



# The Holy See

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MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS  
**POPE JOHN PAUL II**  
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE  
**DAY OF PEACE**

**1 JANUARY 1981 TO SERVE PEACE, RESPECT FREEDOM** *To all of you who are building peace,  
To all of you who are the leaders of the nations,  
To you, brothers and sisters, citizens of the world,  
To you young people, who dare to dream of a better world,*

It is to all of you, men and women of good will, that I address myself today, in order to invite you, on the occasion of the Fourteenth World Day of Peace (1 January 1981), to think about the state of the world and about the great cause of peace. I do this from a powerful conviction: that peace is possible, but that it is also something that has to be continually won, a good thing that has to be attained through ever renewed efforts. Each generation feels in a new way the permanent need for peace in the face of the daily problems of life. Yes, it is every day that the ideal of peace has to be made into a concrete reality by each one of us .

*To serve peace, respect freedom*

1. In presenting to you today the theme of freedom as the subject of your thoughts, I am following the line of Pope John XXIII in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, when he put forward freedom as one of the "four pillars that support the house of peace". Freedom responds to a deep and widespread aspiration of the modern world, and this is shown for example by the frequency with which the term "freedom " is used, even though not always in the same sense, by believers and non-believers, scientists and economists, those who live in democratic societies and those who live under totalitarian regimes. Each one gives the term a special nuance, and even a profoundly different meaning. As we seek to develop our service of peace, we must therefore understand clearly the real nature of this true freedom that is at one and the same time the root of peace and its fruit.

*Conditions that call for a fresh examination today*

2. Peace must be realized in truth; it must be built upon justice; it must be animated by love; it must be brought to being in freedom (cf . *Pacem in Terris*). Without a deep and universal respect for freedom, peace will elude man. We have only to look around us to be convinced of this . For

the spectacle that meets our eyes at the beginning of the Eighties seems hardly reassuring, although large numbers of men and women, whether ordinary citizens or leaders of society, are very worried about peace, often to the point of desperation. Their aspirations do not find realization in true peace, because of the absence of freedom, or the violation of freedom, or again because of the ambiguous or mistaken way in which freedom is exercised.

For what can be the freedom of nations, whose existence, aspirations and reactions are conditioned by fear instead of mutual trust, by oppression instead of the free pursuit of their common good? Freedom is wounded when the relationships between peoples are based not upon respect for the equal dignity of each but upon the right of the most powerful, upon the attitude of dominant blocs and upon military or political imperialism. The freedom of nations is wounded when small nations are forced to align themselves with large ones, in order to ensure their right to independent existence or to survival. Freedom is wounded when dialogue between equal partners is no longer possible, by reason of economic or financial domination exercised by privileged and powerful nations.

And within a nation, on the political level, does peace have a real chance when the free sharing in collective decisions or the free enjoyment of individual liberties is not guaranteed? There is no true freedom - which is the foundation of peace - when all powers are concentrated in the hands of a single social class, a single race or a single group, or when the common good is merged with the interests of a single party that is identified with the State. There is no true freedom when the freedoms of individuals are absorbed by a collective group "denying all transcendence to man and his personal and collective history" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 26). True freedom is also absent when various forms of anarchy, set up as a theory, lead to the systematic denial or challenging of all authority, leading in extreme cases to political terrorism or to blind acts of violence, whether spontaneous or organized. Nor is there any true freedom when internal security is set up as the single and supreme norm regulating relationships between authority and the citizens, as if it were the only means - or the main one - of maintaining peace. In this context, one cannot ignore the problem of systematic or selective repression - accompanied by assassination and torture, cases of disappearance or banishment - suffered by so many people, including bishops, priests, religious and Christian lay people working in the service of their neighbour.

