

# Solidarity Means Action:



**the Moral Response to  
Interdependence**



Bishop Jorge Meija, Vice President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, visited Australia in February 1989. During his visit he spoke at the Melbourne Archdiocese's Conference **On Social Concerns**, which celebrated the first anniversary of the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concerns).

Bishop Meija was an appropriate person to help us to celebrate and reflect upon the first anniversary of this significant Social Encyclical here in Australia, having been closely associated with its production and promotion.

Over 1,000 conference participants heard two keynote addresses from Bishop Meija: 'John Paul II and the Global Responsibility of Each Believer'; and 'The Universal Scope of Catholic Social Teaching'.

The ACSJC is pleased to present these important addresses as part of its series of **ACSJC Occasional Papers**. In doing so, the ACSJC hopes to make Bishop Meija's insights available not only to those who were lucky enough to attend the Melbourne conference, but also to Catholics across the country and beyond.

Bishop W Brennan  
Chairman, ACSJC

# John Paul II and the Global Responsibility of Each Believer

## Keynote Address I (16 February 1989)

It is, I believe, significant that the seventh Encyclical of Pope John Paul II, and his second social one, "Sollicitudo rei socialis", which Cardinal Etchegaray, President of the Pontifical Commission "Iustitia et Pax", and I, presented to the media in Rome, almost exactly a year ago, on the 19th February 1988, is now commemorated by the same speaker, among many others, in this city of Melbourne, almost at the other end of the world.

This, I say, is a significant fact for two reasons, which I would like to underline here. First, because this means that the Papal document has made the tour of the world; not perhaps only once, but many times over, just a year after its promulgation. I submit that this fact has a meaning in itself, which we here gathered are called to take notice of and perhaps learn from.

Second, the fact that the Encyclical has gone round the world in one year has, I am sure, a certain bearing on the subject I am invited to develop today in your presence; namely, "John Paul II (which I take to mean his Social Teaching, and particularly 'Sollicitudo rei socialis') and the global responsibility of each believer". "Global" is, of course, the key word of this title, obviously in relation to the "globe", the terrestrial globe.

I am therefore happy and honoured for the occasion given me, as the Vice President of the Pontifical Commission "Iustitia et Pax", coming from Rome but originally from another end of the world, to celebrate and commemorate with you the first anniversary of "Sollicitudo rei socialis".

I thank Archbishop Little, Brother Mark O'Connor, their collaborators and all of you, here present, for this occasion. I shall do my best to live up to it, with the Lord's help.

Let me add, before I delve into my subject, that to celebrate and commemorate an Encyclical, even at a year's distance, has two very deep implications, which I feel it my duty to make explicit here. On one hand, it is, or should that be an acknowledgement of the importance the text has for us Christians (but also, I dare say, for men and women concerned with the present and future of humanity) and beyond the written text, of the momentum of the Church's Social Doctrine, of which the Encyclical gives the latest authoritative expression. On the other hand, such a celebration cannot but reflect upon ourselves, our own daily lives, as persons and as members of a community. One does not celebrate or commemorate an Encyclical like "Sollicitudo" (or, for that matter, "Rerum novarum" in two years time) without paying the price for it; namely, without searching one's own conscience and asking for the grace of conversion, or, at least, of confirmation of conversion.



I turn, then, to our subject for this evening. "Conversion", just mentioned, is a very personal endeavour; it affects, no doubt, the most personal "responsibility of each believer".

I think we can use this starting point to present our theme in some order.

The labelling of that theme puts together three terms, which are not perhaps easily seen in the organic, intimate connection which they have among themselves. They are: "John Paul II", "global responsibility" and "each believer".

I intend to take each term at its turn.

### 1. John Paul II

I certainly do not pretend to introduce Pope John Paul II to you, Australians, who saw him, heard him and (I am sure) appreciated him, for ten long days, during his apostolic journey to this part of the world, just over one year ago. Perhaps at least some of you have seen the Pope, before or after his visit here.

It is not the personality of the Pope I am here to defend or to promote, although there is an obvious link between this unique personality and the exercise of his pastoral office, teaching, shepherding, praying.

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## It would not be proper to praise the person of the Holy Father, and then dismiss his teaching . . .

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This is not the point, nor do I believe that the Pope's name was included as part of the title of this lecture, that I should dwell upon him as a person.

The point is completely different. It gets us nowhere; indeed, it would not be proper, to praise the person of the Holy Father, and then dismiss his teaching, or part thereof; particularly the "social" part, to put it in this way.

The Pope, in a way is his office. Therefore, when our title mentions John Paul II, two dimensions of that office should come immediately to our minds.

The first dimension is the Pope's teaching mission. He, like the other Apostles, has been sent to teach, as the so-called Commission in Mt 28,19 quite clearly says; but in a very special way, expressed by Luke 22,32 (a text Pope John Paul II likes to quote, talking to bishops): "I have prayed for you (says the Lord to Peter) that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren".

The Pope, most obviously, does not teach in his own name, but in the name of the One who sent Peter and prayed for him that he might not fail in accomplishing his teaching mission: Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Such affirmations, which all Catholics hold as truths of faith, imply, as their direct consequence, two other essential points. Firstly, the Pope, the Holy Father, John Paul II (thus, we come back from the abstract to the concrete), teaches authoritatively and (St. Irenaeus said, speaking of the Church in Rome) with "the sure charism of truth" (AH 111,32) (charisma veritatis certum), and this to "each believer", by which we mean, as I shall develop further, to the conscience of each believer.

