



## The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE  
FOR THE TRADITIONAL EXCHANGE OF NEW YEAR GREETINGS\*Monday, 9 January 2006**

*Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

With joy I welcome you all to this traditional meeting between the Pope and the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See. After our celebration of the great Christian feasts of Christmas and Epiphany, the Church continues to draw life from the joy that they bring: that joy is great, because it arises from the presence of Emmanuel - God with us - but it is also quiet, since it is experienced within the domestic setting of the Holy Family, whose simple and exemplary story the Church relives intimately at this time. Yet it is also a joy that needs to be communicated, because true joy cannot be isolated without becoming attenuated and stifled. So to all of you, Ambassadors, and to the peoples and Governments that you worthily represent, to your beloved families and to your colleagues, I wish Christian joy. May it be the joy of universal brotherhood brought by Christ, a joy that is rich in truthful values and is openly and generously shared; may it remain with you and grow every day of the year that has just begun.

Your Dean, Excellencies, has conveyed the greetings and good wishes of the Diplomatic Corps, finely expressing your sentiments. To him and to you I offer thanks. He also mentioned some of the many grave problems that afflict today's world. They are of concern to you as also to the Holy See and the Catholic Church throughout the world, which is in solidarity with every form of suffering, with every hope and with every effort that accompanies human history. Hence we feel united as in a common mission, which confronts us with ever new and formidable challenges. Yet we address them with confidence, eager to support one another - each according to his proper responsibility - on our path towards great common objectives.

I spoke of "our common mission". And what is this, if not the mission of peace? The Church's task is none other than to spread the message of Christ, who came, as Saint Paul writes in the Letter to the Ephesians, to proclaim peace to those who are far away and to those who are near (cf. 2:17). And you, esteemed Diplomatic Representatives of your peoples, according to your statutes

(*Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations*) you have this among your noble goals: to promote friendly international relations. On this foundation, true peace can develop.

Peace, alas, is hindered or damaged or threatened in many parts of the world. What is the way that leads to peace? In the [Message that I delivered for the celebration of this year's World Day of Peace](#), I said: "wherever and whenever men and women are enlightened by the splendour of truth, they naturally set out on the path of peace" (no. 3). *In truth, peace.*

In today's world, alongside appalling scenes of military conflict, open or latent, or only apparently resolved, one can observe, thank God, a courageous and tenacious effort on the part of many people and institutions in support of peace. Reflecting upon this situation, I would like to offer some thoughts by way of fraternal encouragement, which I will set out in a few simple points.

The first: *commitment to truth is the soul of justice.* Those who are committed to truth cannot fail to reject the law of might, which is based on a lie and has so frequently marked human history, nationally and internationally, with tragedy. The lie often parades itself as truth, but in reality it is always selective and tendentious, selfishly designed to manipulate people, and finally subject them. Political systems of the past, but not only the past, offer a bitter illustration of this. Set against this, there is truth and truthfulness, which lead to encounter with the other, to recognition and understanding: through the splendour which distinguishes it - the *splendor veritatis* - truth cannot fail to spread; and the love of truth is intrinsically directed towards just and impartial understanding and rapprochement, whatever difficulties there may be.

Your experience as diplomats can only confirm that, in international relations too, by seeking the truth one can identify the most subtle nuances of diversity, and the demands to which they give rise, and therefore also the limits to be respected and not overstepped, in protecting every legitimate interest. This search for truth leads you at the same time to assert vigorously what there is in common, pertaining to the very nature of persons, of all peoples and cultures, and this must be equally respected. And when these aspects of diversity and equality - distinct but complementary - are known and recognized, then problems can be resolved and disagreements settled according to justice, and profound and lasting understandings are possible. On the other hand, when one of them is misinterpreted or not given its due importance, it is then that misunderstanding arises, together with conflict, and the temptation to use overpowering violence.

There seems to me to be an almost paradigmatic illustration of these considerations at that nerve point of the world scene, which is the Holy Land. There, the State of Israel has to be able to exist peacefully in conformity with the norms of international law; there, equally, the Palestinian people has to be able to develop serenely its own democratic institutions for a free and prosperous future.

