



The Holy See

A DDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE* *Saturday, 10 January 1987* 1. The

good wishes just expressed in your name by your Dean, His Excellency Ambassador Joseph Amichia, constitute a moving and always very much appreciated testimony from a diplomat alert to the endeavours of the Holy See and committed with it to the search for better solutions to the great problems of the world. I thank him very much, and I thank all the members of the Diplomatic Corps who have wished to associate themselves therewith. I am pleased to meet you on the threshold of a new year for which I in my turn offer you my cordial good wishes, for each of you, for your families, for the countries which you represent. I have visited a certain number of those countries, which have thus become more familiar to me, but all are assured of finding here the same consideration. Each of your nations is esteemed by the Holy See not only for its cultural heritage, its achievements or its capabilities, but in the first place because it forms a human community whose full blossoming and development I desire, with a properly recognized place in the midst of the great family of peoples. It is my wish that here, too, the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the spiritual entity that the Holy See is should manifest among themselves a mutual openness in respect and solidarity, and that they should share in their own way in the quest for the common good of all, namely peace. I greet especially the ambassadors attending this ceremony for the exchange of good wishes for the first time, above all those that are just beginning the mission of representing their countries to the Holy See. I am pleased also to greet your spouses and families and the members of your embassies accompanying you. 2. Your representative, after expressing kind words about some of the important activities of my pontificate during the past year, rightly emphasized certain grave aspects of the life of today's world which urgently call for progress and a concerted effort on the part of the peoples: the injustice of racial discrimination, the dangerous situation created by the stockpiling or sale of certain weapons, the indebtedness of numerous poor countries, the scourge of drug abuse and terrorism. These are all among the challenges that rise from the heart of every sensible person who is anxious for peace, and which the Holy See also listens to as it tries to bring to them its own witness and contribution. Your governments, and yourselves as diplomats, exercise an activity whose *raison d'être* and nobility consist in creating bonds of peace between nations, in asserting and defending what seems just for your country, in listening to and understanding the needs of others, in reconciling their points of view, in waging a joint struggle against those things which threaten and degrade human relationships and the dignity of life. Do I need to tell you, Your Excellencies, that the Holy See, being a member of the international community and having established diplomatic relations with your countries, is always ready to play its part in this matter, by concerning itself with your efforts, encouraging them, sharing in them and sometimes instigating them? But you know also that the Holy See is primarily and essentially a religious institution called to deal with the problems of peace in their spiritual and ethical dimensions. In this spirit, I took the initiative of a gathering of religious leaders by inviting them to Assisi last Oct. 27. His Excellency the Dean, in fact, referred to this event as the most characteristic of the year. Thus today I would like to dwell upon this event

in particular, in order to see with you what importance it has, not only for a dialogue between religions, but for the achievement in depth of the justice and peace which it is part of your duty to promote.³ Certainly, the meeting in Assisi of the leaders and representatives of the Christian churches or ecclesial communions and of the world religions had a fundamentally and exclusively religious character. It was not a matter of discussing or deciding upon concrete initiatives or plans of action which might seem useful or necessary for the strengthening of peace. I repeat that this deliberate choice of engaging solely in prayer in no way diminishes the importance of all the efforts undertaken by politicians and Heads of State for improving international relations. But the Assisi initiative had a duty to exclude all possibility of exploitation in favour of a particular political plan. In a word, the Catholic Church, the other churches and ecclesial communions and the non Christian religions, by responding in their own way to the decision of the United Nations to establish 1986 as a "year of peace", wished to do so by using their own language, by approaching the cause of peace in the dimension which for them is the essential one - the spiritual dimension - and more precisely through prayer, accompanied by fasting and by pilgrimage. Nor was it a matter, on the part of the representatives of the great religions of negotiating upon convictions of faith in order to arrive at a syncretistic religious consensus among ourselves. On the contrary, it was a matter of together turning, in a disinterested way, toward the capital objective of peace among peoples, or rather it was a matter of turning, all of us, toward God in order to implore this gift from him. Prayer is the first duty of religious people, their typical expression. Thus, the representatives of these religions showed in their own way their concern for the basic good of humanity. They have manifested the irreplaceable position which the religious sense retains in the hearts of people today. Even if, unfortunately, religion has sometimes been the occasion of divisions, the Assisi meeting expressed a certain common aspiration: the appeal of all to journey toward one final end, God. The personalities who were present there affirmed their intention of now fulfilling a decisive role in the construction of world peace (cf. General Audience, Oct. 22, 1986).⁴ Perhaps certain diplomats will ask themselves, "In what way will prayer for peace advance peace?" The fact is that peace is first of all a gift of God. God is the one who establishes it, for it is he who gives to humanity the whole of creation in order to administer and develop it in a united way. It is God who inscribes in man's conscience the laws which require him to respect life and the person of his neighbour. God does not cease to call man to peace. He is the guarantor of man's rights. He desires that men live together in such a way as to express mutual relations founded on justice, respect and solidarity. He also helps them interiorly to attain peace or recover it, through his Holy Spirit. From man's point of view, peace is also something good on the human level, of a rational and moral nature. It is the fruit of free wills guided by reason toward the common good to be achieved. In this sense it seems within the reach of the well educated, mature man who thinks about the means of living - in truth, justice and love - a wider solidarity, in contrast to "the law of the jungle," the law of the strongest. But to be more precise, one does not see how this moral order could ignore God, the first source of being, essential truth and supreme good. Prayer is the way to acknowledge humbly that source and to submit to it. Far from stifling man's responsibility, it stimulates it. Experience shows that where man has thought it good to free himself from God, it is possible for him to preserve for a time the ideals of truth and justice which are inherent in his rational nature, but he risks losing touch with them by interpreting them to please his immediate interests, desires and passions. Yes, history bears witness that men left to themselves have a tendency to follow their irrational and selfish instincts. They thus experience the truth that peace is beyond human powers. For it requires additional light and strength, a liberation from aggressive passions, a faithful commitment to building a society together, indeed a world community, founded on the common good of each and of all. Reference to the truth of God gives man the ideal and the energy needed to overcome unjust situations, to free himself from ideologies of domination and hatred, and to make an advance toward true universal brotherhood. A religious attitude frees man by putting him in contact with the transcendent. To those who believe in a personal God who is all powerful, man's friend

