



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE*

Saturday, 16 janvier 1993

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. At the beginning of the year 1993, it is a particular pleasure for me to receive the good wishes which in your name His Excellency Ambassador Joseph Amichia has so courteously expressed. I thank you warmly for your presence here today, as also for the interest and benevolent understanding with which you follow day by day the activity of the Holy See.

Please accept, in your turn, the earnest good wishes which I entrust to God in my prayers for you personally and for your families, for your noble mission as diplomats and for the peoples to which you belong.

One hundred and forty five countries at present maintain diplomatic relations with the Holy See. In the year 1992 alone 16 nations expressed the desire to establish this type of cooperation, and I am happy to see among you this morning, for the first time, the Ambassadors of Bulgaria, Croatia, Mexico and Slovenia. In this manner, the expectations and hopes of the greater part of the peoples of the earth make themselves felt in the very heart of Catholicism. And I hope that circumstances will make it possible for other countries to join those represented here: I am thinking of, among others, China and Viet Nam, and of Israel and Jordan, to mention but a few.

Listening to the wise reflections of your Dean and seeing your faces, I recalled many of the countries I have visited on my apostolic journeys. It gives me pleasure to call to mind that marvelous world, its nature and cultural heritage; it gives me pleasure to call to mind those hard working peoples, often lacking material goods but able to resist the temptation to despair, and it certainly gives me pleasure to call to mind the sons and daughters of the Church: with their inexhaustible spiritual resources and daily Christian commitment sometimes in an environment of

religious indifference and even hostility they bear witness to the fact that God "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). What human and spiritual riches in the various different nations!

The light of Christmas has illuminated this world with an incomparable brightness, and it continues to show human achievements in their true nature, revealing the good that has been done and the efforts made to improve certain situations. But this light also shows up the mediocrities and the setbacks affecting the life of individuals and societies. This year, as we consider the human family which God loves and which he does not cease to sustain in its existence and growth (cf. Acts 17:28), we must once more, alas, note that two sorts of evil still hold it in their grip: war and poverty.

2. War is tearing apart many of the peoples of Africa. In Liberia, for example, the path to reconciliation is proving hard to find. Despite the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States, this country is continuing to be a theatre of unheard of violence which spares neither the Church nor her personnel. It is becoming vital to put an end to these battles, to the ceaseless influx of armed men roaming the territory, as also to put an end to personal ambitions and rivalries. In 1992, the Yamoussoukro Accord had been considered a good basis for rapid peace making: is it impossible to manage to put it into practice?

The sinking of Rwanda into a disguised form of war has not made it possible for the transition to democracy yet to achieve its objectives, while military expenditure is weighing heavily on an already precarious economy. It is now clear that in a multiracial nation a strategy of confrontation can never achieve peace.

The Sudan is still divided by a war which sets the peoples of the North and South against one another. I hope that the Sudanese, with the freedom to choose will succeed in finding a constitutional formula which will make it possible to overcome contradictions and struggles, with proper respect paid to the specific characteristics of each community. I cannot fail to make my own the words of the local Bishops: "Peace without justice and respect for human rights cannot be achieved" (Communiqué of 6 October 1992). I entrust to God my plan to make a brief stop in Khartoum next month: it will give me the opportunity to take to all those who are suffering a message of reconciliation and hope, and above all it will be an opportunity for me to encourage the sons and daughters of the Church who, despite trials of every kind, are bravely continuing their journey of faith, hope and charity.

The humanitarian aid brought to Somalia by the international community has revealed to the eyes of the world the unbearable distress of a country long plunged into anarchy, to the point of compromising the very survival of its inhabitants. It must be stated that the claims of clans or individuals will not lead to peace. Let us then hope that international solidarity will intensify: it is the whole balance of the African continent which will thereby be consolidated.

In fact, Africa cannot be left to itself. On the one hand, urgent aid is essential in several areas of conflict or of natural disasters, and on the other hand the vast movement towards democracy which has spread there calls out for support. There too, the link between democracy, human rights and development is more clearly seen to be of prime importance. I express the hope that the countries of Africa which have happily taken the path towards political renewal will be able to continue their journey. That path is of course strewn with hazards and slowed down by those who prefer to look backwards, but it is the only road leading to progress, since the aim of democratization is respectful service of the peoples and of the choice which they have freely expressed. I am thinking in particular of Togo and Zaire, which are continuing to experience moments of grave political uncertainty. In the latter country especially, it would be desirable for the parties involved to make a courageous choice of the path of dialogue and of unselfish efforts to ensure that the transition period leads to a social plan that will respect the legitimate aspirations of the people. Quite clearly, this will only happen if there is an avoidance of intolerance and violence in the different regions of Zaire, which could drag this great country into an adventure with fatal consequences.

