



The Holy See

***LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SCIENTISTS
GATHERED IN THE MEETING OF ERICE***

*To Professor Antonino Zichichi
Director of the International Centre for Scientific Culture*

It was kind of you to inform me of the Second Session of the International Seminar on World Implications of a Nuclear Conflict, which will be held from the 20th to the 23rd of August at the International Centre for Scientific Culture in Erice, of which you are Director.

While thanking you for this thoughtful gesture, I wish to extend my respectful greetings to all the illustrious scientists and other experts who will gather there to study one of the most crucial and disquieting issues for people today and to express my good wishes that their generous efforts will be crowned with consoling results.

It is not for me to go into the technical aspects of the subjects on the agenda of your seminar. One aspect however is closely linked with my pastoral mission and is a matter of deep concern.

Reflection on the possibility and consequences of a nuclear war means considering the very survival of mankind and the fate of the heritage accumulated down the centuries by human civilization.

This is a disturbingly radical issue on which I have felt it my duty to speak forcefully in defence of man and civilization. I have done so before international institutions such as the United Nations Organization (2 December 1979) and UNESCO (2 June 1980), during my apostolic journeys, especially at Hiroshima (25 February 1981) and Coventry (30 May 1982), and in various addresses to national authorities and those in positions of responsibility in the scientific community. I have also sent delegations composed of members of the Papal Academy of Sciences to the capitals of some countries in possession of nuclear weapons, to make known the

results of a study on the catastrophic effects of a nuclear conflict.

On all these occasions I spoke on behalf of the conscience of millions, and in keeping with my ministry I called for a halt to the arms race, especially in nuclear weapons, so as to prepare for real progress towards disarmament and peace.

Scientists and people involved in the technological application of scientific discoveries have a particular role to play in this matter. In view of their special responsibility I make bold to address this message to all the illustrious personalities participating in the seminar.

You, the participants, are in a better position than others to gauge the apocalyptic effects of a nuclear war: in particular, the unheard of sufferings and the tremendous destruction of human lives and works of civilization. You can more easily ascertain that the logic of nuclear dissuasion cannot be considered a final goal or an appropriate and secure means for safeguarding international peace.

The balance of nuclear weapons is a balance of terror. It has already used up too many of mankind's resources for death-dealing works and instruments. And it is continuing to absorb immense intellectual and physical energies, directing scientific research away from the promotion of the most authentic human values and towards the production of destructive devices.

In this way science itself is degraded and is in a sense emptied of its deepest meaning: the discovery of the universal and immutable laws that govern nature, so as to offer man a dominion consisting in conscious docile adherence to the loving purposes that the Creator entrusted to nature from the beginning.

Science and religion are by no means in conflict. They are both involved in bringing about God's plans for man. For his part, man has the awesome responsibility of making decisions either in harmony or in contrast with those plans and thus creating a culture either of love or of hatred.

For this reason, the Church, aware of the promptings to evil that can lure the human heart, proclaims the truth of Christ, the Redeemer of man, who has sown the seed of an authentic civilization of love, granting to those who believe in him the courage to be brothers and sisters to all who are children of the same Father in heaven, and bestowing the grace that transforms the human heart, making it docile to God's teaching.

I make a heartfelt appeal to you scientists, to your commitment, your prestige, your conscience, so that by throwing light on the senseless and catastrophic effects of war you may foster a culture – the only culture worthy of man – based on the perennial values of truth and love. Upon the work of your seminar I invoke the light and encouragement of the Most High God.

Castel Gandolfo, 14 August 1982.

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