and the source of peace, prayer appears to be truly necessary in order to ask him for the peace which they cannot give to themselves, that is, peace among men, the peace which begins in men's conscience.⁵ Authentic prayer already changes man's heart. God is fully aware of what we need. If he invites us to ask for peace, it is because this humble approach mysteriously transforms the people who pray and puts them on the path to reconciliation and brotherhood. Indeed, the person who prays to God sincerely, as we tried to do in Assisi, contemplates the harmony desired by God the Creator, the love which is in God, the ideal of peace among men, that ideal which St. Francis embodied in an incomparable way. For this the person who prays gives thanks to God. He senses that the human family is one in its origin and in its destiny, that it comes from God and will return to God. He knows that every man and woman bears within himself or herself the image of God, despite the limits and failures of the human spirit tempted by the spirit of evil. The person who accepts the Christian revelation goes further in this contemplation. He knows that Christ has united himself in some way with every man, has redeemed him, making him a brother, and gathers together in himself the scattered children of God. The person who prays senses that he is profoundly united with all those who seek in religion spiritual and transcendent values in response to the great questions of the human heart. Then, as he looks at himself, he recognizes his prejudices, his deficiencies, his failures; he easily sees how selfishness, jealousy and aggressiveness, in himself and in others, are the real obstacles to peace. For this he asks forgiveness of God and of his brothers, he fasts, he does penance, he seeks purification. He understands, finally, that he cannot ask for peace if he stands idly by. His prayer becomes an expression of his willingness to work in order to overcome these obstacles, by making a resolute commitment to promote peace. These are the benefits that prayer brings. Is not this what resulted from all the prayers uttered in Assisi? No self justification, no plea on behalf of a particular ideology, no acceptance of violence, deflected those prayers away from their goal: the search for peace as God would have it. Men who pray in this way either remain or become peacemakers. They can no longer accept or go back to unjust or hateful behaviour toward their fellowmen without a flagrant contradiction. Certainly this contradiction can always arise, for temptations remain. That is why at Casablanca I prayed to God in these words: "Do not permit it to happen that in invoking your name we should resort to justifying human disorders." That would be a sign that the prayer was not deep enough, true enough, long lasting enough. It would be a sign that fanaticism has distorted it and manipulated it. But in itself the authentic act of prayer puts one on the path of true peace because it signifies and brings about conversion of heart.⁶ By showing that peace and religion go hand in hand, the Assisi event underlined once again that peace is fundamentally ethical in nature. I mentioned this fact on that occasion in the presence of my brothers and sisters of all religions: "In the great battle for peace, humanity, even with its diversity, must draw upon the deepest and most enlivening sources where conscience is formed and upon which human action is based" (First Address, 2). Besides the basic conviction that peace surpasses human efforts and must be sought in the reality which is beyond us all, an element common to all religions is in fact "a profound respect for conscience and an obedience to conscience which teaches all of us to seek the truth, to love and to serve every person and all peoples," to respect, protect and promote human life, to overcome selfishness, greed and the spirit of revenge (cf. Final Discourse at Assisi, 2, 4). That is to say that the Catholic Church recognizes the spiritual, social and moral values which are found in the various religions. During my visit to India I stressed the value of Mahatma Gandhi's teaching on "the supremacy of the spirit and the truth force (Satyagraha) which triumphs without violence by the intrinsic dynamism of just action" (Discourse of Feb. 1, 1986, at Raj Ghat, No. 2). In the presence of the young Moslems at Casablanca, I recalled that when we invoke God "we must also respect, love and help every human being because he is a creature of God and, in a certain sense, his image and representative" (Aug. 19, 1985, No. 2). At the Rome synagogue, I emphasized the fact that "Jews and Christians are the depositaries and the witnesses of an ethic marked by the Ten Commandments, in obedience to which man finds his truth and his liberty," and I noted that "Jesus carried to the ultimate limit the love