3. Nor is the Mediterranean region exempt from strong tensions causing violence and death. I am thinking of the grave events which have affected Algeria and the serious difficulties which are endangering the peace process in the Middle East, begun just over a year ago in Madrid. Since fresh violence and armed interventions could compromise the efforts of dialogue and peace which have been made in recent months, to all those engaged in the process I renew my appeal to renounce acts of force and a *fait accompli* policy. In this way it will be easier to progress along the path of peace, thanks to negotiation and sincere and trusting dialogue, in order to go beyond the stage of mere meetings. A new climate of respect and understanding is proving more than ever needed in this part of the world. Moreover, it will be a factor of equilibrium and pacification for the neighbouring countries, for example Lebanon and Cyprus, where unsolved problems are still preventing the people from looking to the future with confidence. Nor can we forget that war has long term consequences, and that it forces innocent civilians to endure heavy sufferings. Such is the case of the peoples of Iraq, who, by the simple fact of living in that country, are still continuing to pay a heavy price in the form of cruel privations.

4. But it is nearer to us, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, that war is exercising its ruthless brutality. Obviously I am thinking of the fratricidal battles in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The whole of Europe is being humiliated by them. Its institutions are being ignored. All the peace efforts of recent years have been as it were destroyed. After the disaster of the two last World Wars which had originated in Europe, it had been agreed that States would never again take up arms and support their use in order to solve their internal or mutual differences. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) has even worked out principles and a code of conduct, adopted by consensus by all the States taking part. Now, before our very eyes, these principles and the ensuing commitments are being systematically transgressed. Humanitarian law, a laborious achievement of this century, is no longer being respected. The most elementary

principles governing social life are being scoffed at by veritable hordes spreading terror and death. Ladies and gentlemen how can we fail to think of those children for ever marked by the sight of so much horror? Those families separated and thrown into the street, dispossessed and without resources? Those women dishonoured? Those people shut up and ill-treated in camps which we thought had for ever disappeared? The Holy See is constantly receiving anguished appeals from the Catholic and Orthodox Bishops and the Muslim religious leaders of these regions, appeals that this collective martyrdom might cease, and that at least the humanitarian law might be respected. I echo those appeals before you, this morning.

The international community ought to show more clearly its political will not to accept aggression and territorial conquest by force, nor the aberration of "ethnic cleansing". This is why, in fidelity to my mission, I believe it necessary to say here once again, in the most solemn and firm manner possible, to all the leaders of the nations which you represent, and also to all those who, in Europe and elsewhere, have in their hands a weapon in order to attack their brothers and sisters: war of aggression is unworthy of man; the moral and physical destruction of the enemy or stranger is a crime; - practical indifference in the face of such forms of behaviour is a culpable omission; finally, those who indulge in such actions, and those who excuse them or justify them, will answer for it not only before the international community but still more before God.

Let the words of the Prophet Isaiah resound here: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness" (Is 5:20)! Peace can rest only upon truth and freedom. This demands today much clear sightedness and courage. The Catholics of Europe implored this grace in Assisi, at the moving prayer meeting held on 9 and 10 January. By means of prayer and purifying penance, we asked pardon of God for the many offences against peace, the many occasions on which brotherhood has been scorned, and we implored him to spare Europe these waves of hate and pain which man seems unable to stem.

5. Europe, torn between community integration and the temptation to nationalist and ethnic disintegration, is in fact experiencing a painful transformation. The sources of violent tension which are battering several Republics of the former Soviet Union (I mention in passing Georgia and the Caucasus region), as well as the destiny of the Balkan area, will weigh heavily on the future of the continent. These tragic uncertainties challenge peaceful and prosperous Western Europe, which on 1 January entered the phase of the "single market". Strengthened by the unity of a political and economic project and by the sharing of common values, this Western Europe must continue to increase the contacts and gestures of solidarity and openness towards the rest of the continent. Genuine and lasting progress cannot be made by some without the others, nor by some against the others, still less with weapons in their hands.

6. The other great trial affecting the life of peoples and hindering their development is poverty, both material and moral.

Never has the earth produced so much and never has it counted so many hungry people. The fruits of growth continue to be divided unfairly. Added to that is the growing division between North and South. As you know, I wished to draw the attention of people of good will to this problem with my Message for the World Day of Peace on 1 January, in which I wrote: "Destitution... is a hidden but real threat to peace. By impairing human dignity, it constitutes a serious attack on the value of life and strikes at the heart of the peaceful development of society" (n. 3).

In the face of this growing destitution which is causing the poor to become more numerous and ever poorer, faced with forms of exclusion such as the unemployment which is so sadly affecting the younger generation, illiteracy, racism, broken families or illness, those in positions of political responsibility are the first to be questioned. The world possesses the technological and structural capabilities to improve conditions of life. Today even more than yesterday every individual should have the opportunity to participate worthily and fairly in the banquet of life. The sharing of natural resources, the just distribution of profits, a sound reaction against the excesses of consumption, and the preservation of the environment are some of the priority tasks incumbent upon public authorities.

