



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO SPAIN
(JUNE 12 - 17, 1993)

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS***

Wednesday, 16 June 1993

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It gives me great pleasure to meet the Diplomatic Corps in the headquarters of the Apostolic Nunciature and thus have the opportunity to share a few reflections with you on the occasion of my fourth Pastoral Visit to the noble Spanish nation. I thank you wholeheartedly for your presence and your kind welcome, while I address to you my most cordial and respectful greetings which I also extend to the Governments and peoples you represent. I likewise wish to express my gratitude to Archbishop Mario Tagliaferri, Apostolic Nuncio and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, for the courteous words he has addressed to me on behalf of all.

The high office you hold, burdened with responsibility and not without sacrifice, makes you worthy of the Holy See's appreciation and esteem, especially since it is a service to the important cause of peace, to bringing peoples together in collaboration and a productive exchange for achieving more human and just relationships within the international community.

2. As your personal experience can prove, we are in a hospitable, welcoming country with a wealth of culture and ancient traditions, a country that has developed contacts with many other peoples of the world in the course of history.

The memory is still fresh in our minds of the recent commemoration of the fifth centenary of that 12 October 1492 which changed the shape of the world as it was then known and opened up unimagined ways to the encounter of peoples and cultures. On this occasion, how could we fail to

mention the role played by the school of Salamanca and in particular by Fray Francisco de Vitoria, O.P., in the creation of modern international law? Based on Christian principles, a true and proper code of human rights was drafted, representing the critical conscience which developed in Spain in favour of persons and peoples overseas, claiming for them an identical dignity which was to be both respected and safeguarded. The "Totus Orbis", that is, the "construction of a united world", was also an original idea of Francisco de Vitoria, the result of real coexistence based on respect for individual identity and the ability to share elements in common.

In this regard, as you are well aware, the World Conference on Human Rights, organized by the United Nations, is taking place in Vienna at the moment. This is an important appointment for the international community, since after recognizing the value of the ground covered up to now in the area of the international protection of human rights and freedoms there is a general desire to give new momentum to collaboration on a world level in the recognition and promotion of these rights and freedoms, both in their individual and collective dimensions. Humanity's collective conscience is becoming increasingly aware of the need for an international law firmly based on solid ethical principles effectively able to protect the basic rights and freedoms of the human person, without limits or arbitrary demands resulting from individual interests that have nothing to do with the common good of humanity.

3. As for religious freedom, looking at this noble country's past we see that for a certain period in its history, Christianity Judaism and Islam existed together on the Iberian peninsula. This page, which so enriched Spanish culture and had its most important centre in Toledo, could still represent an eloquent and instructive reference point in our day for promoting authentic religious values as elements of unity, understanding and dialogue among the members of the human family.

Everybody knows the role Spain played in encouraging a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict, which culminated with the meeting held in Madrid in October 1991. Spain, a member of the European Community and at the same time united by close ties to the Latin American countries, sees itself constantly questioned by its vocation as an integrating element of the cultures which have enriched its past.

4. In addition to other important moments and activities aimed at fostering mutual understanding and unity, it is worth mentioning the meeting for Christian-Islamic dialogue, convened last March by the Episcopal Commission for Interfaith Relations of the Spanish Episcopal Conference and the Islamic Cultural Centre of Madrid, on behalf of the World Islamic League. The desire for greater understanding between Christians and Muslims is reflected in the meeting's resolutions, as can be seen in the following words: "We must, through constructive dialogue, gain a better mutual knowledge, free from suspicion and leading to a mutual respect that will in turn end in a more ambitious collaboration in all possible fields" (*Joint communiqué*, 28 March 1993, n. 3).

Before such a number of major diplomatic representatives of countries where the Muslim religion is professed by the majority of the population, I express my fervent wish that this praiseworthy initiative of the Spanish Church, faithfully inspired by the principles of Vatican II's Declaration *Nostra aetate*, will open new routes to cooperation and outreach. It is my heartfelt hope that dialogue and collaboration may prevail wherever members of the three religions that have enriched the spiritual and human melting pot of the Iberian peninsula live together, particularly where this coexistence is marked by a minority/majority relationship, and that injustice and discrimination may be carefully avoided. On the other hand, it is the States' duty to be concerned with these problems and to avoid using religion "as an excuse for injustice and violence, a terrible abuse that must be condemned by all true believers in God.... There can be no genuine peace unless believers stand together in rejecting the politics of hate and discrimination, and in affirming the right of freedom of worship and religion in all human societies" (*Address to the Muslim Delegation, Assisi, 10 January 1993*). The international community is also called to care for and to protect minorities, immigrants, and the right of individuals to freely profess their own faith, through a correct use of the principles of cooperation and reciprocity.

5. Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, daily experience shows us clearly that Francisco de Vitoria's ideal, the *Totus Orbis*, or "the world united in harmony within pluralism" is still a distant goal. This is demonstrated, for example by the great differences between North and South or by warfare, especially that in Bosnia Herzegovina, which is so close and so cruel. This is why there is an increasingly pressing need, one that cannot be postponed, for a joint effort by the nations and international organizations to strengthen more equitable relations with greater solidarity and protected by international law. May I be permitted to encourage you in this noble and urgent task, while assuring you that you will always find in the Holy See a spokesman attentive to all that concerns the promotion of fellowship and solidarity among peoples, as well as all that fosters peace, justice and respect for human rights.

In concluding this encounter, I would like to thank you again for your presence and to express my most sincere wishes for the prosperity of your countries, the success of your missions and the happiness of your loved ones.

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