demanding by the Torah" (April 13, 1986, Nos. 6, 7). Religions worthy of the name, the open religions spoken of by Bergson - which are not just projections of human desires but an openness and submission to the transcendent will of God which asserts itself in every conscience - such religions permit the establishment of Peace. This is also true of philosophies which recognize that peace is a reality of the moral order. Philosophies of this kind show the need to rise above instincts, they affirm the radical equality of all the members of the human family, the sacred dignity of life, of the person, of conscience and the unity of the human family, which demands true solidarity. Without an absolute respect for man founded on a spiritual vision of the human being, there is no peace. This is the witness of Assisi. It was given by religious representatives in the spirit of the whole world, so that the world might find there light and support. I hope that this conviction also inspires Your activity as diplomats.⁷ In the concrete, respect for man entails respect for his fundamental rights. To the great question, "How can peace be maintained?" one must respond, "Within the framework of justice among individuals and among peoples." Today we have the opportunity to see the rights of man being catalogued more and more clearly, and being claimed ever more strongly: the right to life at every stage of its development, the right to respect, whatever the individual's race, sex or religion, the right to the material goods necessary for life, the right to work and to a fair share of the fruits of labour, the right to culture, the right to freedom of the spirit and of creativity, the right to respect for conscience, and particularly to freedom of relationship with God. Nor must one forget the rights of nations to preserve and defend their independence, their cultural identity, the possibility of social organization, running their own affairs and freely determining their destinies without being at the mercy, either directly or indirectly, of foreign powers. You know as well as I do the cases in which this right is clearly violated. Such rights are the expression of the demands of the dignity of man. Those rights, worked out especially in the West by consciences formed by Christianity, have become the heritage of all humanity and are claimed in every part of the world. However, as well as being a claim they are also a duty for individuals and for States to create conditions which ensure that they will be exercised. Countries that wish to suspend these duties under various pretexts such as a totalitarian concept of power, an obsession with security, a desire to maintain privileges for certain groups, ideology, fears of every kind - damage peace. They live a false peace which also risks leading to sad awakenings. When these countries move out of dictatorship without preparation for a democratic life, as we have seen with certain countries during the past year, the road is difficult and slow. Each one then has to become aware of what is required by the common good, while avoiding individual excesses in the exercise of freedom. But these countries deserve encouragement along this path of peace, which is the only one of value.⁸ The ethical imperative of peace and justice of which I have just spoken presents itself as both a right and a duty, first of all on the level of a well formed conscience, among people of good will, in communities which are sincerely interested in seeking peace and in truthfully training people for it. It then helps to influence public opinion. But it must also find expression, support and a guarantee in appropriate juridical instruments of civil society, in declarations or, rather, in treaties, agreements and institutions at the level of the nation, region, continent and world community, so as to avoid as much as possible situations in which the weak fall victim to the ill will, force or manipulation of others. The progress of civilization consists in finding the means to protect, defend and promote, at the level of structures, that which is just and good for the conscience. Diplomacy too finds its field of action in this mediation between conscience and actual life. If these efforts fail, whether at the level of individual conscience or at the level of structures, then true peace is no longer secure. It is fragile or else it is false. It then risks being reduced to the temporary absence of war, to tolerance, including tolerance of abuses which injure man, and to opportunism. It gives way before the concern to preserve at any price particular advantages while closing in on self. It gives way especially before the instincts of aggression or xenophobia, before the anticipated effectiveness of the class struggle, before the temptation to rely for strength solely on the superiority of weapons which intimidate the adversary, before the law of the strongest, before terrorism or the methods of