Secondly, the Pope's, the Holy Father's, John Paul II's teaching office and mission extends to each and every thing the Lord "has commanded" him to teach and us (and he too) to observe, in the words of the Commission just quoted (cf. Mt 28,19-20). This includes the Social Doctrine.

Here we come to the second dimension of the teaching office of the Pope, as implied by the mention of his name in the title of this lecture.

The Pope does not only teach fides, faith; he also teaches mores, conduct, a way of life. The old formula of Vatican I for infallibility used this expression (then repeated by Vatican II), coming from the treasure of ancient Catholic tradition. Nobody would doubt, I submit, that the Lord Jesus taught fides and mores, as God the Father did, in the Old Testament, through the Patriarchs, the Prophets and the Sages. More recently, says the letter to the Hebrews (1,2), in "these last days he has spoken to us through his Son".

Fides and mores are inseparable, not only because one is the consequence of the other, but mainly because in the supreme unity of the Word of God, there is only one content, which is at the same time credendum and operandum (to be believed and to be put into practice). They are more intimately linked even than the two sides of a coin. This is why St. James says, in his Epistle, rather harshly (2,17): "so faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead".

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**The Social Doctrine of the Church is no more, no less than the application of the same Gospel principles, which have always governed Christian *mores*, to the circumstances of our times.**

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Now, mores are many and varied, according to the different dimensions of human action, private, social; towards God, the neighbour, oneself; according to the different states of the human person: unmarried, married, etc.; according also to the different situations in which humanity has found or perhaps will find itself in the future.

Yes, they are many and varied, as we all know; yet, there is something in Christian mores, the Christian way of life, which is unchangeable. Let us put it in two words, at the risk of being simplistic: the Decalogue. The first and the second commandments in the formulation which the Lord has given them, come from the Old Testament: Love of God above all and with all we are and have; love of neighbour as of ourselves; and the imitation of Christ, (which had him add to the second commandment the reference to himself: love one another as I have loved you, namely up to the cross).

The Church has encountered social problems since the beginning, as we see in the Gospel: the use of wealth, the priorities in our choices, regarding our neighbours, slavery, the family. A social teaching is to be found

here, in its roots, which gives sap and life to the developing tree. The Fathers and the Middle Ages were very much concerned with what we now call social problems, old and new: usury was condemned; misery was not to be allowed; the poor were to be preferred and had rights of their own as such. The Popes intervened with decisions and teachings, which we would label "social".

Thus, the recent Popes had not to create a new chapter in mores from scratch, as if they had invented an entirely new dimension of their teaching, improperly extending the traditional mission of the Church. What has changed is not the sphere of competence within which the Church (and the Holy Father) exercise their teaching authority, in the name of Christ, but rather the world around us — and surely at a pace we have not known before.

Thus, what we call the Social Doctrine of the Church is no more, no less than the application of the same Gospel principles, which have always governed Christian mores, to the circumstances of our times.

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**The banking system is more complex now, but money and greed and avarice have not changed.**

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Now, among other differences with times past, economy, politics, the social, the various technologies, have become almost worlds in themselves, while heretofore they were only sectors of human life, private and communitarian, and some had not even made their appearance. This means they have their own rules, their own consistency and, to a certain extent their own autonomy. Nobody would have doubted in the Middle Ages that the Pope could, and should, set a limit to usury; or to torture (as Pope Nicholas I did). Today however some people feel that the Pope, the teaching office of the Church, the Bishops, John Paul II (to return to our title), would do well to abstain from speaking about the international debt problem, or the injustices of world trade, or for that matter, the true exigencies of development. Such people feel intensely the complexity of those matters, are jealous for their autonomy and perhaps are too eager to maintain a certain status quo, with privileged and underprivileged in it.

There is some truth in this, I am ready to admit. It can be seen in two aspects of the question. First, it is true that complexity should be respected and carefully attended to. The banking system is more complex now, infinitely so, than in Renaissance Florence. But, may I add here, money and greed and avarice have not changed.

Second, the teaching office of the Church, at any level, is called to a very rigorous process of study and checking, as broad as possible, before it comes to make pronouncements on the subjects presently discussed.

I would like to say here that there is no reason to suppose that such requirements have not been met by the teaching documents of the Holy Father, his predecessors, or for that matter, the Dicasteries of the Holy See (like our own). Before making judgments, those tempted to sit in judgment should very attentively exam-

ine themselves about whether they speak on behalf of their consciences or just on behalf of a certain preference for a status in life, or in society, or in economics, which is not necessarily a moral preference.

The same care, and the same prudence, which is required from the teaching office of the Church, should be applied to the discernment of one's own motives, when one is tempted to criticize the Social Doctrine of the Church, or some elements in it.

However that may be, my point here, in explaining why John Paul II is mentioned in the title of the present lecture, could be synthesized in three steps:

- the teaching office of the Church extends to social matters, in the widest sense;
- this is because social matters imply the responsible action of the Christian, therefore his or her mores as such;
- what is called the Social Doctrine of the Church (in John Paul II's own words) "belongs to the field, not of ideology, but of theology and particularly of moral theology" (n. 41). It therefore belongs to the mores just mentioned and its content can be as authoritative as any other teaching on Christian conduct. It engages the conscience of each man and woman in the Catholic community, in which precise way I will try to say later, when we will examine the third section of our title.

