



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS*

Thursday, 10 January 2002

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. The good wishes which your Dean, Ambassador Giovanni Galassi, has just offered me in your name are all the more touching in that they are also extended in the name of the governments and peoples which you represent.

I in my turn extend to you, your families and dear ones my heartfelt good wish that God will bless you and grant all peoples *a year of serenity, happiness and peace*.

Mr Ambassador, your thoughtful greeting has been accompanied by a penetrating analysis of the international scene during the past year. The horizon indeed appears dark, and many of those who have lived through the great movement towards freedom and the changes of the 90s are surprised to find themselves gripped today by fear of a future which has once again become uncertain.

But for those who have put their faith and hope in Jesus, born in Bethlehem to become one of us, the angelic message has rung out again in the stillness of Christmas night: "Be not afraid ... I bring you good news of great joy which will come to all the people, for today is born a Savior" (Lk 2:10-11). *The future is wide open, God is with us on our way!*

2. *The light of Christmas gives meaning to all human efforts* to make our earth more fraternal and friendly, to make it a good place to live, and to ensure that indifference, injustice and hatred will never have the last word. Here we could quote a long list of actions successfully concluded by governments, negotiators and volunteers who in recent times have put their know-how and their

dedication at the service of the cause of humanity.

Among reasons for satisfaction, one must surely mention the progressive unification of *Europe*, recently symbolized by the adoption of a single currency by twelve countries. This is a decisive step in the long history of this continent. But it is also important that the expansion of the European Union should continue to be a priority. I am likewise aware that the question has been raised about the expediency of a Constitution for the Union. In this regard, it is essential to make increasingly explicit the goals of the process of building up Europe and the values on which it must rest. Hence it is that, with some regret, I have noted that, no explicit mention was made of communities of religious believers among the partners who are to contribute to the reflection on the "Convention" instituted at the Laeken summit last month. The marginalization of religions, which have contributed and continue to contribute to the culture and humanism of which Europe is legitimately proud, strikes me as both an injustice and an error of perspective. To recognize an indisputable historical fact in no way means to disregard the modern demand for States to have an appropriate non-confessional character, and therefore Europe as well!

I am also pleased to mention the good news, so long awaited, of the beginning of a direct dialogue between the leaders of the two communities on the island of *Cyprus*. A legitimate parliament in *Kosovo* is another harbinger of a more democratic future in that region. Since last November, delegations of the People's Republic of *China* and the Republic of China have taken their seats in the World Trade Organization. May this positive development help prosper all the efforts which have been made on the difficult path of rapprochement! The conversations taking place between the parties in the conflict which has so long torn *Sri Lanka* apart undoubtedly must be encouraged. These certainly are significant advances on the path of pacification between individuals and peoples.

3. But likewise the light which has come from the stable in Bethlehem illuminates implacably *the ambiguities and setbacks in our undertakings*. At this year begins, we are tragically aware that humanity finds itself in a situation of violence, suffering and sin.

On Christmas night we were present in spirit at Bethlehem and were alas forced to note that the *Holy Land*, where the Redeemer was born, is still, through man's fault, a land of fire and blood. No one can remain indifferent to the injustice of which the Palestinian people have been victims for more than fifty years. No one can contest the right of the Israeli people to live in security. But neither can anyone forget the innocent victims who, on both sides, fall day after day under the blows of violence. Weapons and bloody attacks will never be the right means for making a political statement to the other side. Nor is the logic of the law of retaliation capable any longer of leading to paths of peace.

As I have already stated on many occasions, only respect for others and their legitimate aspirations, the application of international law, the evacuation of the occupied territories and an

internationally guaranteed special status for the most holy places in Jerusalem can bring about a beginning of pacification in that part of the world and break the hellish cycle of hatred and vengeance. And I express the hope that the international community will be enabled to fulfil, through peaceful and appropriate means, its irreplaceable role and be accepted by all the parties in the conflict. One against the other, neither Israelis nor Palestinians can win the war. But together they can win peace.

The legitimate fight against terrorism, of which the abhorrent attacks of last 11 September are the most appalling expression, has once again let the sound of arms be heard. Barbarous aggression and killings raise not only the question of legitimate defence but also issues such as the most effective means of eradicating terrorism, the search for the factors underlying such acts, and the measures to be taken to bring about a process of "healing" in order to overcome fear and to avoid evil being added to evil, violence to violence. It is appropriate therefore to encourage the new government installed in Kabul in its efforts to achieve the effective pacification of all *Afghanistan*. Finally I must mention the tensions which have once more set *India* and *Pakistan* at odds, in order earnestly to request the political leaders of these great nations to give absolute priority to dialogue and negotiation.

