



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE
FOR THE TRADITIONAL EXCHANGE OF NEW YEAR GREETINGS***

Monday, 10 January 2005 Your Excellencies,

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*1. The quiet joy which marks this season when the Church re-lives the mystery of the birth of Emmanuel and the mystery of his humble family in Nazareth, is very much a part of this, my yearly meeting with you, the distinguished Ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See. In gathering here today, you in a certain way make visible the great family of the Nations. This joy-filled and long-awaited meeting has opened with the message of good wishes, respect and appreciation for my universal concern on the part of your Dean, Professor Giovanni Galassi, Ambassador of San Marino. I am grateful for his kind words and I reciprocate with good wishes of peace and joy for all of you and your beloved families, and of peace and prosperity for the countries you represent. I offer a particularly cordial word of welcome and good wishes to the thirty-seven Ambassadors who began their mission at the See of Peter in the past year, and to the members of their families.2. These sentiments of joy are overshadowed, unfortunately, by the enormous catastrophe which on 26 December struck different countries of Southeast Asia and as far as the coasts of East Africa. It made for a painful ending of the year just past: a year troubled also by other natural calamities, such as the devastating cyclones in the Indian Ocean and the Antilles, and the plague of locusts which desolated vast regions of Northwest Africa. Other tragedies also cast a shadow on 2004, like the acts of barbarous terrorism which caused bloodshed in Iraq and other countries of the world, the savage attack in Madrid, the terrorist massacre in Beslan, the inhuman acts of violence inflicted on the people of Darfur, the atrocities perpetrated in the Great Lakes region of Africa. These events have caused great anguish and distress, and we would feel a tragic concern for the future of humanity, were it not for the fact that from the cradle of Bethlehem there comes to us a message, both divine and human, of life and more certain hope: in Jesus Christ, who comes into the world as the brother of every man and woman and takes his place at our side, it is God himself who asks us not to yield to discouragement, but to overcome every difficulty, however great it may be, by strengthening the common bonds of our humanity and by making them prevail over all other considerations.3. Your presence here, as representatives of almost all the peoples of the earth, immediately sets before our eyes the great tableau of humanity with its grave and troubling problems and its great and undampened hopes. The Catholic Church, because of her universal nature, is always directly engaged in the great causes for which the men and women of our age struggle and hope. She considers herself a stranger to no people, since wherever there are Christians, the whole body of the Church is called into play; indeed, wherever there is any one individual, we sense a bond of brotherhood. In her presence and her concern for the future of men and women everywhere, the Holy See knows that it can count on Your Excellencies to offer an important service, since it is precisely