John Paul II then means, in the present context, the Social Doctrine of the Church, as expressed by "Sollicitudo rei socialis" (and indeed "Laborem exercens", and other texts, before and after the latest Encyclical), with its intrinsic authority coming from the teaching mission of the Church, and particularly that of the Holy Father.

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## 2. The Global Responsibility

We have two words here with very different connotations: "global" is, in fact, a spatial or geographic term; but perhaps (as we shall see) carries here a deeper meaning; and "responsibility" is, of course, a typical moral term.

I would like to analyse each term in itself, but particularly in their present mutual connection.

"Global", I believe, points to a characteristic of what used to be called "the social question", which now has changed its scope and, in a sense, the reason for its urgency.

Pope Paul VI, in "Populorum progressio" (n. 3), which "Sollicitudo" is destined to commemorate, pointed out as the most important new development in his time, in the social field, that "the social question has become world-wide". And he quoted to that effect John XXIII's "Mater et Magistra" and Vatican Council II's "Gaudium et Spes". Pope John Paul II, in "Sollicitudo", reiterates and deepens the same reference (cf. n. 9). Indeed, his Encyclical is obviously written from the perspective of a "social question" become universal, more so even than twenty or twenty one years earlier, at the time of "Populorum progressio". "Universal" and "global" go hand in hand. If the first recalls the Universe, the second (as I said at the beginning) recalls the globe.

What does this mean exactly, in terms of Social Doctrine, as expressed particularly but not only in "Sollicitudo"?

It does not mean, to begin with, that there are no more local or regional social problems. We all know there are, and suffer frequently the consequences of unsolved local problems in the social or economic or political fields, like racial discrimination in South Africa, hunger in Ethiopia, or "perestroika" and its attendants in Eastern Europe.

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The point is not that problems are not local any more. It is that, on one hand, local (or regional) problems depend quite often, if not always, on much larger if not actually universal, factors, conditions or causes. And on the other hand, that the solutions that can be envisaged or sought, are never, or almost never, entirely local, which is tantamount to affirming, briefly stated, that, for better or worse, we are all closely interlocked, interdependent, interwoven.

Interdependence is, in fact, a key word in "Sollicitudo" (cf. n. 38). But not only in the Papal Encyclicals. It is to be found in any serious analysis of the present economic world situation, and by the same token (and for the same reason), also in the political and social situations thereby implied.

To be more concrete, without necessarily turning to individual cases, I shall recall two examples of interdependence, one negative and another positive.

Decisions on the prices of agricultural products in a country with a rich and developed agriculture, immediately cause repercussions on the agriculture of less developed and poorer countries. And vice versa, if those countries, less developed, flood the markets with low-priced products, the producers in the rich countries run the risk of being put out of business. What happened with oil in the 1970's, and to a certain extent, still happens, is another case in point.

There may be reasons, internal to a country with an important and solid banking system, to lower the interest rate. Such a measure immediately eases up the debt situation of the countries or institutions in another country, indebted to such banks. Or even more clearly, precisely because the banking system is now closely linked worldwide, such a measure of lowering the interest rate here, will not be without effect for the

determination of the interest rate there, and elsewhere. When we consider the fact that half a point up or down in what is called the LIBOR (London international banking offered rate), may mean millions of dollars either way for the indebted countries, one really touches with the tip of the fingers the reality of interdependence, harsh or bright, as it may be.

Interdependence depends on many factors, some technical, like communications generally; and more recently, computerization. We know that banking and investment operations, not to speak of the stock market, go on for twenty-four hours in twenty-four. The sun never sets on the trading of money, much more truly that it didn't in Charles 5th's Empire, or Queen Victoria's for that matter.

"Global" therefore, properly understood, means, in our title, not only the spatial or geographical dimension, but also the time dimension. The social question has now become universal in space as in time, at least with regard to the linear dimension of time. It is spatially unlimited and chronologically non-stop.

There is undoubtedly great progress in this. Economy, with its social and political consequences, has now become worldwide, and in terms of technology; it could hardly be otherwise.

But the only intervening factor is not technical, and here is where "responsibility" comes in. Because the human will is involved, human choices are presupposed, and the human person is made to suffer or to be liberated.

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I would like to make this point very clear, essential as it is for our theme this evening.

"Global responsibility", both words now taken together, would mean that the human persons making the decisions which pull the strings one way or the other, must be conscious, (namely aware before God, the neighbour and himself/herself), of the consequences of what he/she does or leaves undone. To be yet more precise: the *only* possible consideration is *not* the advantages of a banking operation, which of course means profit, nor the magnitude of the enterprise or holding aimed at by a successful buying option, nor the extending of the business to yet another country.

There are other considerations to be made, other criteria to be applied, which belong to a different order, and may modify the purely economic ones. One cannot decently ignore that one's own decisions, because of the network of interdependence just mentioned, may cause suffering, sometimes even death, somewhere along the line, if some conditions are not met, even on the economic level.

Profit is not bad in itself, but as "Sollicitudo" rightly says (n. 38), it should not be made absolute. If it is made absolute, it becomes a "sin"; indeed "a structure of sin" (ib.). It subverts the true order of things, natural and supernatural, and simply ignores the neighbour, near or faraway, but, in the present "global village", always lying at our door, as Lazarus in the Gospel (cf. Lc 16), or across the path we follow, like the half dead man in the same Gospel of Luke (cf. Lc 10).

This is "global responsibility": to introduce morals, ethics, Christian justice and love, in the tight present economic (social, political) fabric of this world, which will soon include the outer-space, if it hasn't yet.

This is certainly "global responsibility" but it is not the whole story.

We do not want to limit such a "global" dimension to international bankers, or executives of multinational enterprises, or ministers of economy in the developed countries.

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"Global" here means also "each and everyone". In a moment, I shall turn to each believer, to round up my thoughts and this lecture.

I want to state now, that nobody, either in the developed countries or in the developing ones, is exempted from such responsibility.

"Sollicitudo rei socialis" has very explicitly stated some of the requirements of the present situation, for the second group of nations of those mentioned above (cf. n. 44-45). Again, not only for technical reasons, but for moral ones. People in the Third World cannot and should not be made to feel that they are only on the receiving end. They might be there for some time and this because of the sheer impossibility, in some cases, of getting started otherwise. But even then, they are to be made to feel that they are also needed in this world. What they can contribute to the good of all, is necessary and cannot be dispensed with, be it soya, sugar, cacao, or (and this is much more important), whatever human wisdom they may possess and whatever other human gifts the Lord has surely sowed in their midst for the benefit of all. Culture belongs also to authentic development, in the view of "Sollicitudo" (cf n. 15).

"Global", I am convinced, also means this, which is not, or not immediately, measurable in terms of revenue, or profit.

### 3. Each believer

We come now to ourselves, believers in Christ, for God's grace.

Here I would like to raise three points, somehow bringing together the loose ends of the preceding thoughts, and thus bringing this lecture to a conclusion.

**First:** believers have a special obligation, or, if you wish, a specific responsibility. "Global" indeed, but mainly transcendent, if I may use this word. It means, in the present context, that we are not here, in this world, only for the sake of it, but for the sake of the coming kingdom, at the end of our lives, and at the end of the

present eon (as "Sollicitudo" says in its concluding chapter). This does not distract us from the task we are faced with daily. On the contrary, it shows where we are going and what are we living for, and helping others to live for.

"Transcendent" also means here that people around us are not just figures nor quantities, but human persons, created by God and redeemed by Christ. We are called, as disciples of Jesus, to consider each man and woman, whatever his or her position in the social scale or in the global world geography, as "another oneself". Thus our decisions, not only as leaders in society, if we so happen to be, but simply as private persons, must bring in this "global" horizon we live in, even if we are not always able to see the direct connection between the choice of a more austere way of life and the need of

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others. Nor is there any need for such a clear perception. It may not be entirely true that our well mowed, well watered lawns diminish the possibility for others, somewhere in the globe, to dispose of even the necessary amount of vegetables to survive. It is beyond discussion (or should be) that the disciples of Christ are expected to live like their Lord, not in luxury or in glowing wealth, but modestly and simply. The rest, if any, belongs to the poor. And I underline belongs. "Sollicitudo" (n. 31) is very explicit about the use we should give to our goods, superfluous or even necessary, if others are more in need than we are. And, if anything, this is not a modern notion. It is enough to read the footnote at the end of that page of the Encyclical, and the books or texts referred to. Much more could be added.

**Second**, believers have again a special responsibility for the poor "at their gates" (cf. Deut. passim), which, as I have tried to prove, now means anywhere.

For such reason, this is also a "global" responsibility, in the sense that we are "all" really responsible for *all*" (cf. "Sollicitudo" n. 38).

The Encyclical uses this last expression when dealing with the virtue of solidarity. The development is well worth noting. The Pope distinguishes between human and Christian solidarity, always a virtue, to make one thing of both of these, for us believers. In this context, "solidarity" represents the moral or ethical side of interdependence, which cannot be left, so to speak, to fend for itself. It will surely end up negatively, as we see around us, given the inclination to egoism we all carry deep in our own selves.

Solidarity is there to correct this bias, because of the reality of natural human brotherhood and sisterhood on one side; and because of the brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ and our relation to the Blessed Trinity, on the other. It is here that our Christian conscience, as believers, is involved.

There is however an order, even in solidarity, as in Christian love. There are priorities to be respected. The

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first one, according to the Encyclical (n. 42), which only repeats here authentic Gospel tradition, is the poor.

I am sure no description is needed at this point. I only would like to add that nothing can dispense from respecting this priority, not even the fact that some poor may have become so of their own fault, either personal or social (namely, through the fault of their own countries). It would be a curious argument indeed, if one would argue with the Lord at his final coming (cf. Mt 25,31ss.) Yes, Lord, I did not feed nor give drink to your little ones, because they were lazy, uneducated and spendthrift. One can easily imagine the Lord's answer.

**Third**, and last.

"Each believer" is not an isolated entity. We belong to a universal Church, which is "global" in its own right.

So, the "global responsibility of each believer" implies also the responsibility of the Church as such, local or universal. To such a call we respond in two ways: by carefully following and helping our brothers and sisters in the faith anywhere, but also by trying to make the Catholic Church, hopefully together with the other Churches and Christian ecclesial communities, live up to its responsibility of making the Lord Jesus present in this world, caring and serving for each and for all. In a true way, we are "globally" responsible for this too. A "global" Church, "globally" sustained by "each believer" is responsible for the whole globe. This, I believe, is the main thrust of "Sollicitudo rei socialis".