3. On the social level, it is hard to describe as truly free those men and women who lack the guarantee of honest and adequate employment, or all those people in country villages who are still the victims of regrettable servitude, of ten the heritage of a dependent past or colonial mentality. Nor is there enough freedom for those who, as the result of uncontrolled industrial, urban or bureaucratic development, find themselves caught up in a gigantic machine, in a tangle of unwanted or unmanageable procedures that leave no room for a social development worthy of man. Freedom is also reduced - and more than appears at first sight - in a society that lets itself be guided by the dogma of indefinite material growth, by the pursuit of wealth or by the arms race. The economic crisis now affecting all societies, if it is not faced with principles of another order, could easily lead to the adoption of measures that would reduce still further the measure of freedom that peace needs if it is to blossom and flourish.

At the level of the mind, freedom can also suffer from manipulation of various kinds. This is the case when the social communications media misuse their power and disregard strict objectivity. It is also the case when

psychological procedures are used without regard for the dignity of the person. Moreover, freedom will always remain very incomplete, or at least hard to exercise, in the case of men, women and children for whom illiteracy constitutes a kind of daily slavery in a world that presupposes education.

At the beginning of 1981, which has been declared by the United Nations the Year of the Disabled, it is also fitting to include in this picture those of our brothers and sisters who have suffered damage to their physical or mental completeness. Is our society sufficiently aware of its duty to set in motion all means that will enable them to share more freely in life with others, to have access to the human advancement that corresponds to their rights as human beings and to their abilities, in accordance with their dignity?

*Encouraging efforts already being made  
and praiseworthy accomplishments*

4. However, side by side with these typical examples in which more or less serious conditioning obstructs the proper exercise of freedom and could be changed, there is also another side to the picture of the modern world seeking peace in freedom, and it is a positive one. It is the image of a multitude of men and women who believe in this ideal, who are committed to placing freedom at the service of peace, to respecting it, to promoting it, to upholding and defending it, and who are ready to make the efforts and even sacrifices that this commitment demands. I am thinking of all the Heads of State, Heads of Government, politicians, international officials and civil leaders at all levels who are trying to make available to everyone the freedoms that have been solemnly proclaimed. My thoughts also go to those who know that freedom cannot be divided, and who as a result seek out, with full objectivity, in situations as they change, fresh attacks on freedom in the sphere of personal life, family life, cultural life, social and economic development and political life. I am thinking of men and women throughout the world, fired by a solidarity that knows no frontiers, for whom it is impossible, in a civilization that has become worldwide, to isolate their own freedom from the freedom that their brothers and sisters in other continents are struggling to gain and safeguard. I am thinking especially of the young people who believe that one only becomes really free by striving to obtain for others that same freedom.

*Freedom is rooted in man*

5. Freedom in its essence is within man, is connatural to the human person and is the distinctive sign of man's nature. The freedom of the individual finds its basis in man's transcendent dignity: a dignity given to him by God, his Creator, and which directs him towards God. Because he has been created in God's image (cf. *Gen 1:27*), man is inseparable from freedom, that freedom which no external force or constraint can ever take away, and which constitutes his fundamental right, both as an individual and as a member of society. Man is free because he possesses the faculty of self-determination with regard to what is true and what is good. He is free because he possesses the faculty of choice, "as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by blind impulses in himself or by mere external constraint" (Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 17). To be free is to be able to choose and to want to choose; it is to live according to one's conscience.

*Promoting free individuals in a free society*

6. Man must therefore be able to make his choices in accordance with values to which he gives his support; this is the way in which he will show his responsibility, and it is up to society to favour this freedom, while taking into account the common good.

The first and the most fundamental of these values is always man's relationship to God as expressed in his religious convictions. Religious freedom thus becomes the basis of the other freedoms. On the eve of the meeting in Madrid on European security and cooperation, I had the occasion to repeat what I have not ceased to state since the beginning of my ministry: "Freedom of conscience and religion... is... a primary and inalienable right of the person; far more, to the extent that it touches upon the most intimate sphere of the spirit, one can even say that it underlies the *raison d'être*, intimately anchored in each person, of the other freedoms " (Religious freedom and the final Document of Helsinki, 5: cf . *L'Osservatore Romano*, 15 November 1980).