the mission of diplomats to transcend borders and to bring peoples and governments together in the desire to cooperate harmoniously, in scrupulous respect for each other's competencies, but at the same time in the quest for a higher common good.⁴ In my [Message for this year's World Day of Peace](#), I called the attention of the Catholic faithful and of all men and women of good will to the exhortation of the Apostle Paul: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good": *vince in bono malum* (Rom 12:21). There is a profound truth underlying these words: in the moral and social sphere, evil takes on the countenance of selfishness and hatred, which is negativity; it can only be overcome by love, which has the positivity of generous and disinterested giving, even to the point of self-sacrifice. This is the heart of the mystery of Christ's birth: to save humanity from the selfishness of sin and its corollary of death, God himself lovingly enters, in Christ, into the fullness of life, into human history, thus raising humanity to the horizon of an even greater life. This is the message -"overcome evil with good"- which I would like to address today to your Excellencies, and through you to the beloved peoples whom you represent and to your Governments. This message also has a specific application to international relations, and it can be a guide to all in meeting the great challenges facing humanity today. Here I would like to point out some of the more significant ones:⁵ The first is *the challenge of life*. Life is the first gift which God has given us, it is the first resource which man can enjoy. The Church is called to proclaim "the Gospel of Life". And the State has as its primary task precisely the safeguarding and promotion of human life. The challenge to life has grown in scale and urgency in recent years. It has involved particularly the *beginning of human life*, when human beings are at their weakest and most in need of protection. Conflicting views have been put forward regarding abortion, assisted procreation, the use of human embryonic stem cells for scientific research, and cloning. The Church's position, supported by reason and science, is clear: the human embryo is a subject identical to the human being which will be born at the term of its development. Consequently whatever violates the integrity and the dignity of the embryo is ethically inadmissible. Similarly, any form of scientific research which treats the embryo merely as a laboratory specimen is unworthy of man. Scientific research in the field of genetics needs to be encouraged and promoted, but, like every other human activity, it can never be exempt from moral imperatives; research using adult stem cells, moreover, offers the promise of considerable success. The challenge to life has also emerged with regard to the very sanctuary of life: *the family*. Today the family is often threatened by social and cultural pressures which tend to undermine its stability; but in some countries the family is also threatened by legislation which at times directly challenges its natural structure, which is and must necessarily be that of a union between a man and a woman founded on marriage. The family, as a fruitful source of life and a fundamental and irreplaceable condition for the happiness of the individual spouses, for the raising of children and for the well-being of society, and indeed for the material prosperity of the nation, must never be undermined by laws based on a narrow and unnatural vision of man. There needs to prevail a just, pure and elevated understanding of human love, which finds in the family its primordial and exemplary expression. *Vince in bono malum*.⁶ The second *challenge* is that of *food*. This world, made wondrously fruitful by its Creator, possesses a sufficient quantity and variety of food for all its inhabitants, now and in the future. Yet the statistics on world hunger are dramatic: hundreds of millions of human beings are suffering from grave malnutrition, and each year millions of children die of hunger or its effects. In fact, the alarm has been raised for some time now, and the leading international organizations have set important targets, at least for reducing the emergency. Concrete proposals have also been put forward, such as those discussed at the [Meeting in New York on hunger and poverty](#) held on 20 September 2004. I had asked Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State, to represent me at that meeting, as a way of demonstrating the Church's great interest in this dramatic problem. Many non-governmental associations have also been generously committed to providing assistance. Yet all this is not enough. An adequate response to this need, which is growing in scale and urgency, calls for a vast moral mobilization of public opinion; the same applies all the more to political leaders, especially in those countries

enjoying a sufficient or even prosperous standard of living. In this regard, I would like to recall an important principle of the Church's social teaching, to which I once again made reference in my [Message for this year's World Day of Peace](#) and included in the recently-published *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: the principle of the universal destination of the earth's goods. While this principle cannot be used to justify collectivist forms of economic policy, it should serve to advance a radical commitment to justice and a more attentive and determined display of solidarity. This is the good which can overcome the evil of hunger and unjust poverty. *Vince in bono malum*.⁷ There is also *the challenge of peace*. As a supreme good and the condition for attaining many other essential goods, peace is the dream of every generation. Yet how many wars and armed conflicts continue to take place - between States, ethnic groups, peoples and groups living in the same territory. From one end of the world to the other, they are claiming countless innocent victims and spawning so many other evils! Our thoughts naturally turn to different countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where recourse to arms and violence has not only led to incalculable material damage, but also fomented hatred and increased the causes of tension, thereby adding to the difficulty of finding and implementing solutions capable of reconciling the legitimate interests of all the parties involved. In addition to these tragic evils there is the brutal, inhuman phenomenon of terrorism, a scourge which has taken on a global dimension unknown to previous generations. How can the great challenge of building peace overcome such evils? As diplomats, you are men and women of peace by profession but also by personal vocation. You know the nature and extent of the means which the international community has at its disposal for keeping or restoring peace. Like my venerable predecessors, I have spoken out countless times, in public statements - especially in my [annual Message for the World Day of Peace](#) - and through the Holy See's diplomatic activity, and I shall continue to do so, pointing out the paths to peace and urging that they be followed with courage and patience. The arrogance of power must be countered with reason, force with dialogue, pointed weapons with outstretched hands, evil with good. Many indeed are the men and women who are working towards this goal with courage and perseverance, and there are some encouraging signs that the great challenge of building peace can be met. *In Africa*, for instance, despite serious relapses into disagreements which appeared to have been resolved, there is a growing common will to resolve and prevent conflicts through a fuller cooperation between the great international organizations and continental groupings, like the African Union: examples of this were had in the meeting of the United Nations Security Council in Nairobi last November to discuss the humanitarian emergency in Darfur and the situation in Somalia, and in the international Conference on the Great Lakes region. *In the Middle East*, the land so dear and sacred to believers in the God of Abraham, armed confrontation appears to be decreasing, with the hope of a political breakthrough in the direction of dialogue and negotiation. Certainly an outstanding example of the possibility of peace can be seen in *Europe*: nations which were once fierce enemies locked in deadly wars are now members of the European Union, which during the past year aimed at further consolidation through the constitutional Treaty of Rome, while at the same time showing an openness to admitting other States willing to accept the requirements of membership. Bringing about an authentic and lasting peace in this violence-filled world calls for a power of good that does not shrink before difficulties. It is a power that human beings on their own cannot obtain or preserve: it is a gift from God. Christ came to bring this gift to mankind, as the angels sang above the manger in Bethlehem: "peace among men with whom he is pleased" (*Lk 2:14*). God loves mankind, and he wants peace for all men and women. We are asked to be active instruments of that peace, and to overcome evil with good. *Vince in bono malum*.⁸ There is another challenge that I wish to mention: *the challenge of freedom*. All of you know how important this is to me, especially because of the history of my native people, yet it is also important to each of you. In your service as diplomats you are rightly concerned to protect the freedom of the peoples you represent, and you are diligent in defending that freedom. Yet freedom is first and foremost a right of each individual. As the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* fittingly states in Article 1 - "all human

beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Article 3 goes on to state that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person". Certainly the freedom of States is also sacred; they need to be free, above all so that they can carry out adequately their fundamental duty of safeguarding both the life and the freedom of their citizens in all their legitimate manifestations. Freedom is a great good, because only by freedom can human beings find fulfilment in a manner befitting their nature. Freedom is like light: it enables one to choose responsibly his proper goals and the right means of achieving them. At the very heart of human freedom is the right to religious freedom, since it deals with man's most fundamental relationship: his relationship with God. Religious freedom is expressly guaranteed in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (cf. Article 18). It was also the subject - as all of you are well aware - of a solemn Declaration of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, one which began with the significant words *Dignitatis Humanae*. In many States, freedom of religion is a right which is not yet sufficiently or adequately recognized. Yet the yearning for freedom of religion cannot be suppressed: as long as human beings are alive, it will always be present and pressing. Consequently I repeat today an appeal which the Church has already made on numerous occasions: "It is necessary that religious freedom be everywhere provided with an effective constitutional guarantee, and that respect be shown for the high duty and right of man freely to lead his religious life in society" (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 15). There need be no fear that legitimate religious freedom would limit other freedoms or be injurious to the life of civil society. On the contrary: together with religious freedom, all other freedoms develop and thrive, inasmuch as freedom is an indivisible good, the prerogative of the human person and his dignity. Neither should there be a fear that religious freedom, once granted to the Catholic Church, would intrude upon the realm of political freedom and the competencies proper to the State: the Church is able carefully to distinguish, as she must, what belongs to Caesar from what belongs to God (cf. *Mt* 22:21). She actively cooperates in promoting the common good of society, inasmuch as she repudiates falsehood and educates to truth, she condemns hatred and contempt, and she calls for a spirit of brotherhood; always and everywhere she encourages - as history clearly shows - works of charity, science and the arts. She asks only for freedom, so that she can effectively cooperate with all public and private institutions concerned with the good of mankind. True freedom always aims at overcoming evil with good. *Vince in bono malum*. Your Excellencies, in the year now beginning I am certain that, as you carry out your lofty mandate, you will continue to accompany the Holy See in its daily efforts to meet, in accordance with its specific responsibilities, the abovementioned challenges which affect all humanity. Jesus Christ, whose birth we have celebrated in these days, was foretold by the Prophet as *Admirabilis Consiliarius, Princeps Pacis*, "Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace" (*Is* 9:5). May the light of his word, his spirit of justice and brotherhood, and the gift of his peace, so needed and so desired, a peace which he offers to all, shine upon your lives, your beloved families and your dear ones, upon your noble countries and upon all humanity.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n.2 pp.3, 10.

© Copyright 2004 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana