



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE\****

*Consistory Hall  
Friday, 12 January 1979*

*Your Excellency,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Just now, on the threshold of the new year, your Doyen has interpreted your feelings and your good wishes in a way that moves me deeply. I thank him, and I thank you all, for this comforting testimony. Be assured, in return, of my fervent wishes for each of you, for all the members of your Embassies, for your families, and for the countries you represent. It is before God that I express these wishes, asking him to shed light on your way, as on that of the Magi in the Gospel, and to give you, from day to day, the courage and the joys that you need in order to face up to your duties.

I pray to him to bless you, that is, to lavish his goods on you.

On this solemn occasion which gathers round the Pope all the diplomatic Missions accredited to the Holy See, it is usual to add to these cordial wishes some considerations on your noble function and on the framework in which it takes its place: the Church and the world.

1. I will begin by looking with you towards the very recent past, renewing the gratitude of the Apostolic See to the many Delegations which honoured the funeral ceremonies of Pope Paul VI and of Pope John Paul I, of holy memory, as well as the inaugural ceremonies of my predecessor's pontificate and those of my own.

Let us try to grasp the significance of this. Is not this participation in the most important events of the life of the Church, by the representatives of those who wield political responsibilities, a way of

emphasizing the presence of the Church within the modern world, and in particular of recognizing the importance of her mission—especially the mission of the Apostolic See? This mission, while being strictly religious, also fits into the general pattern of the principles of morality, which are indissolubly bound up with it. This brings us back to the order to which the modern world aspires, an order based on justice and peace. The Church, following the inspiration of the Second Vatican Council and conforming to the constant tradition of Christian doctrine, is eager to contribute to it with the means that are within her reach.

2. Of course, these means are "poor means", which Christ himself taught us to use and which are characteristic of the Church's evangelical mission. However, in this age of enormous progress of the "rich means" at the disposal of the present-day political, economic and civic structures, these specific means of the Church retain all their meaning, keep their finality, and even acquire a new splendour. The "poor means" are strictly bound up with the primacy of the spiritual. They are certain signs of the presence of the Spirit in the history of mankind. Many contemporaries seem to manifest particular comprehension for this scale of values: let it suffice to recall, to speak only of non-Catholics, Mahatma Gandhi, Mr Dag Hammarskjöld, Pastor Martin Luther King. Christ remains forever the highest expression of this poverty of means in which the primacy of the Spirit is revealed: the plenitude of the spirituality of which man is capable, with the grace of God, and to which he is called.

3. Allow me to appreciate, in this perspective, all the acts of good will manifested at the beginning of my pontificate, as also this meeting today. Yes, let us consider this fact of the presence, at the Apostolic See, of the representatives of so many States, so different in their history, their way of organization, and their confessional character; those who represent European or Asian peoples known from antiquity, or younger States, such as most of those of America whose history goes back a few centuries, and finally the most recent States, born in the course of this century. This presence corresponds in depth to the vision that the Lord Jesus revealed to us one day, speaking of "all nations" of the world, at the moment when he entrusted to the Apostles the mandate of taking the Good News all over the world (cf. Mt 28:19 and Mk 16:15). It also corresponds to the splendid analyses made by the Second Vatican Council. (cf. the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 13-17 and the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 2, 41, 89 etc.).

4. Maintaining contacts—among others by means of diplomatic representations—with so many and such different States, the Apostolic See wishes above all to express its deep esteem for each nation and each people, for its tradition, its culture, its progress in every field, as I said already in the letters addressed to Heads of State on the occasion of my election to Peter's See. The State, as the expression of the sovereign self-determination of peoples and nations, is a normal realization of social order. Its moral authority consists in that. The son of a people with a millenary culture which was deprived for a considerable time of its independence as a State, I know, from experience, the high significance of this principle.

The Apostolic See welcomes joyfully all diplomatic representatives, not only as spokesmen of their own governments, regimes and political structures, but also and above all as representatives of

peoples and nations which, through these political structures, manifest their sovereignty, their political independence, and the possibility of deciding their destiny autonomously. And it does so without any prejudice as regards the numerical importance of the population: here, it is not the numerical factor that is decisive.

5. The Apostolic See rejoices at the presence of so many representatives; it would likewise be happy to see many others, especially of nations and peoples which at times had a centuries-old tradition in this connection. I am thinking here particularly of the nations that can be considered Catholic; but also of others. For, at present, just as ecumenism between the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches is developing, just as there is a tendency to establish contacts with all men by appealing to good will, so this circle is widening, as the presence here of many representatives of non-Catholic Countries shows. And it continually finds a reason for extension in the Church's awareness of her mission, as my venerated predecessor Paul VI expressed so well in his Encyclical "[Ecclesiam suam](#)". Wishes have arrived from everywhere—I noted it particularly in the Messages coming from countries of the "East"—that the new pontificate may serve peace and the rapprochement of nations. The Apostolic See, in conformity with the mission of the Church, wishes to be at the centre of this brotherly rapprochement. It wishes to serve the cause of peace, not through political activity, but by serving the values and principles which condition peace and rapprochement, and which are at the basis of international common good.

6. There is, in fact, a common good of mankind, with very serious interests at stake which require the concerted action of governments and all men of good will: human rights to be guaranteed, the problems of food, health, culture, international economic cooperation, the reduction of armaments, the elimination of racialism ... The common good of humanity! A "utopia" which Christian thought pursues tirelessly and which consists in the unceasing quest for just and humane solutions, taking into account at once the good of persons and the good of States, the rights of each one and the rights of others, particular interests and general necessities.

It is the common good that inspires not only the social teaching of the Apostolic See but also the initiatives which are possible for it in the framework of its own specific field. This is the case, a very topical one, of Lebanon. In a country upset by hatred and destruction, with innumerable victims, what possibility remains of re-establishing relations of common life between Christians of various tendencies and Moslems, between Lebanese and Palestinians, if not in a loyal and generous effort which respects the identity and vital requirements of all, without the vexation of any? And considering the Middle East as a whole, while certain statesmen are tenaciously trying to arrive at an agreement and others are hesitating to commit themselves to it, who does not see that, just as much as military or territorial security, the fundamental problem is real mutual trust? Only the latter can help to harmonize the rights of all, distributing advantages and sacrifices in a realistic way. It is the same for Northern Ireland: the Bishops and leaders of non-Catholic Confessions have for years been exhorting their followers to overcome the virus of violence in its form of terrorism or of reprisals; they call upon them to reject hatred, to respect human rights concretely, to pledge themselves to an effort to understand and to meet each other. Is that not a common good in which

justice and realism meet?

Diplomacy and negotiations are also for the Holy See a specialized means of trusting in the moral resources of peoples. It was in this spirit that, accepting the appeal of Argentina and Chile, I made a point of sending Cardinal Samoré to these two countries, in order that as a diplomat of great experience, he might advocate solutions acceptable to the two peoples who are Christians and neighbours. I am happy to see that this patient work has already led to a first positive and precious result.

My thought and my prayer also turn to so many other problems that, these days in particular, are seriously troubling the life of the world, and which are again causing so many deaths, so much destruction and rancour in countries which contain few Catholics but which are equally dear to the Apostolic See. We are following the dramatic events in Iran and are very attentive to the news reaching us with regard to the Khmer country and all the peoples of this, already so sorely tried, South East Asia.

7. We see clearly that humanity is divided in a great many ways. It is a question also, and perhaps above all, of ideological divisions bound up with the different state systems. The search for solutions that will permit human societies to carry out their own tasks and to live in justice, is perhaps the main sign of our time. Everything that can serve this great cause must be respected, in whatever regime it may be. Advantage must be taken of mutual experiences. On the other hand, this multiform search for solutions cannot be transformed into a programme of struggle to secure power over the world, whatever may be the imperialism on which this struggle is based. It is only along this line that we can avoid the threat of modern arms, particularly nuclear armament, which remains such a matter of concern for the modern world.

The Apostolic See, which has already given proof of this, is always ready to manifest its openness with regard to all countries or regimes, seeking the essential good which is man's real good. A good number of exigencies connected with this good have been expressed in the "Declaration on Human Rights" and in the international Pacts which permit its concrete application. In this matter, great praise goes to the United Nations Organization as the political platform on which the pursuit of peace and détente, rapprochement and mutual understanding find a foundation, a support, a guarantee.

8. The Church's mission is, by its very nature, religious, and consequently the meeting point of the Church or the Apostolic See with the multiform and differentiated life of the political communities of the modern world, is characterized particularly by the universally recognized principle of religious freedom and freedom of conscience. This principle is not only contained in the list of human rights admitted by everyone, but it has a key position on it. It is a question, in fact, of respect for a fundamental right of the human spirit, in which man expresses himself most deeply, perhaps, as man.

The Second Vatican Council drew up the declaration on religious freedom. It comprises both the motivation of this right and its principal practical applications: in other words, all the data that confirm the real operation of the principle of religious freedom in social and public life.

Respecting the similar rights of all other religious communities in the world, the Apostolic See feels urged to undertake, in this field, steps in favour of all the Churches attached to it in full communion. It seeks to do so always in union with the respective Episcopates, and with the clergy and communities of faithful.

These initiatives yield, for the most part, satisfactory results. But it is difficult not to mention certain local Churches, certain rites, the situation of which, as regards religious freedom, leaves so much to be desired, when it is not quite deplorable. There are even heart-rending cries for help or assistance, which the Apostolic See cannot but hear. And consequently it must present them, in all clarity, to the conscience of states, regimes, and the whole of mankind. It is a question here of a simple duty which coincides with the aspirations to peace and justice in the world.

It was in accordance with this way of thinking that the Holy See delegation was induced to raise its voice at the Belgrade meeting in October 1977 (cf: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 8 October 1977, p. 2), referring to the declarations approved at the Helsinki Conference on security and cooperation in Europe, in particular on the matter of religious freedom.

On the other hand, the Apostolic See is always ready to take into account changes in realities and social mentalities that occur in the different States; and it is ready, for example, to agree to revise solemn Pacts which had been concluded in other times, under other circumstances.

9. Very soon, I am going to go to Puebla to meet the representatives of all the Latin American Episcopates, and to inaugurate a very important meeting with them. That is part of my mission as Bishop of Rome and Head of the College of Bishops. I wish to express publicly my joy at the comprehension and benevolent attitude of the Mexican authorities as regards this journey. The Pope hopes to be able to carry out this mission in other nations too, all the more so as many similar invitations have already been presented to him.

Once more I renew my cordial wishes for peace and progress for the whole world, this progress which fully corresponds to the Creator's will: "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1 :28). This order must be understood as applying to moral mastery, and not just economic domination. Yes, I wish mankind every kind of good, in order that all may live in real freedom, in truth, justice, and love.

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\**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 4 pp.6-7.