If now we put "John Paul II" at the beginning of the sentence, the meaning is that the Church and each of us such respond to our call, in the present world, under the guidance, the inspiration, and (so to speak) the incarnate example of somebody who teaches and does, or rather "does and teaches", as St. Luke says of our Lord Jesus, in the prologue to the Acts of the Apostles (1,1).

Social Doctrine, like Christian Doctrine in general, certainly means "principles of reflection, criteria of judgment and directives for action"; namely, fides et mores. But first and foremost, it means a person, Jesus Christ our Lord.

I could perhaps end this talk by suggesting that Social Doctrine, and very especially "Sollicitudo rei socialis", is really:

"John Paul II and the global responsibility of each believer".

Thank you,

† Jorge Mejia  
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Pontifical Council  
for Justice and Peace

# The Universal Scope of Catholic Social Teaching

(with particular reference to the responsibilities of affluent countries)

## Keynote Address II (17 February 1989)

Yesterday, we celebrated the promulgation of "Sollicitudo rei socialis". As I said on that occasion, a celebration like the one we intend to perform here, would be utterly meaningless, without devising some practical ways and means to translate the Papal Encyclical into action. It wouldn't be an authentic celebration.

I understand that the reason why we are here now, meeting for a whole day, in a Seminar, is precisely to find somehow a response to the practical requirements of our celebration. In a way, we are placed before a text: we celebrate the Pope's Encyclical, yes; how couldn't we, anyway. But, are we prepared to take up its challenges to the point of changing in our lives, personal and/or communitarian, what is to be changed to make fully true to the teaching of the Encyclical; and beyond it, the Social Teaching of the Church?

Perhaps much has been done already in this country. And certainly, there are things in the making.

However, I cannot but be impressed by the theme set for this Seminar Day, in its slogan-like conciseness:

Act locally, think globally.

It sounds a bit like those posters which sometimes our Superiors have placed before our desks in our offices: 'think great', or something to that effect.

Let us dispel for a moment this unholy association and try to look squarely into the face of the challenge implied by the very existence of a Social Teaching in the Catholic Church and its universal scope.

I will proceed by steps as I did in my first address, paying however more attention to the problem of the difference (or shall we say, the abyss) between affluent and poor countries.



### 1. The inequalities of the present world

"Sollicitudo rei socialis" speaks about this at length (cf. n. 14 etc.), as "Populorum progressio" (passim) did twenty years earlier.

I believe there is no need here of statistics. We are clearly aware of the facts: even if some of the "general indicators" referred to by "Sollicitudo" (n. 13), may, in some cases, reveal a certain positive tendency, regarding life-expectancy or the progress in alphabetization, or the extension of medical care, there is no doubt that, generally speaking, the differences between some countries (mainly in the Northern Hemisphere) which are affluent and others (mainly in the Southern Hemisphere) which are destitute.

I am convinced that this picture presented by the Encyclical is true. I would like, however, to call your attention

to one or two particular aspects of this situation, which, I hope, shall help us assess it more objectively.

As the Encyclical points out, in a footnote, a new terminology has now been devised to designate an entire category of nations: those countries which are below a certain level of poverty; namely, below the so-called "poor" countries. It is thought therefore, that "Third World" is not an adequate expression to cover all the countries involved. The "Fourth World" has now been discovered, extending this expression, originally destined to the "poor in our midst", that is in the affluent countries, to the poorest of the poorest in the world.

Admittedly, all expressions of this sort are tentative, slogan-like, and perhaps even, at least to some extent, arbitrary. There is a certain danger, for instance, that we pass from the "First World" to the "Third" or the "Fourth", forgetting about the "Second", which is however there, and has its problems and its very serious responsibilities in the general picture. This is why the more formal, technical language of the international organisations prefers other expressions, like: countries with a free market economy, countries with a centralised economy, developing countries and less developed countries. (In French, "Pays moins avances", whence the acronym comes: PMA).

One may easily find fault also with such denominations. To some they may look, especially the last two, rather euphemistic: developing countries? One could ask: really? And developing into what?

However that may be, I think we can accept as a fact that the need felt to create a fourth category of nations is a sign, indeed an ominous sign, of the increasing amount of poverty in our world, and of the difficulty of moving into a real process of development.

The countries in question (less developed) number thirty two, with a per capita income of less than 350 \$ USA. Thirty two, I should say, is a remarkable figure; slightly less than a fifth of the whole number of countries now existing. Such countries, may I add, have fallen into this category in the last ten to fifteen years.

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Another aspect of the general picture with which the world confronts us from the point of view of its division into affluent and poor countries, is the problem of the international debt.

I am well aware, I believe, of the complexities of this problem. Our Pontifical Council, as you well know, has published a document on this subject, which has been appreciated in places like the World Bank and other international and national banking and financial institutions.

It should not be ignored that the debt is not only

between South and North West, to put it this way. It is also between South and North East, or, if you wish, between the Third and Fourth World and the Second; namely, the socialist countries.

Also, many Third World countries are in debt among themselves, as some Fourth World countries are indebted to others in the Third.

So, any simplification of this problem in the sense of presenting a group of English, or French, or even German speaking stone-hearted capitalists as being creditors to the rest of the world, would amount to a caricature. Caricatures are perhaps good to laugh at but they deform reality.

