



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE SYMPOSIUM
SPONSORED BY "NOVA SPES" INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION**

Thursday, 14 December 1989

*Your Eminence,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am pleased to welcome you, distinguished participants in the latest Symposium sponsored by "Nova Spes" International Foundation. My particular greeting goes to Cardinal Koenig, the President and Founder of "Nova Spes". To all of you, representatives of the natural and social sciences, philosophy and theology, I express my gratitude for the important interdisciplinary work which you have undertaken on a subject of increasing concern to all those who hold the good of mankind at heart.

Your discussions during these last days have explored the many aspects of the Symposium's stated theme: "Man, the Environment and Development – Towards a Global Approach". In considering the problem of the environment, a global and ethical perspective is indispensable, since the environment is not only the setting in which the great drama of human history is played out, but in a sense it is also an active participant in that drama. There is a living interaction between man and the environment, within which he grows in knowledge of himself, of his place within God's creation, and indeed comes to appreciate the value, the potential and the limitations of all human life and labour.

2. It is in just such a global and ethical perspective that I address the question of ecology in [my Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace](#), entitled "Peace with God the Creator; Peace with all Creation". This message emphasizes the fundamentally moral character of the ecological crisis and its close relationship to the search for genuine and lasting world peace. In calling attention to the ethical principles which are essential for an adequate and lasting solution to that crisis. I lay

particular emphasis on the value of respect for life and for the integrity of the created order (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Nuntius ob diem ad pacem fovendam dicatum pro a. D. 1990, 7, die 8 dec. 1989: vide supra, p. 1463*).

Since the ecological crisis is fundamentally a moral issue, it requires that all people respond in solidarity to what is a common threat. Uncontrolled exploitation of the natural environment not only menaces the survival of the human race; it also threatens the natural order in which mankind is meant to receive and to hand on God's gift of life with dignity and freedom. Today responsible men and women are increasingly aware that we must pay "attention to what the earth and its atmosphere are telling us: namely, that there is an order in the universe which must be respected, and that the human person, endowed with the capability of choosing freely has a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations" (*Ibid.* 15: vide *supra*, p. 1472).

Concern for the environment, guided by objective ethical principles and marked by true human solidarity, is ultimately rooted in man's very nature as a rational and free being who is constantly interacting with his surroundings. As the ecological crisis makes abundantly clear, man's individual and social development cannot be considered apart from the natural environment. Within this broader perspective man bears a grave responsibility for wisely managing the environment. Indeed, his responsibility increases as he becomes ever more capable of introducing substantial modifications in his natural surroundings.

3. A satisfactory description of the relationship between the environment and development must take into account the person in all his dimensions as well as the respect due to nature, ever mindful of man's central place within the environment. Authentic human development can hardly ignore the solidarity which binds man and his environment, nor can it exclude a universal concern for the needs of all the earth's peoples. Any attempt to assess the relationship between environment and development which ignores these deeper realities will inevitably lead to further and perhaps more destabilizing imbalances.

Seeing the issue of ecology within a global perspective which takes account of the human person in all his dimensions and of the requirements of an authentically human development may properly be considered one of the great challenges of our time. Should the present generation face this challenge wisely, we may be confident that it will contribute in no small way to resolving other pressing international questions as well. In the end, what is required of us all is an increased awareness of the unity of the human family, in which man remains solidly rooted in his particular culture, and yet is capable of transcending the limits imposed by geography, ideology, race and religion. And in relation to the world's nations, the need for solidarity in the face of the threats to our common environment presents "new opportunities for strengthening cooperative and peaceful relations among States" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Nuntius ob diem ad pacem fovendam dicatum pro a. D. 1990, 7, die 8 dec. 1989: vide supra, p. 1469*).

4. The environmental decisions which are adopted today must also take into account the moral responsibility which we bear towards future generations. For this reason, I have spoken of the need for a new “education in ecological responsibility”, one which entails a genuine conversion in our patterns of thought and behaviour (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Nuntius ob diem ad pacem fovendam dicatum pro a. D. 1990, 7, die 8 dec. 1989*: vide *supra*, p. 1471). This moral imperative is rooted in our common humanity and in the universal ethical demands which flow from it. “Even men and women without any particular religious conviction, but with an acute sense of their responsibilities for the common good, recognize their obligation to contribute to the restoration of a healthy environment” (*Ibid.* 15: vide *supra*, p. 1472).

Christians, for their part, will find inspiration for this task in their belief in God as the Creator of the world and in Jesus Christ as the one who has reconciled to himself all things “whether on earth or in heaven” (Cfr. *Col.* 1, 20).

Our own generation has been blessed in having inherited from the industry of past generations the great wealth of material and spiritual goods which stand at the foundations of our society and its progress.

Universal solidarity now demands that we consider it our grave duty to safeguard that inheritance for all our brothers and sisters and to assure that each and every member of the human family may enjoy its benefits.

5. Dear Friends: in expressing my gratitude to “Nova Spes” for its commitment to the process of reflection on these problems, I also express the hope that your work will be a fruitful incentive for yourselves and your colleagues to carry on the important work of promoting those values and programmes that can guarantee and develop improved living conditions for all people, facing the ecological crisis in a spirit of authentic solidarity, fraternal charity and unfailing respect towards all people and all nations. I am pleased to renew to you, men and women of thought and science, the assurance expressed by the Second Vatican Council that in the Church you have a friend of your vocation as researchers, a companion in your efforts, an admirer of your successes, and if necessary, a consoler in your discouragement and failures (Cfr. Patrum Conc. *Nuntii quibusdam hominum ordinibus dati: Aux hommes de la pensée et de la science, die 8 dec. 1965*: AAS 58 [1966] 8-18).

As I entrust your endeavours to God, the Creator of heaven and earth and of all that is seen and unseen, I assure you of my prayers. Upon all of you I willingly invoke God’s blessings of joy and peace.

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