



Address to the Study Week on the Subject 'Remote Sensing and Its Impact on Developing Countries'



John Paul II praises the advantages of the technique of 'remote sensing' and calls for the application of modern technology to achieve a 'more just form of worldwide co-existence'. The resources of science could be employed to 'feed the whole human family' but the political will is often lacking. The resources of space should be utilised to unify 'the human family in justice and peace'. His Holiness concludes by affirming that national and international economic powers should serve everyone but especially those whose lives are 'particularly threatened and who need assistance to secure their very survival and the means of living in a way consonant with human dignity'.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to receive today those taking part in the study week organised by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the subject of 'Remote Sensing and Its Impact on Developing Countries'. An ever deeper knowledge of the earth, and in particular of its poorest zones, is the purpose for which the Pontifical Academy and its distinguished President have brought you together in order to study this subject.

1. The new technique of remote sensing makes it possible to survey anything from a few square metres to huge expanses of the earth's surface. Certain areas, the home of hundreds of thousands of people, are being affected by the *terrible phenomenon of desertification*, with consequent famine and disease. The causes of this phenomenon vary from unsuitable methods of

farming to climatic factors such as cyclones and other atmospheric disturbances.

Surveys carried out *with the aid of satellites* linked to a network of ground tracking stations can provide a detailed and exact picture of crops, including their increase or deterioration, and can offer the chance of using *technical means of combating the encroaching desert*, which imperils the livelihood of a high percentage of the world's population.

With the help of remote sensing, it is possible to give useful advice for many schemes. These latter include the improvement of soil condition, forecasting and increasing the development of crop harvesting both in quantity and quality, the introduction of new crops, the prevention of the destruction of forested areas needed for ecological balance, and the taking of measures to meet possible atmospheric conditions, both harmful and beneficial.

By means of remote sensing it is likewise possible to detect the presence of concealed sources of energy, both renewable and non-renewable, as also the presence of food resources on the seabed and in rivers and lakes, together with the mineral wealth lying in the subsoil.

2. Your meeting has highlighted the possibility of aiding all peoples, with the help of advanced technological methods, to attain a *more just form of worldwide co-existence, so that the earth's resources, which are the patrimony of all, may be fairly distributed and shared*. This is in accordance with the will of the Creator who made man and woman in His own likeness and said to them, '... have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth... I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food'.¹ The resources of science make it possible to feed the whole human family, with the remedying of past and present mistakes and shortcomings. Nevertheless, one cannot help noting that there is still a lack of firm determination in political circles to make proper use of the technological means which you have been examining during these days of study and of service to human welfare. We know that *progress must not be the exclusive privilege of the favoured few*. We should not forget the words of Pope Paul VI who said that development is the new name of peace.

3. It is a source of satisfaction that the conclusions of your previous study week, held in October of the year before last, on the subject of 'The Impact of Space Exploration on Mankind', have been adopted by the United Nations Organisation and sent to all member States. This is indeed a sign of profound respect for the relevance and importance of the work being done by the Pontifical Academy.

It is my hope that by means of joint agreements and commitments all governments will promote the *peaceful uses of space resources for the sake of the unification of the human family in justice and peace*. I take this opportunity to express once more my conviction that national and international economic powers should serve all peoples and every individual, but with special preference for those whose lives are particularly threatened and who need assistance to secure their very survival and the means of living in a manner consonant with human dignity.

May the Lord of heaven and earth look kindly upon you and grant to you and your families the abundance of His blessings.