Having said this, I must immediately affirm that the mere existence of such an enormous amount of money owed by some countries to others, or to commercial banks in other countries, or to international financial institutions, is certainly a sign of a most unequal distribution of wealth in the present world.

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### **This crisis is a sign, and a consequence, of an unequal distribution of wealth.**

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To be still more precise: one could perhaps admit that a certain flow of wealth in the form of credits goes from some countries (or banks or institutions) to others, with a rate of interest attached. This, I think, would be within the limits of normal financial relations in a global economy, like the one we are living in; if, of course, interest rates are kept reasonably low.

This would undoubtedly mean that there are countries richer and poorer. I underline the comparative, as you may have noticed.

But, in the opinion of all concerned, the present phenomenon goes well beyond such a mild process of borrowing and lending within well defined limits.

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### **Debt, not only comes from poverty, but also creates it.**

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What we are faced with now is a very serious crisis, which worries everybody, from the Group of Seven, meeting in Toronto, in June last year, to the Cartagena Group in Latin America, to the Assemblies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Berlin last September.

This crisis is again a sign, and a consequence, of an unequal distribution of wealth, whatever its causes may be, to which I will turn later.

Debt, in fact, especially at the levels now arrived at, comes from poverty; but also creates poverty, in a true and painful sense.

A third sign of the unequal distribution of wealth we are faced with in this last decade of the century, is the growing poverty inside the affluent nations, to which "Sollicitudo" has dedicated a long paragraph (n. 17).

Now, it would perhaps be wondered why I should bring in this subject when the question posed to us is "the responsibilities of the affluent countries", obviously towards other countries.

But the reference just made to the "poor in our midst" (you will have recognised the Biblical expression, coming from Deuteronomy) is not that far-fetched. And this for at least two reasons.

First, the poor in our countries (I mean, the rich ones) are in themselves a sign, as I have just said, of the unequal distribution of wealth before our own eyes. I mean by this that it is not at all necessary to travel to Bangladesh, or Sudan, or Bolivia, to find the poorest of the poor. No; it is enough to look carefully outside one's window or door step. And perhaps not even *that* carefully.

The sign is there, to be seen when looked at, and duly interpreted. Because it is essentially the same phenomenon, that people are deprived and destitute in foreign remote places and just next door. The one reveals the other. If we learn to see the poor at home we may discover the poor abroad, and vice versa. Or so we should. Because sometimes the impression is created that the poor abroad, unseen and unheard of, can serve as an alibi for the "poor in our midst", or the care thereof.

We may be aware of the hungry in the countries just mentioned, or the homeless in Armenia, just recovering from an earthquake, and react accordingly, as human persons and as Christians. Do we do the same with, and are we aware of, the hungry in our gigantic cities, the homeless on our sidewalks or in our shanty-towns?

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### **. . . people, human beings, have been sacrificed for the sake of an ideology.**

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But there is a second reason, to link both sides of the poverty problem, at home and abroad. And it is this: most, if not all, of the "poor in our midst", come from abroad. They are namely the immigrants who leave on their own account or are made to leave the impoverished countries where they used to live, and we know at what price.

Thus, if we read correctly the phenomenon of the poor amongst us, in many cases, they may be for us the revelation of the poor abroad, because of the intrinsic link between the two.

Poverty, so to speak, has become so intense and so unbearable at home, that people are even prepared to suffer it abroad. Albeit sometimes in loneliness and humiliation, but at least near the glow and the splendour of prosperity, in the hope that some of it may fall also on them, while there is no hope at home.

A last point on this subject of the unequal distribution of wealth in this world, which I would like to raise, notwithstanding its complexity and difficulty, touches upon two new situations which have been recently revealed to us and certainly have a bearing on the present question.

The poverty of the masses in the socialist countries, long suspected but carefully concealed, has now been made manifest. It is not a question of the abundance of more or less superfluous consumer goods, like high class automobiles or sophisticated computerisation. It is a question of hunger, at least in some cases, and real scarcity in others.

Who would have spoken of hunger in Vietnam, five years ago? Of queuing up for almost everything in Cuba? I am afraid there are even worse situations.

The plain consequence to be drawn from such undeniable facts is that people, human beings, have been sacrificed for the sake of an ideology. The failure of such subversion of values is now there for everybody to see. Apparently, some responsible governments are trying to redress their ways, some with more courage, some with less; and try to feed their people instead of simply pushing so-called axioms down their throats.

We are happy for this development and thank the Lord for it.

However, we have to deal with the fact that a whole new section has suddenly made its appearance in the already crowded map of universal poverty, from which we are not supposed to avert our eyes.

Simultaneously we are being told, sometimes in ringing tones and with an undissimulated sense of superiority, that other countries instead, not that far from here, have found their way out of the map of poverty, because they have tried to put their houses in order, and succeeded, to a certain extent.

At least, we are told, they have applied the right prescription, as the others just mentioned have applied the wrong one. These last have left ideology and promoted free enterprise and the free market and solved the problem of poverty; or are on the way to solving it.

Should we not look their way, and learn their lesson, less abstract (it is said) and more efficient than the Social doctrine of the Church?

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For anybody reading John Paul II's latest Encyclical, there cannot remain even a shade of a doubt that there is a moral problem implied in this unequal distribution of wealth.

