



23 April 1998

**Address to the Plenary Session on the Subject
'Democracy – Some Acute Questions'**

The Supreme Pontiff expresses happiness at the fact that the Academy in its researches has borne in mind the Church's social doctrine, which is always 'open to new developments and applications'. The Church wishes to ensure that the Gospel message permeates cultural, economic and political realities. The Academy is called upon to play a 'role of mediation and dialogue between faith and science'.

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to welcome you as you gather in the Vatican for the fourth plenary session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, which has as its subject 'Democracy – Some Acute Questions'.

I extend a cordial greeting to each of you, and in particular I thank your President, Prof. Edmond Malinvaud, for expressing the sentiments of all and for explaining the purpose of this session.

In these four years since the foundation of the Academy, in plenary meetings and in study sessions you have chosen as the central themes of your research and analysis two questions of vital importance for the social doctrine of the Church: first, work and employment, and now democracy.

I congratulate you and express my deep gratitude for the fruitful work you have already accomplished in such a short time. The acts of the plenary session and the book on the problems concerning democracy, which you have already published and kindly sent to me, show not only a great wealth and variety of content, but at the same time offer concrete applications for making the world more human, more united and more just.

2. I was able to note with pleasure how all the research you have carried out has always kept in mind the fundamental orientation of the *Church's social doctrine*, from the memorable Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII to the more recent *Laborem Exercens*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Centesimus Annus*.

The Church's teachings on social matters form a doctrinal corpus that is always open to new developments and applications. In fact, as I wrote in *Centesimus Annus*: 'The Church has no models to present; models that are real and truly effective can only arise within the framework of different historical situations, through the efforts of all those who responsibly confront concrete problems in all their social, economic, political and cultural aspects, as these interact with one another'.¹

The Church's social doctrine is not called to concern itself with the technical aspects of the various social situations, in order to formulate her own solutions. The Church proclaims the Gospel and wants to manifest in all its richness the newness that characterises it. The Gospel message must permeate the various cultural, economic and political situations. In this effort of inculturation and spiritual reflection, the Academy of Social Sciences is also called to make its particular contribution. As experts in the social disciplines and as Christians, you are called to play a role of mediation and dialogue between faith and science, between ideals and concrete situations, a role that is sometimes one of pioneers, because you are asked to indicate new paths and new solutions for solving in a more equitable way the burning issues of today's world.

3. A few moments ago, your President, Prof. Malinvaud, stressed how in this fourth plenary session your intention is to study the complex theme of democracy which you have divided into *three great issues of investigation*: the relation between democracy and values; the role of civil society in democracy; the relation between democracy and supranational and international aspirations.

These are subjects that await study and guidelines suitable for directing researchers, political authorities and nations in this millennial passage between the 20th and 21st centuries. How important is this period of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, from which we expect a strong message of reconciliation and peace for the Church and for the world!

Distinguished and dear academicians, may the Spirit of the risen Lord accompany you in this journey of analysis and research. I am following you with keen attention and, as a token of my closeness to your work, I cordially impart to you, the members of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, a special Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to the experts you have invited, your co-workers and all your loved ones.

1 N. 43.