



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II  
AT THE EXCHANGE OF GREETINGS  
WITH THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS\***

*10 January 2000*

*Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I wish before all else to express my deep gratitude to your Dean, Ambassador Giovanni Galassi, who has graciously offered greetings and good wishes in your name while at the same time pointing to a number of significant events in the life of our contemporaries, their hopes, their troubles and their fears. He has wished to underline the specific contribution of the Catholic Church on behalf of harmony between peoples and in support of their spiritual progress. I offer him heartfelt thanks.

2. Since we have just crossed the threshold of a new year, the Vicar of Christ strongly desires to offer to the peoples whom you represent his prayerful good wishes for this Year 2000 which so many have welcomed in "jubilation". Christians have entered into the Great Jubilee by commemorating the coming of Christ into time and human history: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son", as we read in the Letter to the Hebrews (1:1-2).

To God who desired to make a covenant with the world which he continues to create, to love and to enlighten, I most heartily entrust each one's noblest aspirations and their fulfilment, without overlooking the tragic trials and setbacks which so often thwart humanity's march forward. With our contemporaries I praise God for so many beautiful and good things, and I invoke his forgiveness for so many attacks on human life and dignity, on fraternity and solidarity. May the Most High help us to conquer in us and around us every form of resistance, so that the season of men and women of good will may dawn or return, a season which the recent feast of Christmas has proposed to us with the freshness of new beginnings! These are my prayerful good wishes for

all men and women, of all countries and of all generations.

3. The century just ended has seen remarkable advances in science which have considerably improved people's life and health. These advances have also contributed to our dominion over nature and made easier people's access to culture. Information technology has made the world smaller and brought us closer to one another. Never before were we so quickly informed about the daily events which affect the lives of our brothers and sisters in the human family. But one question can be asked: was this century also the century of "brotherhood"? Certainly an unqualified answer cannot be given.

As the balance is made, the memory of bloody wars which have decimated millions of people and provoked massive exoduses, shameful genocides which haunt our memories, as well as the arms race which fostered mistrust and fear, terrorism and ethnic conflicts which annihilated peoples who had lived together in the same territory, all force us to be modest and in many cases to have a penitent spirit.

The life sciences and biotechnology continue to find new fields of application, yet they also raise the problem of the limits imposed by the need to safeguard people's dignity, responsibility and safety.

Globalization, which has profoundly transformed economic systems by creating unexpected possibilities of growth, has also resulted in many people being relegated to the side of the road: unemployment in the more developed countries and extreme poverty in too many countries of the southern hemisphere continue to hold millions of women and men back from progress and prosperity.

4. For this reason it seems to me that the century now beginning ought to be the century of solidarity.

We know one thing today more than in the past: we will never be happy and at peace without one another, much less if some are against others. The humanitarian efforts deployed during recent conflicts and natural catastrophes inspired praiseworthy initiatives of volunteerism which reveal a greater sense of altruism, especially among the younger generation.

The phenomenon of globalization has somewhat changed the role of States: citizens have become more and more involved, and the principle of subsidiarity has undoubtedly contributed to greater balance between the forces present within civil society; the citizen has become more a "partner" in the common effort.

This means, it seems to me, that the men and women of the 21st century will be called to a more developed sense of responsibility. First, their personal responsibility, in fostering a sense of duty

and honest labour: corruption, organized crime or passivity can never lead to a true and healthy democracy. But there must also be an equal sense of responsibility towards others: an attitude of concern for the poor, participation in structures of mutual assistance in the workplace and in the social sphere, respect for nature and the environment, all these are required if we are to have a world where people live together in a better way. Never again must there be separation between people! Never again must some be opposed to others! Everyone must live together, under God's watchful eyes!

This also supposes that we must renounce idols such as prosperity at any price, material wealth as the only value, science as the sole explanation of reality. It also supposes that the rule of law will be applied and respected by everyone and in all places, so that individual liberties can be effectively guaranteed and equal opportunity become a reality for all people. It also supposes that God will have his rightful place in people's lives: the first place.

In a world more than ever in search of meaning, Christians sense the call, as this century opens, to proclaim with greater fervour that Jesus is the Redeemer of mankind, and the Church senses the call to show herself to be the "sign and safeguard of the transcendence of the human person" (Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 76).

5. Such solidarity calls for certain precise commitments. Some of these are quite urgent:

- The sharing of technology and prosperity. In the absence of an attitude of understanding and readiness to help, it would be difficult to restrain the frustration felt by certain countries which see themselves condemned to founder in ever more serious precariousness and at the same time to have to compete with other countries. I myself have brought up on a number of occasions, for example, the issue of the debt of poor countries.
- Respect for human rights. The legitimate aspirations of the most defenceless persons, the claims of ethnic minorities, the sufferings of all those whose beliefs or culture are in one way or another held in contempt are not merely optional issues to be dealt with as circumstances, or political or economic interests, dictate. Not to ensure these rights means quite simply to flout the dignity of persons and to endanger global stability.
- Conflict prevention would avoid situations difficult to resolve and would spare much suffering. Appropriate international means are not lacking; they need only to be used, carefully distinguishing, without opposition or separation, between politics, law and morality.
- Lastly, calm dialogue between cultures and religions could favour a new way of thinking and living. Despite their diverse mentalities and beliefs, the men and women of this millennium, in recalling the errors of the past, must find new ways of living together and respecting one another. Quality education, science and information represent the best means for developing

in each of us respect for others, for their talents and beliefs, as well as a sense of universality worthy of man's spiritual vocation. This dialogue would also make it possible in the future to avoid arriving at an absurd situation: that of excluding or killing others in the name of God. This undoubtedly will be a decisive contribution to peace.