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## 2. A Technical or a Moral Problem?

I have purposely used, up till now, the word "inequality" of wealth distribution between rich and poor countries. I have not used the word "inequity". They are very near to each other, even semantically and phonetically. But the first states a fact, the second implies a moral judgment.

For the same reason, I have said nothing, up to now, about the "responsibilities" for such situation. "Responsibility" is also a moral term.

For anybody, however, reading Pope John Paul II's latest Encyclical there cannot remain even the shade of a doubt concerning the fact that there is a moral problem implied in this unequal distribution of wealth. By the same token and for the same reason, there are also moral responsibilities at the root of the problem and there is also a moral obligation to co-operate in its solution.

I will turn back to this all important point in a moment.

But I would like to make two observations first, which will, I hope, set the Pope's teaching in its proper perspective.

First, nobody has ever asserted, at least when speaking knowledgeably and seriously about such matters (matters, I insist, of life and death for millions of people), that poverty in the world, or the unequal distribution of wealth therein, is only a consequence of the actions of the rich nations. And John Paul II (nor the preceding Pontiffs, for that matter) is not guilty of such affirmation. The contrary is explicitly stated in more than one section of "Sollicitudo rei socialis". (cf. n. 16,44).

Yes, poverty of nations, as of private persons, can be the result of sins or failures of the persons concerned or, if it is a question of nations, of the governments thereof.

I have just mentioned, precisely for this reason, how, in some countries, which now are publicly included in the painful chart of poverty, such poverty is a consequence of the sin of ideology, if not outright greed and corruption.

And it is not the only case in point. We all know about a long list of cases of misuse of public funds, ill administration, nepotism, even ignorance and incompetence, without forgetting sheer greed and corruption, just named.

Some countries, many or just a few, I am not able to tell, have either been thrown into their present state of prostration or been made unable to raise themselves up, because of such crimes.

The question to be posed here however is twofold. Does this account for all the cases of poverty around us? Or rather, because it is not so much a question of figures, do such moral failures as those here described, account sufficiently and completely for the present growing gap between rich and poor nations?

Are moral failures in the poor countries so powerful that they are able to create the terrible widening abyss we are faced with?

Is it, I am tempted to ask, almost in scholastic terms, an adequate cause of such tragedy?

I have purposefully left the question unanswered. But I would be very much surprised to hear it answered positively. Yes, there is no other cause.

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Corruption, greed, the pursuit of profit for profit's sake in the centres of decision in this world, wherever they may be, East or West, North or South, is a sin of tremendous consequences, a kind of moral cataclysm . . .

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Moral failures would, in this hypothesis, be only on one side of the fence, strangely enough. If somebody is ready to admit that there are moral failures on the other side of the fence, then this would mean that such failures have a larger scope than the first ones, because

people responsible for them are more powerful and their actions have more serious consequences.

Corruption and greed and inefficiency in a Third or Fourth World country are clearly inexcusable and have perhaps more consequences than we could tell. But corruption, greed, the pursuit of profit for profit's sake in the centres of decision in this world, wherever they may be, East or West, North or South, is a sin of tremendous consequences, a kind of moral cataclysm, the size of which we can only appreciate when we are faced with a situation like the present one.

It is not, therefore, that some are to be excused to place the blame on others. But the world being what it is, closely interlinked and interdependent, the strongest in it have certainly a greater weight to pull the net their way. If they sin, the repercussions are felt almost everywhere. If the other, the weaker, sin, the repercussions are less intense. But there is no question that both are sinners. It could be added that they are closely linked in their sinning and in the distortion or distortions that follow to the network which binds us all together.

This is exactly what the Holy Father, in "Sollicitudo rei socialis" calls the "structures of sin" (n. 36 ff.).

At this point, to ask the question about who is more responsible than others seems futile if not hypocritical. St. Paul says twice, in fact, in his Epistles: "All (men) have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God" (Rom. 3,23; Gal. 3,22).

Now a second observation, which I believe is equally important as my first.

It should be very clear that the Social Doctrine of the Church has never denied, nor called into question, the importance of adequate technical instruments to solve the poverty problem and the strict need for their application.

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### The difference between 'the right to economic initiative' and 'free enterprise' is extremely revealing . . .

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One of these technical means may be what it is called free enterprise, if it is not made a kind of universal panacea, endowed with intrinsic magic.

It has been noted that the Holy Father, John Paul II, and generally the Social Teaching of the Church, prefer to use the expression: "right to economic initiative", or sometimes, the "principle of subsidiarity", as applied to the economy. Is this a mere difference of vocabulary, a free use of synonyms, independent of their meaning? Or does it go deeper?

In my opinion, it certainly goes much deeper, and the difference between "free enterprise" and the "right to economic initiative" is extremely revealing for our present discussion.

"Free enterprise" is a technique; a good one, technically speaking; and one which has proved its value in many and varied circumstances.

But it remains what it is; namely a technical instrument. As such, it is not an absolute entity, of absolute universal value. Since its origins, it has developed, has

changed, been corrected, applied in various ways, according to differing times and places. It may yet change again. Actually, it is changing, under the influence of informatics.

Above all — and this is the most important — as any other technical means, dealing with human endeavours and used by human beings, it is subject to moral requirements. Its aims, its operation, its consequences, its place in human life and the life of society, is to be judged morally. And I am sure we are all convinced that many of the changes free enterprise has experienced in its long history, have come from moral considerations. This remains true, even in the age of informatics and of the global economy.

