 7 April 1998*

1. Dear young people, I offer you all a cordial welcome on the occasion of your International UNIV Congress. In particular I greet the leaders and organizers of the meeting. Our meeting is taking place during Holy Week and it is an appropriate occasion to turn our gaze to the paschal mystery.

This year, in accordance with the preparatory phase of the Great Jubilee, is dedicated, as you know, to the Holy Spirit. Let us invoke the Paraclete Spirit together, so that he may assist the work of your congress on the theme: "*Human progress and the rights of the person*", and grant that you may all be authentic witnesses to Jesus and courageous workers for social renewal.

In order fully to achieve all this, it is necessary to act on two fronts simultaneously: *to be converted*, that is, to remove the evil from your own life by gradually improving yourself, and *to share with others the fruits of divine grace* through acts of concrete solidarity. These are the presuppositions for effectively respecting the rights of each person.

2. The rights of the person are the key element of the entire social order. They reflect *the objective and inviolable requirements of a universal moral law* which is based on God, the first Truth and highest Good. It is precisely for this reason that they *are the foundation and benchmark of every human organization* and only on them is it possible to build a society worthy of man, rooted firmly in the truth, structured in accordance with the demands of justice and animated by love.

Faced with the many forms of oppression existing in the world, the Church does not hesitate boldly to denounce abuses of power. She continues to struggle for justice and charity as long as there are forms of injustice in the world; if she did not do this, she would not be faithful to the mission entrusted to her by Jesus. When the person is at stake, *Christ himself moves believers to raise their voice in his name*. In his name and in every place, the Church does not cease to recall that

the primacy of human dignity over every social structure is a moral truth that no one can disregard.

3. "*Human progress and the rights of the person*". Why is the Church so energetically involved in the field of human rights? The answer stems from an assertion that is dear to me: *man is the first way that the Church must take in fulfilling her mission.*

Man is a creature of God, and for this reason human rights have their origin in God, are founded on his design for creation and are part of his plan of Redemption. One could almost boldly say that *human rights are also God's rights.* That is why the duty to safeguard and promote them is an essential part of the Church's mission. Today the Church condemns every abuse of the person because she knows that it is also a sin against the Creator. She does all she possibly can to encourage the authentic development of every person's humanity, in the conviction that *respect for the person is the way to a better world.*

The Church must serve man if she wants to serve God. This is a distinctive element of her fidelity to him. Christians are therefore bound to do all they can to give evidence of this belief in their daily lives. I know that in your forum you will be able to describe numerous volunteer projects carried out in areas of the world marked by poverty, injustice, violence and disease. I urge you to continue in this commitment; indeed I would like to ask you to do even more. Be apostles of the love of Christ, by responding to people's material expectations, yes, but especially by satisfying the spiritual thirst for God which every human being experiences.

I recently said: "The world and humanity are deprived of their life-breath if they are not open to Jesus Christ" (*Homily*, 23 January 1998, Camagüey; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 28 January 1998, p. 4). Never tire of evangelizing and of being formed in the truth of Christ. "Today also", I wrote in my first Encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, "even after 2,000 years, we see Christ as the one who brings man freedom based on truth, frees man from what curtails, diminishes and as it were breaks off this freedom at its root, in man's soul, his heart and his conscience" (n. 12).

4. Here another point is involved which we can express in this way: the Church, in addition to rights, insists on duties. The conscience of every Christian *must be deeply marked by the concept of duty.* Man's relationship with God, the Creator and Redeemer of man, his beginning and his end, has true binding force.

Conscience is where true freedom is won, but on condition that we are prepared to recognize "the rights of God" inscribed in our inmost being. It is "the witness of God himself, whose voice and judgement penetrate the inmost depths of a man's soul, calling him *fortiter et suaviter* to obedience ... the sacred place where God speaks to man" (Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, n. 58). The inescapable question, which should arise spontaneously in us before God, is therefore that which Paul asked Jesus when he met him for the first time on the road to Damascus: "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10).

Christ asks for everything. The witness to the Father's intimate love is demanding. But when the Holy Spirit awakens in us the living awareness that we are sons of God (cf. Rom 8:15), *his call does not frighten us but attracts us with the power of love.* Anyone who entrusts himself totally to him experiences the marvellous exchange described by Bl. Josemaría Escrivá in these words: "My Jesus: what is mine is yours, because what is yours is mine, and what is mine I

leave to you" (The Forge, 594).

May Mary, Mother of the Church, help each one to understand that the generosity of her own response to God is the decisive factor for the development of the gifts received. Be prepared, dear young people, to make your life a gift to God and to your neighbour.

For my part, I assure you of a remembrance in my prayer, as I affectionately wish you a Happy Easter and wholeheartedly bless you all.

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