



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE 9th
"WORLD CONFERENCE ON LAW"**

Monday, 24 September 1979

*Ladies,
Gentlemen,*

I THANK YOU for your visit at the end of the important conference which brings to completion your discussions at Madrid. It offers me this happy occasion of meeting you and of expressing to you my profound esteem and encouragement for the work of peace to which you dedicate your exceptional talents by sharing in common your experiences.

The "World Peace through Law-Center" and the associations affiliated to it rightly pride themselves in being "the first association on a world scale to coordinate the efforts of thousand of judges, lawyers, professors and students of law from all the nations of the world in a positive drive to involve themselves in the common problems of humanity, in trials, procedures, principles and institutions universally accepted by the rule of law". To this task, the Holy See wishes to make its own impartial contribution within the limits and in the spirit of the mission entrusted to the Church by Christ our Lord.

The rapid development, both in extension and in depth, of relations between men and nations calls for an unprecedented effort to be mastered by man, lest it be carried away on the tumultuous wave of self-interest and instinct, so that an ordered structure be found which expresses and promotes the unity of the human family with respect for the paramount dignity of every individual, of every human group.

This endeavour finds in the rule of law, the *imperium legis*, and indispensable support that guarantees its continuity, its rectitude and its creative force. The rule of law in no way implies a rigid immobility. Being founded on a rich tradition and on lasting human values, which themselves draw force from it and have thereby also been refined, it becomes more capable than ever of

facing with resolve the constantly changing situations and of impressing upon them the hallmark of man. Its traditional and essential application to all circumstances finds precisely in the present unification of humanity a vast new terrain for devising fresh ways and at the same time rejuvenating the varying accepted expressions that it has forged according to the traditions of different nations.

Rule of law does not ignore the tensions that arise from life, nor the aspects of truth contained in the protests and contestation of those people which a given legal system refuses to recognize as legitimate aspirations[1]. But it has sufficient confidence in itself, in the law of the heart and of reason from which it emanates, to look for solutions, not in the further exasperation of those tensions, but rather in an appeal to the higher faculties of man, capable of devising and creating organized systems more appropriate to the present development of humanity. It is this conviction that has led you to examine at Madrid the whole range of challenges of our times: Human Rights and the Helsinki Agreements, Maritime Law, the codification of rules governing multinational corporations, the rights of the family, data processing technology and the right to privacy, international control of alternative sources of energy, the progressive reduction of the sale of conventional weapons, international arbitration, etc.

The Holy See actively participates in the international conferences that deal with these diverse problems and its original contribution of an ethical nature, finds the ground all that more fertile where the patterns of legal systems have been better worked out, thanks especially to your efforts. It does so from a standpoint of change and evolution which must characterize law, because it is also characteristic of the development of mankind and of nations.

As I have said already, the Declaration of Human Rights and the setting up of the United Nations Organization certainly had as its aim not only to depart from the horrible experiences of the last world war, but also to create the basis for a continual revision of programmes, systems, and regimes, precisely from this unique and fundamental point of view, namely the welfare of man, – or, let us say, of the individual in the community, – which must, as a fundamental factor in the common good, constitute the essential criterion for all programmes, systems and regimes[2].

Yes, man is at the basis of everything. He must be respected in his personal and unsurpassed dignity. His social dimension must be respected: the human and the Christian personality cannot realize itself, in effect, except in the degree that exclusive self-centredness is rejected, because its call is both personal and social. Canon Law admits and favours this characteristic improvement because it leads to overcoming egoism: abnegation of self, as exclusive individuality, leads to the affirmation of self in an authentic social perspective, in the recognition and respect of the other as a “person” having universal, inviolable, inalienable rights, and a transcendental dignity[3].

Human values, moral values are at the basis of everything. Law cannot set them aside, neither in its objectives nor in its means. Its rightful ordered autonomy is intrinsic to the moral law, in which,

besides, it encounters, not really a brake, or a restriction, but the fertile soil of its dynamic and planned development.

You know – and I know too – that it is difficult to define man in what constitutes his permanent being and his universality in time and space, beyond customs and different cultures. It is likewise difficult to trace the institutional elements that favour human growth in solidarity, while taking into account the variety of man's convictions and counting on his creative conscience, thus assuring the indispensable freedom wherein this conscience can be formed, re-formed and in which it can act. But the whole history of law shows that law loses its stability and its moral authority, that it is then tempted to make an increasing appeal to constraint and physical force, or on the other hand to renounce its responsibility – in favour of the unborn or the stability of marriage, or, on the international plane, in favour of entire populations abandoned to oppression – whenever it ceases to search for the truth concerning man and allows itself to be bought off with some harmful form of relativism.

A difficult search, a groping search, but a necessary search of which the jurist least of all may divest himself.

For the Church, the solid foundation of this pursuit is Jesus Christ. But, whatever the believer discovers in the light of faith, he believes and affirms about all men, believer or non-believer, because Christ is united in some way to all men, to each man. Moreover, it is our certainty: the life of Christ speaks, also, to many who are not capable of repeating with Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God". He, the Son of the living God, speaks to people also as Man: it is his life that speaks, his humanity, his fidelity to the truth, his all-embracing love^[4].

Ladies and Gentlemen, with deep respect for your convictions, allow me to invite you to listen to the voice of Christ, to the message of the Gospel concerning man. It cannot but strengthen you in your desire to build world peace through law.

In repeating my profound esteem for the work you have already accomplished and in encouraging you to continue with in without pausing, I invoke upon you and your families, and above all on your work, the blessing of almighty God.

[1] Cfr. Ioannis XXIII *Pacem in Terris*, 39 et ss.

[2] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 17, 3.

[3] Cfr. Eiusdem *Allocutio ad Sacram Romanam Rotam*, die 17 febr. 1979.

[4] Cfr. Eiusdem *Redemptor Hominis*, 7, 4.

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