



The Holy See

DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II AI PARTECIPANTI AL II CONGRESSO INTERNAZIONALE SULLO STERMINIO PER FAME E MISERIA*

Giovedì, 13 febbraio 1986

1. It is with pleasure that I welcome you here and greet you. Even before beginning the work of your second international conference on the themes of extermination by destitution and hunger and of the affirmation of the right to life and liberty, you honour me with your visit. I am very grateful for that. Among the participants of this highly representative assembly, each of whom I will greet personally at the end of this audience, I thank in particular your spokesman for the cordial words he has just addressed to me.

I am all the more appreciative as I see in your gesture a homage to the work of the Holy See and of the entire Catholic Church for the promotion of human life.

2. The Church cannot but look favourably on all initiatives which cooperate to inform and mould public opinion, making it aware of the common responsibility with regard to the problem of under development and of hunger in the world, so as to have an influence also with states and international organizations with a view to eliciting on their part a more effective and more coordinate commitment in the struggle against these plagues of humanity.

Your conference offers a particular occasion for a meeting among distinguished personalities of the entire world, representing diverse sectors of political life, international life, science and economy. Owing to the comparison of your different experiences, you thus want to work out some proposals determining, in a more precise way, some objectives and means of action apt to favour the integral development of every human being and of all people.

3. The abundance and the urgency of the problems require, in fact, that realistic measures be adopted without delay, thus permitting the terrible and urgent situation of undernourishment and death from hunger to be faced concretely and in a responsible manner. Such situations cannot be overcome by sporadic initiatives, but by progressive and constant

action, carried out in each of the countries and means of action apt to favour development, within the framework of the co-responsibility of all the nations of the world.

Such choices presuppose that one adopts - as you do - a viewpoint of moral values, notably the right to life, the right to fundamental liberties, to the growth and the integral promotion of each human person; and, consequently, the right of each of the members of the human community and the right of each people to have at their disposal the necessary means for a life worthy of man.

Each nation can consider as a fundamental need to meet all the necessary conditions allowing for a global process of growth, these being allotted justly in a manner to guarantee life, liberty and the full development of all the members of the national community.

When one wants to struggle in a concrete manner against misery and hunger, one cannot of course limit oneself to giving necessary assistance at the opportune moment, nor to preparing measures aimed at increasing production in an adequate manner. There must be a long-lasting and co-ordinated commitment which profoundly affects relations between countries in different stages of development. It is a matter of correcting, even fundamentally, situations of imbalance between populations and resources, which exist in a more acute way in certain regions of the world.

In summary, let us say that it is important to act on the causes, identified in their diversity, according to their kind and extent.

4. That is why it is important to make the most of the contribution deriving from the experience of government members and of persons engaged in the activities of international organizations, on both the world level and the regional level, and this your conference is rightly doing.

Such a contribution seems indispensable, firstly, in order to have documentation with precise data on situations and resources- and also to be in a position to prepare projects and valuable programmes. In fact it is necessary that, on the international level and on the level of government decisions, one arrives at definite working options, corresponding to actual needs and taking into account the concrete possibilities of realization. The contributions which derive from the numerous and generous initiatives towards solidarity seem to be going well in becoming intensified; but, at the same time, various initiatives must be coordinated and made more effective, because it is necessary to avoid duplication or any waste, and it is also necessary to harmonize them with the directives and choices of a true policy of cooperation for development.

5. Finally, the question is rightly this: to act so that all countries feel themselves involved in a responsible and effective way, the most prosperous having to become aware of their duty to contribute to the progress of countries less gifted, and in a measure proportionate to their greater possibilities.

In taking account of the requirements of the liberty and the dignity of each people, an authentic cooperation for development is concretely realized in programmes established in accord with the benefiting countries, according to models corresponding to their culture, and begun in respect for their timing and local possibilities, in a manner to obtain,

in every measure possible, the active collaboration of the whole population.

In a word, it is a matter of working together for the effective good of populations who find themselves in conditions of underdevelopment, while seeking the convergence of public and private, national and international initiatives, all animated by a sincere spirit of solidarity. One must go beyond egoistic interests of persons and particular groups and enterprises, and also selfish national interests which are sometimes hidden behind government initiatives, especially in bilateral operations.

6. Finally, it is necessary to recall that such a change of direction of internal and international politics supposes a profound renewal of consciences, either on a general level, that of public opinion, or, in a special way, among the leaders called to make effective decisions and to put them into practice.

It is necessary to modify mentalities and behaviour which run counter to the criteria of justice in solidarity towards the neighbour. It is urgent to do away with the adoption of life of ease and plenty; habits of dangerous over-consumption; and the squandering in enterprises of a general nature or of passing fashion.

The causes of internal and international tensions must be surmounted, as well as the perverse logic of divisions, the will to power, which is manifested among other things in expensive armaments, because all that compromises the process of development of certain countries - sometimes hardly begun - and conditions in a negative manner the support of more advanced countries.

Finally, one must work, with clearmindedness and courage, to establish a new international economic order.

7. But the profound change that I have just discussed will remain sterile, if it is not founded on complete respect, a respect born of conviction, for the dignity of man, of every person.

Precisely so, in the programme of your work, you have established a close bond between the struggle against misery and hunger, and the affirmation of the right to life and liberty. During my recent pastoral journey to India, in meeting the leaders of the traditional religions at Madras, I expressed the same conviction: "The abolition of inhuman conditions of life is an authentic spiritual victory, because it gives man liberty and dignity».

The promotion of the dignity and the liberty of man, which are clearly evangelical values, is an essential dimension of the mission of the Church. Man is, in fact, «the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself» (Redemptor Hominis, n. 14). That is why the Church does not limit itself to the abstract Proclamation of such values, but is concerned about being united with man in the concrete reality of his needs and sufferings, his anxieties and his hopes.

Thus, the Church does not cease to defend with all its power human life, which comes from God. Permit me to observe, with sorrow that, in face of a very deep and, as it were, sacrosanct sensitivity to offences against life which are the result of hunger, war and terrorism, one; does not find a similar sensitivity to the crime of abortion which, however, cuts off innumerable innocent lives.

Recalling, besides, that Christ identified himself with those who suffer from hunger, thirst, nakedness and all sorts of privations, the Church is concerned with all who are struggling in misery and underdevelopment. There she is in the front line herself, and shows all men of good will the urgency of struggling against such inhuman conditions, in a commitment to justice which is the fruit of fraternal love.

The Church cannot but be concerned about another hunger: the "hunger for liberty" of men and peoples oppressed for political, ideological and racial reasons. Liberty is a property of man as a son of God; it is a good which belongs to the inviolable intimacy of the person and which cannot be trampled underfoot, without, in a certain sense, putting the person interiorly to death.

Such is the specific contribution of the spiritual and religious mission of the Church: she is resolved to offer it to all those who are open, on different levels of competence and initiative, to the great causes of man which constitute the object of your conference.

It is in this spirit that I desire to assure you of my interest, my encouragement, and my cordial wishes for your work. And I invoke upon yourselves and upon your undertaking of human solidarity, the blessings of the Most High.

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