



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
TO NORWAY, ICELAND, FINLAND,
DENMARK AND SWEDEN

MEETING WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO DENMARK

*ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II**

Apostolic Nunciature of Copenhagen
Wednesday, 7 June 1989

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Both at the Vatican and on my journeys to the Church in various parts of the world, I have frequent opportunities to meet members of the diplomatic community. Today, I have the great pleasure of meeting you, *the distinguished Heads of Mission and diplomatic personnel accredited to Her Majesty the Queen of Denmark*. I greet you all and thank you for your presence here. Through you I pay tribute to the nations and peoples you represent. In your service to your respective countries and to the world community I see a direct contribution to the realization of the ardent hope that burns in human hearts everywhere, the hope that an ever more peaceful and humane world will result from the transformations taking place in peoples and in the relations between the forces that shape our history.

I wish to speak to you this morning as a friend in our common humanity, as one concerned for the genuine well-being and advancement of the human family, and as a disciple of Jesus Christ whose Church I have been called to serve in a ministry of unity and faith.

In preparing for this visit to Denmark, I have been strongly reminded of two Danish thinkers. As a former professor of ethics in my own country, I have long been familiar with the writings of one of

them: *Søren Kierkegaard*. Kierkegaard was deeply absorbed by a sense of the limited and finite nature of existence, and by a consequent sense of *dread* – a sense of foreboding which he understood as something not merely psychological but essentially metaphysical, and therefore inevitably present in all of human experience. For Kierkegaard, this anguish was the fundamental category defining the relationship of the individual to the world. For him, the whole of existence is permeated by the possibility of not being. Hence everything is somehow, at the same time, nothing. “What I am”, wrote Kierkegaard, “is nothing” (Søren Kierkegaard, *Intimate Diary*).

Kierkegaard’s escape from this negativity was through *his Christian faith and his obedience to God*. In a certain sense he went against the intellectual climate of his time by *drawing attention back to the individual and the individual’s personal relationship to God*. Some later philosophers were much affected by Kierkegaard’s concept of existential dread. Of these, some found no way out but to extol the orientation towards death and nothingness inherent in being “situated” in the world. In that school, the human spirit was prepared for radical despair and a denial of meaning and freedom in life.

The other Danish scholar who comes to mind was the seventeenth century scientist *Niels Stensen*, the famous anatomist and the founder of scientific paleontology, geology and crystallography. As I had occasion to point out at last year’s beatification ceremony for this outstanding son of Denmark, his life followed a double course: he was a *keen observer* of the human body and of inanimate nature, and at the same time he was a *deeply believing Christian* who placed himself at the service of God’s will in a humble yet forthright and fearless way. His pursuit of scientific knowledge led him to attend the Universities at Amsterdam, Leyden, Paris and Florence. His journey of faith led him to a profound experience of conversion, to ordination as a priest, to becoming a bishop and a missionary. His personal holiness was so notable that the Church holds him up as an example to the faithful and as an intercessor for them before God.

2. The memory of these two Danish intellectuals and believers provokes reflections which may be far removed from our daily and immediate concerns, but which nevertheless form the undercurrent of all thought and decision, and therefore determine as it were the very sense of our daily struggles, both personal and collective. These reflections are related to *the meaning of life with its obvious limitations*, its sufferings and its mysterious outcome which is death. They concern the place of religion in history, culture and society, and the perennial question about the relationship between faith and reason. *On the practical plane*, they concern the pressing need for collaboration between men and women of religion, science, culture, politics and economics in facing the great problems of the world: *the preservation of the planet* and its resources, *peace* between nations and groups, *justice in society*, and a prompt and effective response to the tragic situation of *poverty, sickness and hunger* affecting millions of human beings.