certain guerrillas who are prepared to use every violent means even against the innocent, or before clever attempts to destabilize other countries, before efforts to manipulate, before lying propaganda, all under the appearance of seeking something good or just.⁹ When one sees the absurd ravages caused by wars and the major peril of widespread and very severe destruction which would be caused by the use of weapons possessed by certain countries, one may think that the world situation calls for the most radical refusal possible of war as a means of solving conflicts. It is in this perspective that for Oct. 27 I had invited all those engaged in hostilities to observe a complete cease-fire, at least on that day. A good number accepted the proposal favourably and I congratulate them. It was also a pause which permitted the sparing of human lives, which are all precious; it was an occasion given to each to reflect on the vanity and inhumanity of war for solving tensions and conflicts which could be settled by the means offered by the law; it was an invitation to renounce once and for all the violence of arms. Of course, this does not mean the total setting aside of the principle whereby each people, each government, has the right and duty to protect by proportionate means its own existence and liberty against an unjust aggressor. But war appears more and more to be the most barbaric and most ineffective means of solving conflicts between two countries or of gaining power in one's own country. It is necessary rather to do everything possible to acquire instruments of dialogue and negotiation, with the arbitration, if need be, of impartial third parties or of an international authority endowed with sufficient powers.¹⁰ In any case, a fundamental threat is posed by the development of weapons of every sort with a view to ensuring domination over others or at the expense of others. Should not arms be reduced to a level compatible with legitimate defense, with the abandonment of those which can in no way be included in this category? Is there any need to repeat that such an arms race is dangerous, destructive and scandalous in the eyes of those countries which cannot ensure for their own people the food and health care needed for survival? This is one of the key problems of North South relations, and it seems, from the ethical point of view, even more fundamental than the problem of East West relations. Another crucial point is that of external debt and of the balance of trade, which are matters that particularly concern the Holy See for, in a word, what really matters is the united development of peoples. Solidarity is by nature ethical and a fundamental key to peace. It presupposes that one sees things from the point of view of a people in need and of seeking what is good for that people, while considering the people as active agents of their own development. This solidarity is based upon the realization that we make up a single human family. This is the purpose of the Message for the World Day of Peace that I entrusted to you this year. While aiming for the development of peoples as a whole, means must be found to come to the aid of the smaller groups which are left aside in a poverty or danger unworthy of humanity. They are legion. For example, I am thinking of those who are affected by the famine in Ethiopia or the Sudan, and I am thinking of the tragic plight of so many refugees. Admirable private initiatives have concerned themselves with these people, but what will they be able to do if governments and the international community do not make their contribution?¹¹ From the peace message for this year I repeat this one sentence in order to conclude these words: "As solidarity gives us the ethical basis to act upon, development becomes the offer that brother makes to brother, so that both can live more fully in all the diversity and complementary that are the hallmarks of human civilization" (No. 7). Very frequently, in speaking of the rights of man, we have in view only the equality of men and their liberty. Men's equality in dignity is to be guaranteed always and everywhere; it does not necessarily require the equality of all situations, which risks being a snare and which continually creates conflicts. What is of capital importance is brotherhood. It appears as the keystone of the ever fragile edifice of democracy, as the goal of the ever difficult journey toward peace, as its decisive inspiration. It removes the contradiction so frequently pointed out between equality and liberty. It transcends strict justice. Its driving force is love. The fathers of the Second Vatican Council emphasized this aspect: "Hence peace is likewise the fruit of love, which goes beyond what justice can provide" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 78). This love is at the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who in an incomparable manner gave the

world a taste of it when he invited us to become the neighbour of every man, as a brother. This love presupposes a rising above self, which is favoured by a religious attitude but which is in any case necessary to life in society. A world without fraternal love will never know anything but a fragmentary peace, a peace that is fragile and threatened. In case of war, the belligerent countries will be incapable of renouncing the desire to dominate, even at the price of a tragic massacre or senseless destruction, because this would be humiliating for them. Only the spirit of brotherhood will lead them to accept and offer a truce or, rather, a peace which is not humiliating for the other side. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is not within my competence to propose more precise technical solutions for the grave problems of peace and development which we have evoked. But I have considered it appropriate to reflect with you upon the spirit which opens the door to viable solutions: humility, dialogue, respect, justice, brotherhood. The experience of Assisi, at the level of the representatives of the religions, was inspired by this spirit. May you be enabled to find in it light for your noble mission as ambassadors and may the world drink from the same source in order to know the peace that God destines for it.

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