The United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro last June, tried to pave the way. Now it is necessary to go beyond good intentions. Involving citizens in society's projects gives them confidence in those who govern them and in the nation to which they belong: these are the bases on which the harmonious life of human societies rests. Very often, phenomena such as street protests or an atmosphere of suspicion which the print and broadcast media report are simply a manifestation of dissatisfaction and helplessness due to the frustration of basic needs: not seeing legitimate rights guaranteed; not feeling that one is regarded as a partner in political and social planning; not discovering the beginning of a solution to difficulties that have lasted for years. Basically all problems of justice have as their main cause the fact that the person is not sufficiently respected, taken into consideration or loved for what he or she is. People must learn or learn anew to look at one another, to listen to one another, to walk together. That obviously presupposes that people share in common a minimum of human values, the recognition of which is able to motivate convergent choices.

7. This brings me naturally to that other form of poverty: moral destitution. The reception currently being given to the Catechism of the Catholic Church of itself shows our contemporaries' felt need for references. Reflecting currents of opinion and fashion, the means of social communication often transmit indulgent messages which excuse everything and result in an unrestrained permissiveness. Thus the dignity and stability of the family are not recognized or are changed. Many young people are coming to consider almost everything as objectively indifferent: the only reference is what suits the convenience of the individual, and quite often the end justifies the means. Now, as we can see, a society without values rapidly grows "hostile" to the individual who becomes the victim of personal profit, of a brutal exercise of authority, of fraud and crime. Today too many people have a bitter experience of this, and I know that statesmen are conscious of

these serious problems which they must face each day.

I would like to restate here the Church's readiness to cooperate in the authentic moral development of societies by her witness of faith, the contribution of her reflection and the aid of her activities. She must still be given a place in public dialogue: one sometimes has the impression of a desire on the part of some people to relegate religion to the private sphere, under the pretext that believers' convictions and norms of behaviour are synonymous with reaction or an attack on freedom. The Catholic Church, present in every nation of the earth, and the Holy See, a member of the international community, in no way wish to impose judgments or precepts, but merely to give the witness of their concept of man and history, which they know comes from a divine Revelation. Society cannot afford to forgo this original contribution without becoming the poorer for it and without violating the freedom of thought and expression of a large part of its citizens.

If the Gospel of Jesus Christ does not offer ready made responses to the many social and economic problems assailing contemporary man, it nevertheless shows what is important to God, and therefore for human destiny. This is what Christians propose to those who are willing to hear their voice. Despite difficulties, the Catholic Church for her part will continue to offer her disinterested cooperation so that at the end of this century man will be better enlightened and able to free himself from the idols of this age. Christians' only ambition is to show that they understand personal and collective history as a meeting between God and mankind, of which Christmas is its most shining expression.

8. That is why, with vigilance but also in solidarity with initiatives and advances which help man grow, the Church rejoices at everything which in recent months has represented a peaceful victory over violence and disorder.

In Europe, despite the uncertainties mentioned earlier, a new chapter in the history of the continent opened on 1 January. With the single market coming into effect, a good many Europeans have gained a heightened awareness that they form one family, sharing values coming from their recent and more distant history. This is important, because the future cannot rest solely on the bases of economy and trade. Let us hope that centuries old conflicts having become thing of the past, solidarity and a sense of community will be established once and for all. From now on, thanks to common structures and permanent mechanisms of concerted action, life will be more harmonious for much of Europe.

In this context, I would like to encourage the two new European countries which saw the light of day on 1 January: the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. May the peaceful character of the dissolution of the former Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, the result of persevering dialogue, be a good omen for the development of each of the two new States and for the quality of their mutual relations!

9. Father away from us, peace efforts have succeeded, as in Angola, where we hope that the difficulties of recent days will not endanger the gains of the peace accord signed in Lisbon on 31 May 1991. The choice of the voters must be respected by all! This sorely tried people, whom I had the joy of visiting recently, is waiting for peace. They deserve it! The fratricidal conflicts which are devastating certain regions will bring victory to no one. They will only serve to exhaust the fragile human and moral resources of a country which had nevertheless taken the right path.

Again in Africa, in Mozambique the negotiations happily concluded in Rome allow us to hope that the parties concerned will from now on act as partners in national dialogue and together carry forward the process of pacification and democratization desired by all Mozambicans. No one can do that for them.

One cannot help but rejoice at seeing the desire of the African peoples to build their societies on new bases whereby exercising the right to opinion and to initiate legislation makes it possible to transform the political profile of the whole continent. Even though at times the changes which have begun are still disappointing, it is none the less true that the movement towards democracy is irreversible. In this new Africa, it is important that the central role should be left to the population, which must be able to participate fully in development. For this purpose, the population needs regional and international cooperation to help to prevent crises on the one hand, and for this cooperation to support the process of democratization as well as economic growth on the other.

