



The Holy See

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

Monday, 13 January 2003

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. This meeting at the beginning of the New Year is a happy tradition which affords me the joy of welcoming you and in some way of embracing all the peoples whom you represent! For it is through you and thanks to you that I come to know their hopes and aspirations, their successes and their setbacks. Today I wish to offer your countries my *fervent good wishes of happiness, peace and prosperity*.

At the threshold of the New Year I am also pleased to offer all of you my best wishes, as I invoke upon you, your families and your fellow citizens an abundance of divine blessings.

Before sharing with you some reflections inspired by the present situation in the world and in the Church, I must thank your Dean, Ambassador Giovanni Galassi, for his kind words and for the good wishes which he has thoughtfully expressed, in the name of all present, for my person and for my ministry. Please accept my deep gratitude!

Mr Ambassador, you have also pointed to the legitimate expectations of modern men and women, all too often frustrated by political crises, by armed violence, by social conflicts, by poverty or by natural catastrophes. Never as at the beginning of this millennium has humanity felt how precarious is the world which it has shaped.

2. I have been personally struck by *the feeling of fear which often dwells in the hearts of our contemporaries*. An insidious terrorism capable of striking at any time and anywhere; the unresolved problem of the Middle East, with the Holy Land and Iraq; the turmoil disrupting South

America, particularly Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela; the conflicts preventing numerous African countries from focusing on their development; the diseases spreading contagion and death; the grave problem of famine, especially in Africa; the irresponsible behaviour contributing to the depletion of the planet's resources: all these are so many plagues threatening the survival of humanity, the peace of individuals and the security of societies.

3. *Yet everything can change.* It depends on each of us. Everyone can develop within himself his potential for faith, for honesty, for respect of others and for commitment to the service of others.

It also depends, quite obviously, on political leaders, who are called to serve the common good. You will not be surprised if before an assembly of diplomats I state in this regard *certain requirements* which I believe must be met if entire peoples, perhaps even humanity itself, are not to sink into the abyss.

First, a "YES TO LIFE"! Respect life itself and individual lives: everything starts here, for the most fundamental of human rights is certainly the right to life. Abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, for example, risk reducing the human person to a mere object: life and death to order, as it were! When all moral criteria are removed, scientific research involving the sources of life becomes a denial of the being and the dignity of the person. War itself is an attack on human life since it brings in its wake suffering and death. The battle for peace is always a battle for life!

Next, RESPECT FOR LAW. Life within society – particularly international life – presupposes common and inviolable principles whose goal is to guarantee the security and the freedom of individual citizens and of nations. These rules of conduct are the foundation of national and international stability. Today political leaders have at hand highly relevant texts and institutions. It is enough simply to put them into practice. The world would be totally different if people began to apply in a straightforward manner the agreements already signed!

Finally, the DUTY OF SOLIDARITY. In a world with a superabundance of information, but which paradoxically finds it so difficult to communicate and where living conditions are scandalously unequal, it is important to spare no effort to ensure that everyone feels responsible for the growth and happiness of all. Our future is at stake. An unemployed young person, a handicapped person who is marginalized, elderly people who are uncared for, countries which are captives of hunger and poverty: these situations all too often make people despair and fall prey to the temptation either of closing in on themselves or of resorting to violence.

4. This is why *choices need to be made so that humanity can still have a future.* Therefore, the peoples of the earth and their leaders must sometimes have the courage to say "No".

"NO TO DEATH"! That is to say, no to all that attacks the incomparable dignity of every human being, beginning with that of unborn children. If life is truly a treasure, we need to be able to

preserve it and to make it bear fruit without distorting it. "No" to all that weakens the family, the basic cell of society. "No" to all that destroys in children the sense of striving, their respect for themselves and others, the sense of service.

"NO TO SELFISHNESS"! In other words, to all that impels man to protect himself inside the cocoon of a privileged social class or a cultural comfort which excludes others. The life-style of the prosperous, their patterns of consumption, must be reviewed in the light of their repercussions on other countries. Let us mention for example the problem of water resources, which the United Nations Organization has asked us all to consider during this year 2003. Selfishness is also the indifference of prosperous nations towards nations left out in the cold. All peoples are entitled to receive a fair share of the goods of this world and of the know-how of the more advanced countries. How can we fail to think here, for example, of the access of everyone to generic medicines, needed to continue the fight against current pandemics, an access — alas — often thwarted by short-term economic considerations?

"NO TO WAR"! War is not always inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity. International law, honest dialogue, solidarity between States, the noble exercise of diplomacy: these are methods worthy of individuals and nations in resolving their differences. I say this as I think of those who still place their trust in nuclear weapons and of the all-too-numerous conflicts which continue to hold hostage our brothers and sisters in humanity. At Christmas, Bethlehem reminded us of the unresolved crisis in the Middle East, where two peoples, Israeli and Palestinian, are called to live side-by-side, equally free and sovereign, in mutual respect. Without needing to repeat what I said to you last year on this occasion, I will simply add today, faced with the constant degeneration of the crisis in the Middle East, that the solution will never be imposed by recourse to terrorism or armed conflict, as if military victories could be the solution. And what are we to say of the threat of a war which could strike the people of Iraq, the land of the Prophets, a people already sorely tried by more than twelve years of embargo? War is never just another means that one can choose to employ for settling differences between nations. As the Charter of the United Nations Organization and international law itself remind us, war cannot be decided upon, even when it is a matter of ensuring the common good, except as the very last option and in accordance with very strict conditions, without ignoring the consequences for the civilian population both during and after the military operations.