We also need to heed the question which comes to us from the depths of this abyss: that of *the place and the use made of religion* in the lives of people and societies. Here I wish to say once again, before the whole international community, that killing in the name of God is an act of blasphemy and a perversion of religion. This morning I wish to repeat what I wrote in my [Message for January 1](#): "It is a profanation of religion to declare oneself a terrorist in the name of God, to do violence to others in his name. Terrorist violence is a contradiction of faith in God, the Creator of man, who cares for man and loves him" (No. 7).

4. In the face of these outbreaks of irrational and unjustifiable violence, *the great danger is that other situations will go unnoticed* and leave whole peoples abandoned to their sad fate.

I am thinking of *Africa*, and the health emergencies and armed struggles which are decimating its peoples. Recently, during a debate in the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization it was observed that there were seventeen conflicts taking place on the African continent! In such a situation, the establishment of an "African Union" is in itself good news. This Organization should help to develop common principles capable of uniting all the member States, with a view to facing major challenges such as the prevention of conflicts, education and the fight against poverty.

And how can I fail to mention *Latin America*, which is always dear to me? In some countries of this great continent the persistence of social inequalities, drug trafficking, corruption and armed violence can endanger the foundations of democracy and discredit the political class. Most recently, the difficult situation in *Argentina* has given rise to public unrest which has painfully affected people's lives. This is yet another reminder that political and economic activity at the

national and international levels must always be inspired by the pursuit of the authentic good of individuals and peoples. With insistence I wish to encourage the people of Latin America, and of Argentina in particular, to hold on to hope amid the present difficulties, and not to lose sight of the fact that, given the great human and natural resources available, the present situation is not irreversible and can be overcome with everyone's help. If this is to happen, private or partisan interests must be set aside, and the interest of the nation must be promoted by every legitimate means, through a return to moral values, open and frank dialogue, and the renunciation of what is superfluous in order to help those who are in any way in need. In this spirit, it should be remembered that political activity is above all a noble, demanding and generous service to the community.

5. The troubled situation of this world of ours at the dawn of the third millennium has one advantage, if I may say so: it makes us squarely face our responsibilities. *Everyone is forced to ask the real questions: the truth about God and the truth about man.*

God is not at the beck and call of one individual or one people, and no human venture can claim to monopolize him. The children of Abraham know that God cannot be commandeered by anyone: God is to be received. Standing before the crib, Christians can better realize that Jesus himself did not impose himself, and he rejected the use of power as a means of promoting his kingdom!

The truth about man, who is a creature. Man is true to himself only when he sees himself as coming from God, in an attitude of poverty. He is conscious of his dignity only when he acknowledges in himself and in others the mark of God who created him in his own image. For this reason I chose to put the subject of forgiveness at the heart of my traditional [Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace on 1 January 2002](#), for I am convinced that: "the help that religions can give to peace and against terrorism consists precisely in their teaching forgiveness, for those who forgive and seek forgiveness know that there is a higher Truth, and that by accepting that Truth they can transcend themselves" (No. 13).

This truth about God and man is a gift which Christians offer to all people, especially to their brothers and sisters who are followers of authentic Islam, a religion of peace and love of neighbour.

6. To you, Ladies and Gentlemen, I confide these reflections which rise from my prayer as well as from the things I hear from those who visit me. I ask you to pass them on to your governments. Let us not be overwhelmed by the distress of the present time. *Let us instead open our hearts and minds to the great challenges lying before us:*

– the defence of the sacredness of human life in all circumstances, especially in relation to the challenges posed by genetic manipulation;

- the promotion of the family, the basic unit of society;
- the elimination of poverty, through efforts to promote development, the reduction of debt and the opening up of international trade;
- respect for human rights in all situations, with especial concern for the most vulnerable: children, women and refugees;
- disarmament, the reduction of arms sales to poor countries, and the consolidation of peace after the end of conflicts;
- the fight against the major diseases, and access by the poor to basic care and medicines;
- the protection of the environment and the prevention of natural disasters;
- the rigorous application of international law and conventions.

Of course, many other demands could also be mentioned. But if these priorities became the central concerns of political leaders; if people of good made them part of their daily endeavours; if religious believers included them in their teaching, the world would be a radically different place.

7. These are the thoughts which I wanted to share with you. *Darkness can only be scattered by light. Hatred can only be conquered by love.* My most fervent wish, which I entrust to God in prayer and which, I believe, will be shared by all those taking part in the forthcoming meeting in Assisi, is that we should all carry in our unarmed hands the light of a love which nothing can discourage. May God grant that it be so, for the happiness of all!

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