The same considerations take on a wider application in today's global context, in which attention has rightly been drawn to the danger of a clash of civilizations. The danger is made more acute by

organized terrorism, which has already spread over the whole planet. Its causes are many and complex, not least those to do with political ideology, combined with aberrant religious ideas. Terrorism does not hesitate to strike defenceless people, without discrimination, or to impose inhuman blackmail, causing panic among entire populations, in order to force political leaders to support the designs of the terrorists. No situation can justify such criminal activity, which covers the perpetrators with infamy, and it is all the more deplorable when it hides behind religion, thereby bringing the pure truth of God down to the level of the terrorists' own blindness and moral perversion.

The commitment to truth on the part of Diplomatic missions, at both bilateral and multilateral level, can offer an essential contribution towards reconciling the undeniable differences between peoples from different parts of the world and their cultures, not only in a tolerant coexistence, but according to a higher and richer design of humanity. In past centuries, cultural exchanges between Judaism and Hellenism, between the Roman world, the Germanic world and the Slav world, and also between the Arabic world and the European world, have enriched culture and have favoured sciences and civilizations. So it should be again today, and to an even greater extent, since the possibilities of exchange and mutual understanding are much more favourable. To this end, what is needed above all today is the removal of everything that impedes access to information, through the press and through modern information technology, and in addition, an increase in exchanges between scholars and students from the humanities faculties of universities in different cultural regions.

The second point which I would like to make is this: *commitment to truth establishes and strengthens the right to freedom*. Man's unique grandeur is ultimately based on his capacity to know the truth. And human beings desire to know the truth. Yet truth can only be attained in freedom. This is the case with all truth, as is clear from the history of science; but it is eminently the case with those truths in which man himself, man as such, is at stake, the truths of the spirit, the truths about good and evil, about the great goals and horizons of life, about our relationship with God. These truths cannot be attained without profound consequences for the way we live our lives. And once freely appropriated, they demand in turn an ample sphere of freedom if they are to be lived out in a way befitting every dimension of human life.

This is where the activity of every State, and diplomatic activity between States, comes naturally into play. In the development of international law today, it is becoming increasingly clear that no Government can feel free to neglect its duty to ensure suitable conditions of freedom for its own citizens without thereby damaging its credibility to speak out on international problems. And rightly so: for in safeguarding the rights belonging to the person as such, rights which are internationally guaranteed, one must naturally give primary importance to ensuring the rights of freedom within individual States, in public and private life, in economic and political relations, and in the cultural and religious spheres.

In this regard, you yourselves are well aware that by its very nature the Holy See's diplomatic activity is concerned with promoting, among other forms of freedom, the aspect of freedom of religion. Unfortunately, in some States, even among those who can boast centuries-old cultural traditions, freedom of religion, far from being guaranteed, is seriously violated, especially where minorities are concerned. Here I would simply recall what has been laid down with great clarity in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Fundamental human rights are the same on every latitude; and among them, pride of place must be given to the right to freedom of religion, since it involves the most important of human relationships: our relationship with God. To all those responsible for the life of Nations I wish to state: if you do not fear truth, you need not fear freedom! The Holy See, in calling for true freedom for the Catholic Church everywhere, also calls for that freedom for everyone.

I come now to a third point: *commitment to truth opens the way to forgiveness and reconciliation*. This necessary link between peace and the commitment to truth has given rise to an objection: differing convictions about the truth cause tensions, misunderstandings, disputes, and these are all the more serious the deeper the convictions underlying them. In the course of history these differences have caused violent clashes, social and political conflicts, and even wars of religion. This is undeniably true, but in every case it was the result of a series of concomitant causes which had little or nothing to do with truth or religion, and always, for that matter, because means were employed which were incompatible with sincere commitment to truth or with the respect for freedom demanded by truth. Where the Catholic Church herself is concerned, in so far as serious mistakes were made in the past by some of her members and by her institutions, she condemns those mistakes and she has not hesitated to ask for forgiveness. This is required by the commitment to truth.