On the other side, and here precisely lies the radical difference, "the right to economic initiative" is a moral concept. Rights are in fact values, and imply moral capabilities and moral obligations at one and the same time. In this sense, the "right to economic initiative" comes before and goes beyond "free enterprise". Indeed, one of the moral criteria with which to judge this particular technical instrument is precisely the "right" just mentioned. "Free enterprise" and "right to economic initiative" are thus related but not necessarily coextensive.

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Poverty is a problem of technical ways and means, but it is more radically a problem of moral options — or as 'Sollicitudo' would have it, a question of 'conversion' (cf.n38), in the original Christian sense of the word.

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Having said this, I insist that technical means are to be applied to alleviate poverty, and are to be applied knowledgeably and competently. They are, however, subject to moral criteria, either in their choice for a particular situation, in their use or in the way of their concrete applications.

The problem of poverty is certainly a problem of technical ways and means, but it is, more radically, a problem of moral options, at any level, or as "Sollicitudo" would have it, a question of "conversion" (cf. n. 38), in the original Christian sense of the word.

Therefore it is a question of acknowledged responsibilities at every level and of the "change of mind" which is necessarily implied therein, so as to reform and correct what is wrong and put into practice what is good.

### 3. The affluent countries and the virtue of solidarity

At this point, it could well be asked, what is there to reform and to correct, and on what basis?

I will dedicate the last minutes of this address trying to answer the questions thus raised. I hope that the respondents will come to my help afterwards.

I shall start by affirming again that the present inequality of wealth among nations and inside nations is not a fact of life we have to live with, as with the alternation of seasons. Sometimes it is cold, sometimes hot. Some countries are rich, some are poor. That's it.

It is not so. I hope I have showed, drawing on Pope John Paul's latest Encyclical, but also relying on former Church teaching, that in such appalling phenomena of poverty, moral responsibilities are implicated, on both sides, but more on one than on the other. I have also admitted, and gladly so, that there are also technical questions involved. But I have noted that even this turns to be, in the final instance, a moral imperative.

As a consequence, then, the poverty problem, as just stated, must be faced morally, if it is to be solved humanly, not to say, at all.

Morally, in the present context, means, beyond doubt, with the initiative of all the parties concerned. The poor and poorest countries have a lot of things they should do and undo, to set things in motion or make them move more quickly. "Sollicitudo rei socialis" has dedicated a good part of the second half of chapter VI precisely to such necessary initiatives. A section, may I note here, that seems to have been frequently overlooked by friends and foes alike.

This, however, will not be enough. The means and power are mostly on the side of the affluent countries. They should therefore come to the help of the others. I believe that this principle is now above discussion.

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## Help and the duty to help does not depend on the presence or absence of guilt — it depends on need.

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One could perhaps examine the motivations for it, because the right motivations will surely inspire the right actions.

I shall try to state them briefly and in good order.

First, we do not primarily help others for own benefit. We do so for the sake of the others, because they are in need, and may suffer or die if we do not give them a helping hand.

Second, we may ask why somebody, a person, a community or a country, has lapsed into poverty. Perhaps we should. We have tried to do it together, a moment ago. We might find them guilty. We may find ourselves guilty. We might find both guilty, more ourselves than others. In any case, we will help. Help and the duty to help does not depend on the presence or absence of guilt on either side. It depends on need, which is very different, although perhaps linked. And if it depends at all on guilt, it is on ours, not on that of others.

Third, who has more gives more, according to St. Paul's rule in 2 Cor. 8,9 ff. Again, the reason for this is the simple fact that one has more, no matter for what reason the other has less.

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## It is through our own personal decisions that the rich countries will assume their duty towards the poor ones and the peoples in them.

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Fourth and final, the goods of this world were given to all human beings by the Lord, and are always so given to them, for them to be used with a certain measure of equity. This is traditional Christian social teaching, coming from the Bible, repeated by the Church Fathers, the great Medieval theologians, the Popes, Vatican Council II (Gaudium et Spes n. 69), and "Sollicitudo rei socialis" (n. 38 and passim). It is what is called: the universal destination of created goods. The formula may sound strange in a world where "mine" and "thine" are uppermost and seem indisputable. Actually, by this formula, as "Sollicitudo" teaches, private property is not suppressed but is given its true meaning (cf. n. 42). It is there to allow sharing. Much more so in the universal scope, when some countries (and therefore individuals) possess much, and other countries, more in number, possess less. Such inequality, whatever its causes, is contrary to the will of God. It is therefore a sin; or a "structure of sin" and is to be corrected to obey God's will. We Christians, are called to correct it, in our daily lives, in our personal choices, in our priorities, and, last but not least, in our civic, political and societal responsibilities. It is through our own personal decisions that the rich countries will assume their duty towards the poor ones and the peoples in them.



"The universal scope of Catholic Social Teaching" regarding "the responsibilities of affluent countries" means simply this: that we are called "to see the 'other' — whether a person, people or nation . . . as our 'neighbour', a 'helper' . . . to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which we are all equally invited by God" ("Sollicitudo" n. 39). For this, we are called to exercise "solidarity" (ib.), namely, to love our neighbour as ourselves, nay, more than ourselves, for the love of God, who has made us all equal and equally called to be happy.

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