The various authorities in society must make possible the exercise of true freedom in all its manifestations. They must endeavour to guarantee each individual's possibility of realizing his or her human potential to the full. They must allow each person a juridically protected domain of independence, so that every human being can live, individually and collectively, in accordance with the demands of his or her conscience. Moreover, this freedom is called for in the major international pacts and other documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Conventions on the same subject, as also in the vast majority of national Constitutions. This is only right, since the State, as the recipient of a mandate given by its citizens, must not only recognize the basic freedoms of individuals but also protect and foster them. The State will play this positive role by respecting the rule of law and seeking the common good in accordance with the demands of the moral law. Similarly, the freely constituted intermediate groups will make their own contribution to safeguarding and advancing these freedoms. This noble task concerns all living forces in society.

7. But freedom is not merely a right that one claims for oneself. It is also a duty that one undertakes with regard to others. If it is really to serve peace, the freedom of each human individual and each community must respect the freedoms and rights of other individuals and communities. This respect sets a limit to freedom, but it also gives it its logic and its dignity, since we are by nature social beings.

Some kinds of "freedom" do not really deserve the name, and we must take care to defend true freedom against various counterfeits. For example, the consumer society - that excess of goods not needed by man - can in a way constitute an abuse of freedom, when the more and more insatiable pursuit of goods is not subjected to the law of justice and of social love. Such consumerism involves a limitation of the freedom of others; and from the viewpoint of international solidarity it even affects whole societies which are unable to obtain the minimum of goods required for their essential needs. The existence of areas of absolute poverty in the world and the existence of hunger and malnutrition pose a serious question to the countries that have developed freely, without regard for those countries lacking even the minimum and perhaps at times at their expense. It could even be said that within the

rich countries the uncontrolled pursuit of material goods and all kinds of services offers only an apparent increase of freedom to those who benefit from them, since it sets up as a basic human value the possession of things, instead of aiming at a certain material prosperity as the condition and means for the full development of the talents of the individual in collaboration with and in harmony with his fellowmen .

Likewise, a society built on a purely materialistic basis denies people their freedom when it submits individual freedoms to economic domination, when it represses man's spiritual creativity in the name of a false ideological harmony, when it denies people the exercise of their right of association, when in practice it reduces to nothing the power to participate in public affairs or acts in such a way that in this field individualism and civic and social non-participation become the general attitude.

Finally, true freedom is not advanced in the permissive society, which confuses freedom with licence to do anything whatever and which in the name of freedom proclaims a kind of general amorality. It is a caricature of freedom to claim that people are free to organize their lives with no reference to moral values, and to say that society does not have to ensure the protection and advancement of ethical values. Such an attitude is destructive of freedom and peace. There are many examples of this mistaken idea of freedom, such as the elimination of human life by legalized or generally accepted abortion.

*Promoting free peoples in a free world*

8. Respect for the freedom of peoples and nations is an integral part of peace. Wars continue to break out and destruction has fallen upon peoples and whole cultures because the sovereignty of a people or a nation was not respected. Every continent has seen and suffered from fratricidal wars and struggles caused by one nation's attempts to limit another's autonomy. One can even wonder if war may not become - or remain - a normal fact of our civilization, with "limited" armed conflicts going on for long periods without exciting public concern, or with a succession of civil wars. The direct causes are many and complex: territorial expansionism, ideological imperialism for the triumph of which weapons of total annihilation are stockpiled, economic exploitation deliberately perpetuated, obsession with territorial security, ethnic differences exploited by arms dealers, and many other causes as well. Whatever their reason, these wars contain elements of injustice, contempt or hatred, and attacks on freedom. I stressed this when speaking last year to the General Assembly of the United Nations: "The spirit of war, in its basic primordial meaning, springs up and grows to maturity where the inalienable rights of man are violated. This is a new and deeply relevant vision of the cause of peace, one that goes deeper and is more radical. It is a vision that sees the genesis, and in a sense the substance, of war in the more complex forms emanating from injustice viewed in all its various aspects: this injustice first attacks human rights and thereby destroys the organic unity of the social order and it then affects the whole system of international relations" (11).