Our own century has experienced such terrible wars and political tensions, such offences against life and freedom, such seemingly intractable sources of suffering – including the present-day

tragedies of the international drug trade and the increasing spread of AIDS – that some people may hesitate to express too much hope or to be over optimistic about the future. Yet many will agree that the world is living through *a moment of extraordinary awakening*. The old problems remain, and new ones arise; but there is also a growing awareness of an opportunity being offered to give birth to a new and better era: a time to involve one another in frank and truthful collaboration in order to meet the great challenges facing humanity at the end of the twentieth century. The opportunity I speak of is not something clearly definable. It is more like the confluence of many complex global developments in the fields of science and technology, in the economic world, in a growing political maturity of peoples and in the formation of public opinion. Perhaps it is right to say that what we are experiencing is a *change*, however slow and fragile, *in the direction of the world's concerns*, and an increasing, if sometimes grudging, willingness to *accept the implications of a planetary interdependence* from which no one can truly escape.

I speak of these things to you, distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps, because of your personal and professional capability of evoking an appropriate response to the challenges which have appeared on the horizon of humanity's progress. *Mine is an invitation to you* and to all men and women with responsibility for the public life of nations, *to do everything possible to encourage this moral awakening and to further the peaceful processes which seek to implement freedom, respect for human dignity and human rights throughout the world*. In this you and your Governments and peoples will have the full encouragement of the Catholic Church.

The Church has little or no technical advice to give, nor an economic or political programme to promote. Her mission is *eminently spiritual and humanitarian*. She seeks to be faithful to Jesus Christ, her divine founder, who declared: "My kingdom is not of this world" (*Jo.* 18, 36), but who, at the same time, was moved to compassion at the sight of the sufferings of the multitudes (Cfr. *Matth.* 9, 36). The Church exists to *proclaim the dominion of God*, the loving Father, over creation and over man, and *seeks to educate people's consciences* to accept responsibility for themselves and for the world, for human relationships and for the common destiny of the human family. Specifically, *the Church teaches a doctrine of creation and redemption which places the individual at the centre of her worldview and activity*. Her temporal objective is the full development of individuals. She stimulates and appeals to personal responsibility. She encourages and calls upon society to defend and promote the inalienable worth and rights of the person, and to safeguard these values through legislation and social policies. She wishes to pursue these goals in cooperation with all who serve the common good.

From the beginning of my own pontificate I have endeavoured to give voice to a *preoccupation* which is already present in biblical accounts of man's efforts *to build a world without reference to God*. Today this preoccupation assumes an immediacy all its own, by reason of the immensely magnified potential for good or evil which man has fashioned. The danger is that "while man's dominion over the world of things is making enormous advances, he may lose the essential threads of his dominion and in various ways let his humanity be subjected to the world and

become himself something subject to manipulation” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 16).

As man increasingly takes charge of his world, the fundamental question remains ever the same: “whether *in the context of this progress man, as man, is becoming truly better, that is to say, more mature spiritually*, more aware of the dignity of his humanity, more responsible, more open to others, especially the most needy and the weakest” (*Ibid.* 15).

The basic questions therefore are those related to truth and meaning, to moral good and evil. These are perennial questions, since each generation, and indeed each individual, is called upon to respond to them in the ever changing circumstances of life. The unbalanced development taking place at present and posing the greatest threat to the stability of the world – where the rising material standards of some are in stark contrast with the deepening poverty and misery of others – is not the result of blind and uncontrollable forces, but of decisions made by individuals and groups. I am fully convinced, and have so written in my 1987 Encyclical on the Church’s Social Concern, that certain forms of modern “imperialism” which appear to be inspired by economics or politics, are in fact real forms of idolatry: the worship of money, ideology, class or technology. *The true nature of the inequalities which plague our world is that of moral evil.* To acknowledge this is important, for, “to diagnose the evil in this way is to identify precisely, on the level of human conduct, *the path to be followed in order to overcome it*” (Eiusdem *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 37).

Ladies and Gentlemen: these are the thoughts that I wish to leave with you, trusting that you share my concern for the direction in which humanity is going at the end of this Second Christian Millennium. *The path forward is the path of a profound solidarity*, which is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of others, but a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good (*Ibid.*). Such a commitment to solidarity befits your status as diplomats at the service of peace and progress. My plea to you therefore is that we may work together to build an era of effective worldwide solidarity *in openness to the moral dimensions implicit in every human endeavour.*

May Almighty God be with you in your work. May his blessings be upon you and your families and upon the countries which you serve. Thank you.

*AAS 81 (1989), p. 1357-1361.

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