



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS*

Saturday, 9 January 1971

Your Excellencies, dear friends,

We are happy to be among you in the beginning of this new year for the traditional ceremony of the exchange of good wishes. With all our heart we thank your esteemed spokesman, the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, for his kind expressions in our regard. To all, both to yourselves and to your families, we express our best wishes. May the Lord give you, day after day and month after month, those joys in your families and profession for which you can rightly hope.

This annual encounter affords us the occasion to reflect with you on the significance of your presence here. Some might have thought that the disappearance of the temporal power a century ago could have automatically brought about the disappearance of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See. This is not the case. The diplomatic missions to the Vatican have not ceased to increase, thus emphasizing that it was a question far less of relations with a State than with the Holy See as the centre of the Catholic religion. Besides, everyone is aware that the existence of the unpretentious State of Vatican City is nothing more than the minimum support which is needed, as Our great predecessor Pope Pius XI said, for the exercise of a spiritual authority whose perfect independence is thus recognized and guaranteed internationally in the order that is its own. Furthermore, the Council has laid down clearly, in its pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the relationships between Church and State.

It is thus obvious to all that relations between States and the Holy See, far from contradicting the latter's spiritual mission, have on the contrary the aim of favouring and facilitating the carrying out of that mission. The special nature of your presence – its uniqueness, we might say – is to be found in the fact that the existence of a Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See involves no links of a temporal order, either on the part of the Holy See with regard to States, or on the part of

States with regard to the Holy See it involves no material obligations or advantages, either economic, commercial, military or the like.

What is involved is a dialogue, a permanent meeting of qualified representatives as our venerated predecessor Pope Pius XII so rightly noted when he said that the role of diplomacy constitutes a permanent meeting of the great family of nations (*Address to the Diplomatic Corps on 25 February 1946*, in *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, vol. VII, p 403). It is a high-level meeting: through these diplomatic relations the Church listens to people with official responsibility and is heard by them in the same way in the most suitable and authentic terms.

Apart from the problems concerning the situation of the Church in the various States and the aims of her special mission and her service to the different peoples, the themes of this dialogue are nothing other than the most important questions and the major interests of mankind. Examples are the rights of religious liberty, which are the rights of God and of conscience, the rights of man. awareness of International order and progress, justice, and especially peace.

It must be said that the profound reasons for the Holy See's interventions sometimes escape the notice of superficial observers, because they spring from spiritual and more motives and because they are quite distinct from any activity of a temporal order. That is why such interventions perplex those who seek to interpret them after the fashion of politics or to judge them simply by the yardstick of mere national interest.

As a voice of the human conscience illumined by the Gospel, the Holy See cannot support her interventions with material force or with the habitual means of persuasion. Without any desire other than to recall constantly the exigencies of the common good, respect for the human person, and the promotion of the highest spiritual values her action seeks to be the faithful expression of the mission of the Church in the world.

The Holy See is certainly not unaware that the difficulties along this path are numerous and that progress cannot be achieved except by a progressive transformation of hearts and minds. And if her exterior action is more obvious, she still does not forget the interior and daily work of the entire Church, of each Christian, and of each Christian community in ceaseless dialogue with the world. Is not the Holy See – one scarcely needs to repeat it – on the international juridical level the expression of a living spiritual community whose members are all part and parcel of the very fabric of the nations? And Christians, far from considering themselves as apart from the world, are no less than others subject to human frailty. This is so whether they be governors or governed, and notwithstanding the higher principles which they proclaim in the name of their divine founder and which they store to put into practice. For its part, the Holy See, on its own level is in contact with States the means may differ, but the mission is the same. We thank you, Your Excellencies and dear friends, for the understanding and care with which you are the official witnesses of this fact to your respective governments; your work is done in a shared solicitude for disinterested service

and active collaboration.

Thus we believe that the exercise of diplomacy, which has its own, particular difficulties, could not be – on both sides – more foreign to passions and temporal interests, or more committed to the moral good of peoples and the sincere and discreet witnessing to the Gospel. In our view the years which your service in diplomacy cause you to spend at the Holy See constitute for you a period of serene activity and of deep and intense meditation, meditation upon man, civilization, history, the common life shared in friendship by the nations and upon the true principles of civilization and peace. Here it is the law of the peoples which governs the whole mass of treaties, State policies, economic interests and prestige. Here there exists a school of humanity, in which the Church is both pupil and teacher (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 11, para 3; 40. ad finem), and in which the Diplomatic Corps can catch a glimpse of what the world would be like were it governed by the love which the Church aspires to make its basic principle.

The Church is a society of a quite unique kind, and the diplomat is in a position to observe it at close quarters, at its centre – certainly with indulgence for its human shortcomings, but with appreciation of the principles which inspire it. Constantly, it seems to us, it reminds the diplomat of the ideal principles call them paradoxical if you will – which ought to inspire the ideal of mankind's politics and guide it towards continual progress in culture, human relations, unity and worldwide peace. Since diplomacy strives to favour relationships based upon law, solidarity and peace, as against those based upon force and pure self-interest, it can find in the expression here offered for its meditation an initiation for its higher and essential form.

We, therefore, on our part shall strive to strengthen our awareness of this situation, which puts us in direct contact with a Diplomatic Corps such as you constitute: we shall remind ourselves that here we have the world, the peoples, the States in an attitude of positive dialogue. We shall have no need to resort to the courtly language of times gone by in order to express our praise and our vindication of this human contact afforded us by the Diplomatic Corps. This contact is beyond compare for its representative value, it is extremely stimulating for the search for relations marked by truth, justice, respect and confidence; it is ever directed towards the highest principles of human brotherhood.

We shall also feel the need – indeed the duty – to defend your mission against the superficial judgments of those who see in it no more than traditional outward forms, who see in it nothing but a mere game of duplicity, which has now happily become out-of-date.

We shall further make it our duty, with the moral, authority, of our voice – a voice which is unsupported by physical sanctions certainly, but which is explicit – to protect the exercise of your high mission from shameful criminal attacks, such as have repeatedly, occurred recently, against the integrity and immunity of persons who are invested with diplomatic character. For the honour of modern civilization and for the sake, of its future such outrages should never happen again. The

norms approved by the Havana Convention of 20 February 1928 (cf. League of Nations; Recueil des traités et des engagements internationaux enregistrés par le Secrétariat de la Société des Nations, vol. LXXXVI, 1929, No. 1950, pp. 111-382, articles 1, 2 and 5), and the decisions taken by the Vienna Conventions, of 18 April 1961 and 14 April 1963 (cf. United Nations, Recueil des traités, vols. 500 and 596) should still carry the force of law; not only for Governments but also the conscience of civilized man. Convinced as we are of our duty to plead the cause of one of the prerogatives, which is among the most sacred, the most ancient, the most universally recognized and the most essential for the ordered conduct of international relations, we deeply deplore the outrages recently committed against the personal inviolability of diplomatic person. We deplore them all the more for the fact that the diplomats involved and their service were absolutely unconnected with the disputes of which their persons – through violent ambushes carried out by partisans – became the victims and subsequently the objects of shameful blackmail.

Let us now turn our minds to higher things. Let us raise our thoughts, Gentlemen, to the wise human objectives of your mission. For our part we express to all of you our gratitude for the noble manner in which you exercise the functions entrusted to each one of you. At the same time we extend our best wishes for your worthy selves and for the countries which you represent. Together with our good wish for a happy New Year and for peace and justice; we impart to you from our heart our Apostolic Blessing.

*ORa n.3 p.4, 5.