5. It is therefore possible to change the course of events, once good will, trust in others, fidelity to commitments and cooperation between responsible partners are allowed to prevail. I shall give two examples.

Today's Europe, which is at once united and enlarged. Europe has succeeded in tearing down the walls which disfigured her. She has committed herself to planning and creating a new reality capable of combining unity and diversity, national sovereignty and joint activity, economic progress and social justice. This new Europe is the bearer of the values which have borne fruit for two

thousand years in an "art" of thinking and living from which the whole world has benefitted. Among these values Christianity holds a privileged position, inasmuch as it gave birth to a humanism which has permeated Europe's history and institutions. In recalling this patrimony, the Holy See and all the Christian Churches have urged those drawing up the future Constitutional Treaty of the European Union to include a reference to Churches and religious institutions. We believe it desirable that, in full respect of the secular state, three complementary elements should be recognized: religious freedom not only in its individual and ritual aspects, but also in its social and corporative dimensions; the appropriateness of structures for dialogue and consultation between the Governing Bodies and communities of believers; respect for the juridical status already enjoyed by Churches and religious institutions in the Member States of the Union. A Europe which disavowed its past, which denied the fact of religion, and which had no spiritual dimension would be extremely impoverished in the face of the ambitious project which calls upon all its energies: constructing a Europe for *all*!

Africa too gives us today an occasion to rejoice: Angola has begun its rebuilding; Burundi has taken the path which could lead to peace and expects from the international community understanding and financial aid; the Democratic Republic of Congo is seriously engaged in a national dialogue which should lead to democracy. The Sudan has likewise shown good will, even if the path to peace remains long and arduous. We should of course be grateful for these signs of progress and we should encourage political leaders to spare no effort in ensuring that, little by little, the peoples of Africa experience the beginnings of pacification and thus of prosperity, safe from ethnic struggles, caprice and corruption. For this reason we can only deplore the grave incidents which have rocked Côte-d'Ivoire and the Central African Republic, while inviting the people of those countries to lay down their arms, to respect their respective constitutions and to lay the foundations for national dialogue. It will then be easy to involve all the elements of the national community in planning a society in which everyone finds a place. Furthermore, we do well to note that Africans are increasingly trying to find the solutions best suited to their problems, thanks to the activity of the African Union and effective forms of regional mediation.

6. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is vital to note that *the independence of States can no longer be understood apart from the concept of interdependence*. All States are interconnected both for better and for worse. For this reason, and rightly so, we must be able to distinguish good from evil and call them by their proper names. As history has taught us time and time again, it is when doubt or confusion about what is right and wrong prevails that the greatest evils are to be feared.

If we are to avoid descending into chaos, it seems to me that *two conditions* must be met. First, we must *rediscover* within States and between States *the paramount value of the natural law*, which was the source of inspiration for the rights of nations and for the first formulations of international law. Even if today some people question its validity, I am convinced that its general and universal principles can still help us to understand more clearly the unity of the human race and to foster the

development of the consciences both of those who govern and of those who are governed. Second, we need *the persevering work of Statesmen who are honest and selfless*. In effect, the indispensable professional competence of political leaders can find no legitimation unless it is connected to strong moral convictions. How can one claim to deal with world affairs without reference to this set of principles which is the basis of the "universal common good" spoken of so eloquently by Pope John XXIII in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*? It will always be possible for a leader who acts in accordance with his convictions to reject situations of injustice or of institutional corruption, or to put an end to them. It is precisely in this, I believe, that we rediscover what is today commonly called "good governance". The material and spiritual well-being of humanity, the protection of the freedom and rights of the human person, selfless public service, closeness to concrete conditions: all of these take precedence over every political project and constitute a moral necessity which in itself is the best guarantee of peace within nations and peace between States.

7. It is clear that, *for a believer*, these motivations are enriched by *faith in a God who is the Creator and Father of all*, who has entrusted man with stewardship of the earth and with the duty of brotherly love. This shows how it is in a State's own interest to ensure that religious freedom — which is a natural right, that is, at one and the same time both an individual and social right — is effectively guaranteed for all. As I have had occasion to remark in the past, believers who feel that their faith is respected and whose communities enjoy juridical recognition will work with ever greater conviction in the common project of building up the civil society to which they belong. You will understand then why I speak out on behalf of all Christians who, from Asia to Europe, continue to be victims of violence and intolerance, such as happened recently during the celebration of Christmas. Ecumenical dialogue between Christians and respectful contact with other religions, in particular with Islam, are the best remedy for sectarian rifts, fanaticism or religious terrorism. As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, I will mention but one situation which is a cause of great suffering for me: the plight of Catholic communities in the Russian Federation, which for months now have seen some of their Pastors prevented from returning to them for administrative reasons. The Holy See expects from the Government authorities concrete decisions which will put an end to this crisis, and which are in keeping with the international agreements subscribed to by the modern and democratic Russia. Russian Catholics wish to live as their brethren do in the rest of the world, enjoying the same freedom and the same dignity.

8. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, may all of us who have gathered in this place, which is a symbol of spirituality, dialogue and peace, contribute by our daily actions to the advancement of all the peoples of the earth, in justice and harmony, to their progress towards conditions of greater happiness and greater justice, far from poverty, violence and threats of war! May God pour out his abundant blessings upon you and all those whom you represent. A Happy New Year to everyone!

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n.3 pp.3-4.*

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