Asking for forgiveness, and granting forgiveness, which is likewise an obligation – since everyone is included in the Lord's admonition: *let him or her who is without sin cast the first stone!* (cf. *Jn 8:7*) – are indispensable elements for peace. In this way our memory is purified, our hearts are made serene, and our gaze is clearly fixed on what the truth demands if we are to cultivate thoughts of peace. Here I would recall the illuminating words of John Paul II: "There can be no peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness" (*Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace*). I repeat these words, humbly and with deep love, to the leaders of nations, especially those where the physical and moral wounds of conflicts are most painful, and the need for peace most urgent. One thinks immediately of the birthplace of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, who had a message of peace and forgiveness for all; one thinks of Lebanon, whose people must rediscover, with the support of international solidarity, their historic vocation to promote sincere and fruitful cooperation between different faith communities; and of the whole Middle East, especially Iraq, the cradle of great civilizations, which in these past years has suffered daily from violent acts of terrorism. One thinks of Africa, particularly the countries of the Great Lakes region, still affected by the tragic consequences of the fratricidal wars of recent years; of the defenceless people of Darfur, subjected to deplorable violence, with dangerous international repercussions; and of so many

other countries throughout the world which are the theatre of violent conflict.

Surely one of the great goals of diplomacy must be that of leading all parties in conflict to understand that, if they are committed to truth, they must acknowledge errors – and not merely the errors of others – nor can they refuse to open themselves to forgiveness, both requested and granted. Commitment to truth – which is certainly close to their hearts – summons them, through forgiveness, to peace. Bloodshed does not cry out for revenge but begs for respect for life, for peace! May the *Peacebuilding Commission* recently established by the United Nations Organization respond effectively to this basic demand of mankind, with the willing cooperation of all concerned.

And now, Your Excellencies, I would like to make a final point: *commitment to peace opens up new hopes*. This is, in some sense, the logical conclusion of everything that I have been saying. Man is capable of knowing the truth! He has this capacity with regard to the great problems of being and acting: individually and as a member of society, whether of a single nation or of humanity as a whole. The peace, to which he can and must be committed, is not merely the silence of arms; it is, much more, a peace which can encourage new energies within international relations which in turn become a means of maintaining peace. But this will be the case only if they correspond to the truth about man and his dignity. Consequently one cannot speak of peace in situations where human beings are lacking even the basic necessities for living with dignity. Here my thoughts turn to the limitless multitudes who are suffering from starvation. They cannot be said to be living in peace, even though they are not in a state of war: indeed they are defenceless victims of war. Immediately there come to mind distressing images of huge camps throughout the world of displaced persons and refugees, who are living in makeshift conditions in order to escape a worse fate, yet are still in dire need. Are these human beings not our brothers and sisters? Do their children not come into the world with the same legitimate expectations of happiness as other children? One thinks also of all those who are driven by unworthy living conditions to emigrate far from home and family in the hope of a more humane life. Nor can we overlook the scourge of human trafficking, which remains a disgrace in our time.

Faced with these “humanitarian emergencies” and other human tragedies, many people of good will, along with different international institutions and non-governmental organizations, have in fact responded. But a greater effort is needed from the entire diplomatic community in order to determine in truth, and to overcome with courage and generosity, the obstacles still standing in the way of effective, humane solutions. And truth demands that none of the prosperous States renounce its own responsibility and duty to provide help through drawing more generously upon its own resources. On the basis of available statistical data, it can be said that less than half of the immense sums spent worldwide on armaments would be more than sufficient to liberate the immense masses of the poor from destitution. This challenges humanity’s conscience. To peoples living below the poverty line, more as a result of situations to do with international political, commercial and cultural relations than as a result of circumstances beyond anyone’s control, our

common commitment to truth can and must give new hope.

Your Excellencies!

In the Birth of Christ, the Church sees the Psalmist's prophecy fulfilled: "*mercy and faithfulness will meet; justice and peace will embrace; truth will spring up from the earth and justice will look down from heaven*" (Ps 85:10-11). In his commentary on these inspired words, the great Church Father Augustine, expressing the faith of the whole Church, exclaimed: "Truth has indeed sprung up from the earth: Christ, who said of himself: 'I am the Truth', has been born of the Virgin" (*Sermo* 185).

The Church always draws life from this truth, but at this stage in the liturgical year she finds it a source of special light and joy. And in the light of this truth, may these words of mine stand for you, who represent most of the world's nations, as an expression of conviction and hope: *in truth, peace!*

In this spirit, I offer to all of you my heartfelt best wishes for a happy New Year!

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