



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE MEMBERS  
OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

*Friday, 30 April 2004*

*Your Eminences,  
Your Excellencies,  
Dear Members of the Academy,*

1. I greet you all with affection and esteem as we celebrate *the tenth anniversary of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*. I thank your new President, Professor Mary Ann Glendon, and offer cordial good wishes as she begins her service. At the same time I express my deep gratitude to Professor Edmond Malinvaud for his commitment to the work of the Academy in studying such complex questions as labour and unemployment, forms of social inequality, and democracy and globalization. I am also grateful to Monsignor Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo for his efforts to make the work of the Academy accessible to a wider audience through the resources of modern communications.

2. The theme which you are presently studying – that of relations between generations – is closely connected to your research on globalization. In earlier times the care of grown children for their parents was taken for granted. The family was the primary place of an *inter-generational solidarity*. There was the solidarity of marriage itself, in which spouses took each other for better or worse and committed themselves to offer each other lifelong mutual assistance. This solidarity of the married couple soon extended to their children, whose education demanded a strong and lasting bond. This led in turn to solidarity between grown children and their aging parents.

At present relations between generations are undergoing significant changes as a result of various factors. In many areas there has been a weakening of the marriage bond, which is often perceived as a mere contract between two individuals. The pressures of a consumer society can cause families to divert attention from the home to the workplace or to a variety of social activities. Children are at times perceived, even before their birth, as an obstacle to the personal fulfilment of

their parents, or are seen as one object to be chosen among others. Inter-generational relations are thus affected, since many grown children now leave to the state or society at large the care of their aged parents. The instability of the marriage bond in certain social settings likewise has led to a growing tendency for adult children to distance themselves from their parents and to delegate to third parties the natural obligation and divine command to honour one's father and mother.

3. Given the fundamental importance of solidarity in the building of healthy human societies (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38-40), I encourage your study of these significant realities and express my hope that it will lead to a clearer appreciation of the need for *a solidarity which crosses generations and unites individuals and groups* in mutual assistance and enrichment. I am confident that your research in this area will make a valuable contribution to the development of the Church's social teaching.

Particular attention needs to be paid to the precarious situation of many elderly persons, which varies according to nations and regions (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 44; *Centesimus Annus*, 33). Many of them have insufficient resources or pensions, some suffer from physical maladies, while others no longer feel useful or are ashamed that they require special care, and all too many simply feel abandoned. These issues will certainly be more evident as the number of the elderly increases and the population itself ages as a result of the decline in the birthrate and the availability of better medical care.

4. In meeting these challenges, *every generation and social group has a role to play*. Special attention needs to be paid to the respective competencies of the State and the family in the building of an *effective solidarity between generations*. In full respect for the principle of subsidiarity (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 48), public authorities must be concerned to acknowledge the effects of an individualism which – as your studies have already shown – can seriously affect relations between different generations. For its part, *the family*, as the origin and foundation of human society (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11; *Familiaris Consortio*, 42), also has an irreplaceable role in the building of inter-generational solidarity. There is no age when one ceases to be a father or mother, a son or daughter. We have a special responsibility not only towards those to whom we have given the gift of life, but also toward those from whom we have received that gift.

Dear Members of the Academy, as you carry forward your important work I offer you my prayerful good wishes and I cordially invoke upon you and your loved ones the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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