9. Without a willingness to respect the freedom of every people, nation and culture, and without a worldwide consensus on this subject, it will be difficult to create the conditions for peace. But we must have the courage to believe they are possible. This presupposes a conscious public commitment on the part of each nation and its government to renounce claims and designs injurious to other nations. In other words, it presupposes a refusal to accept any doctrine of national or cultural supremacy. There must also be a willingness to respect the internal processes of other nations, to recognize their personality within the human family, and therefore to be ready to question and correct any policy that would in fact be an interference or an exploitation in the economic, social or cultural spheres. In this context I would plead for a greater effort by the community of nations to aid young or developing nations to attain true control of their resources and self-sufficiency in food and the essential needs of life. I beg the rich countries to direct their aid with the primary aim of actively eliminating absolute poverty.

The preparation of juridical documents has its place in improving relations between nations. In order that freedom may be respected, it is also necessary to contribute to the progressive codification of the applications that flow from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In this matter of respecting the identity of each people, I would like to include particularly the right to see its religious traditions respected both internally and by other nations, and the right to participate in free exchanges in the religious, cultural, scientific and educational spheres.

#### *A climate of trust and responsibility*

10. The best guarantee of freedom and its real attainment depends upon the responsibility of individuals and peoples, upon the concrete efforts of each person at his own level, in his immediate environment, nationally and internationally. For freedom is not something that is given. It is something to be constantly won. It goes hand in hand with the sense of responsibility that everyone must have. One does not make people free without at the same time making them more aware of the demands of the common good and making them more responsible.

For this purpose, a climate of mutual trust must be established and strengthened. Without it freedom cannot develop. Everyone can see that this is an indispensable condition for true peace and the primary expression thereof. But, like freedom and peace, this trust is not something that is given: it is something that has to be gained, something that has to be deserved. When an individual does not accept his responsibility for the common good, when a nation does not feel that it has a share of responsibility for the destiny of the world, trust is jeopardized. This is even more so if one uses others for one's own selfish purposes, or simply indulges in manoeuvres aimed at making one's own interests prevail over the legitimate interests of others. Only trust merited by concrete action in favour of the common good will make possible, between individuals and nations, the respect for freedom which is a service to peace.

#### *The freedom of the children of God*

11. Let me in conclusion address more especially those who are united with me in belief in Christ. Man cannot be genuinely free or foster true freedom unless he recognizes and lives the transcendence of his being over the world and his relationship with God; for freedom is always the freedom of man made in the image of his Creator. The Christian finds in the Gospel support for this conviction and a deeper understanding of it. Christ, the Redeemer of man, makes us free. The Apostle John records the words: "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (*Jn* 8: 36). And the Apostle Paul adds: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (*2 Cor* 3: 17). To be set free from injustice, fear, constraint and suffering would be useless, if we were to remain slaves in the depths of our hearts, slaves of sin. To be truly free, man must be set free from this slavery and transformed into a new creature. The radical freedom of man thus lies at the deepest level: the level of openness to God by conversion of heart, for it is in man's heart that the roots of every form of subjection, every violation of freedom, are found. Finally for the Christian, freedom does not come from man himself: it is manifested in obedience to the will of God and in fidelity to his love. It is then that the disciple of Christ finds the strength to fight for freedom in this world. Faced by the difficulties of this task, he will not allow himself to be driven to inertia and discouragement, for he places his hope in God, who supports and makes fruitful what is done in accordance with his Spirit.

Freedom is the measure of the maturity of man and of the nation. So I cannot end this message without renewing the urgent appeal that I made to you at the beginning: like peace, freedom is an effort to be ceaselessly renewed in order to give man his full humanity. Let us not await the peace of the balance of terror. Let us not accept violence as the way to peace. Let us instead begin by respecting true freedom: the resulting peace will be able to satisfy the world's expectations; for it will be a peace built on justice, a peace founded on the incomparable dignity of the free human being.

*From the Vatican, 8 December 1980.*

JOANNES PAULUS PP. II