6. In recent years there has been much talk of a "new world order". The persevering action of far-sighted diplomats, and of multilateral diplomacy in particular, has resulted in a number of praiseworthy initiatives aimed at the building of an authentic "community of nations". At present, for example, the Middle East Peace Process is continuing; the Chinese people are speaking to one another; the two Koreas are in dialogue; certain African countries are attempting to arrange meetings between rival factions; the government and armed groups in Colombia are trying to remain in contact. All this demonstrates a real desire to build a world based on brotherhood, in order to create, defend and spread peace all around us. Regrettably, however, we must also acknowledge that the errors of the past are all too often being repeated: I am thinking of reactions based on group identity, of persecutions inflicted for religious reasons, of the frequent and at times rash recourse to war, of social inequalities, of the gap between the rich and the poor countries, of the exclusive trust in profit alone, to cite only some typical traits of the century just ended. At the beginning of the year 2000, what do we see?

Africa, shackled by ethnic conflicts which hold entire peoples hostage, impeding their economic and social progress and often condemning them to a situation of mere survival.

The Middle East, constantly poised between war and peace, when we know that only the rule of law and justice will make it possible for all the peoples of the region, without distinction, to live together and to be free of endemic dangers.

Asia, a continent of immense human and material resources, gathers into precarious balance peoples of venerable and economically highly developed cultures and others who are becoming increasingly impoverished. I recently visited this continent in order to consign the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, the fruit of a recent synodal assembly, which has now become a charter for all Catholics. I join the Synod Fathers in inviting once more all the Catholics of Asia and men and women of good will to unite their efforts in building a society more firmly based on solidarity.

America, an immense continent where one year ago I had the joy of promulgating the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, inviting the peoples of the continent to an ever-renewed personal and communal conversion, in respect for the dignity of the person and love for the outcast, for the sake of promoting a culture of life.

North America, where economic and political concerns are often considered paramount, is home to many poor people, despite its manifold riches.

Latin America, which, with a few exceptions, has seen encouraging advances towards democracy, remains dangerously crippled by alarming social inequalities, the drug trade, corruption and in some cases movements of armed struggle.

Europe, following the failure of the ideologies, is finally on the way towards unity; it is struggling to meet the two-fold challenge of reconciliation and the democratic integration of former enemies. Europe has not been spared terrible forms of violence, as the recent Balkan crisis and the conflicts of recent weeks in the Caucasus have shown. The Bishops of the continent recently met in synodal assembly; they acknowledged the signs of hope, growing openness between peoples, reconciliation between nations, more frequent cooperation and exchange, and called everyone to a greater European consciousness.

Faced with this troubled world, at once magnificent and unstable, I am reminded of a commitment made at the end of the terrible Second World War, which everyone wanted to be the last. I am speaking of the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, adopted in San Francisco on 26 June 1945: "We, the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm our faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations, large and small . . . have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims".

This solemn text and this solemn commitment have lost nothing of their force and their timeliness. In a world structured around sovereign but de facto unequal States, it is indispensable for stability, understanding and cooperation between peoples that international relations be increasingly imbued with and shaped by the rule of law. Surely what is lacking is not new texts or juridical instruments; it is quite simply the political will to apply without discrimination those already in existence.

7. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I speak to you as one who has himself been a fellow-traveller of several generations of the century just ended. I shared the harsh ordeals of my native people as the darkest hours experienced by Europe. Twenty-one years ago, when I became the Successor of the Apostle Peter, I felt myself charged with a universal fatherhood which embraces all the men and women of our time without exception. Today, in addressing you who represent practically all the peoples of the earth, I would like to share with each one something personal: at the opening of the doors of a new millennium, the Pope began to think that people might finally learn to draw lessons from the past. Indeed, I ask everyone, in God's name, to save humanity from further wars, to respect human life and the family, to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, to realize that we are all responsible for one another. It is God himself who asks this, and he never asks what is beyond our abilities. He himself gives us the strength to accomplish what he expects of us.

The words which Deuteronomy puts on the lips of God himself come to mind: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil; . . . therefore choose life, that you may live" (*Dt* 30:15-19).

Life takes shape in our daily choices. And political leaders, since they have the role of administering the "res publica", can by their personal choices and their programmes of action guide whole societies either towards life or towards death. For this reason believers, and the faithful of the Catholic Church in particular, consider it their duty to take an active part in the public life of the societies to which they belong. Their faith, their hope and their charity represent additional and irreplaceable energies to ensure that not only will there be unfailing concern for others, a sense of responsibility and the defence of fundamental rights, but also to ensure that there is a perception that our world and our personal and collective history are invested with a Presence. I therefore insist that believers be granted a place in public life because I am convinced that their faith and their witness can reassure our contemporaries, who are often anxious and disoriented, and can ensure that despite failures, violence and fear, neither evil nor death will have the last word.

8. The time has now come for our exchange of personal good wishes. I greet all of you most cordially and I ask you kindly to convey my best wishes to the leaders of the countries which you represent. The doors of the Great Jubilee have been opened for Christians and the doors of a new millennium for humanity as a whole. What is important now is to cross the threshold in order to make our journey. This is a journey on which God precedes us and in which he traces the path which will lead us towards himself. Nothing, no prejudice or ambition, should hold us back. A new history is beginning for us. The peoples whom you represent are going to write that history in their personal and collective life. It is a history in which today, like yesterday and like tomorrow, humanity has an appointment with God. And so to all I say: "Safe journey"!

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