10. In Asia, Cambodia has gradually emerged from its isolation and begun its reconstruction, thanks to the persevering efforts of the United Nations Organization and friendly countries. The commitments made in the Paris Accords mapped out a path which can lead to true democracy and national reconciliation. It should not happen that new difficulties call everything into question. Peace will not be viable unless yesterday's foes are inspired today by a sincere desire for peace. Let us hope that this country too, which has suffered so much, can benefit from the long term aid of unfailing international solidarity.

11. In Latin America, again this year the desire for regional dialogue has remained strong. The year 1992 was an important anniversary for the continent. Latin Americans recalled the great human and spiritual epic of discovery and evangelization, with its lights and shadows. They have become more aware of their immense moral capacities for meeting the challenges of the hour, in particular those of social justice. The Catholic Church, so strongly present in this part of the world, will continue to offer her specific cooperation by proclaiming "the truth of Christ which must enlighten minds and hearts by the active, tireless and public proclamation of Christian values", as I emphasized at the opening of the Fourth General Conference of the Latin America Episcopate on 12 October last in Santo Domingo. By so doing, the Catholic faithful and their Pastors will promote the moral renewal of the peoples of this vast continent, thus facilitating the construction of a more just and prosperous society with respect for their noble traditions.

Among the comforting signs which have marked the life of these peoples one should note the fact that armed groups have laid down their arms, except alas in Peru, or at least are on the point of doing so, as in Colombia. The most eloquent example is provided by El Salvador where, on 15 December last, after 12 years of war, the government and the guerrillas officially put an end to the armed conflict. It remains to be hoped that the reconciliation which has been proclaimed will be affirmed more and more by the facts.

May this happy conclusion inspire another neighbouring country which is also being torn by too much violence: Guatemala! There as elsewhere, a harmonious common life can be built only on respect for human rights and public morality.

12. I hope that other countries of the hemisphere will likewise make progress, from both the social and political points of view. My thoughts turn first to Haiti where a serious, generalized crisis continues. Let us hope that Haitians too may live in civil peace and experience anew the dignity of citizens who are the artisans of their own destiny. The urgent needs of this sorely tried people must be faced without delay. We must help them as the local Bishops and many people of good will are trying to do.

Not far from there is another people particularly dear to me, the people of Cuba. The economic difficulties they are enduring and their international isolation are daily increasing the sufferings of the whole population. The international community cannot ignore this country. I likewise hope that the desire of Cubans for a society renewed in justice and peace will become a reality. Without claiming special privileges, Catholics wish to make their contribution to this internal evolution by the light of their Gospel witness.

13. This broad survey of the international scene, which has become traditional in the framework of our annual meeting, has above all highlighted the fact that the very heart of international life is not so much States as man. Here we take note of what is doubtless one of the more significant developments of the law of nations during the 20th century. The emergence of the individual is the basis of what is called "humanitarian law". There exist interests which transcend States: they are the interests of the human person, his rights. Today as in the past, despite the more or less compelling documents of international law, man and his needs unfortunately continue to be threatened, to such an extent that in recent months a new concept has emerged that of "humanitarian intervention". This term says much about the precarious state of man and of the societies he has established. I myself have had occasion to speak on this subject of humanitarian assistance, during my visit to the headquarters of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization on 5 December last. Once the possibilities afforded by diplomatic negotiations and the procedures provided for by international agreements and organizations have been put into effect, and that, nevertheless, populations are succumbing to the attacks of an unjust aggressor, States no longer have a "right to indifference". It seems clear that their duty is to disarm this aggressor, if all other means have proved ineffective. The principles of the sovereignty of States

and of non interference in their internal affairs - which retain all their value - cannot constitute a screen behind which torture and murder may be carried out. For this is what it means. Jurists will still of course have to examine this new phenomenon and refine its contours. But, as the Holy See often seeks to remind the international bodies to which it belongs, the organization of society has no meaning unless the human dimension is made the principal concern, in a world made by man and for man.

14. Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, at this beginning of the year, amidst the clamour of arms and of events too often tragic, the angels' hymn on Christmas night still rings out: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!". All the greetings we exchange are summed up in this heavenly message. In this violent world, so ready to suspect and to strike, in which interests sometimes seem to stifle the most generous aspirations, the Child in the crib of Bethlehem brings the sweetness of his innocence. He is the sign, offered to man, of God's infinite compassion! To you, your countrymen, your Authorities, to all our brothers and sisters in humanity, I offer from my heart this "Good News" in its perennial freshness. I ask you to accept it! In it is found human happiness, for today and for tomorrow.

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