



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS*

Monday, 10 January 1972

We thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for the wise and kindly words that you, as Dean of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, have addressed to us, in your own name and in that of the other members of the Corps. You have synthesized the main lines of the document with which we commemorated the eightieth anniversary of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of our predecessor, Leo XIII, and you have well stressed what the Church is doing to make men more conscious of their responsibility, both on the individual and on the international level, to commit themselves to the task of uplifting society in a more just and true world, and to respect the freedom of others, by doing all that they can «to build up active and lived solidarity» (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 47).

For this we are grateful to you. We are likewise grateful to all of you, gentlemen, for this yearly encounter, which brings us special satisfaction.

As you know, on the sixth of January is celebrated the solemnity of the Epiphany. This feast seems to us well suited for pointing out the value of your yearly visit to us, who feel ourself so unequal to our task of representing Christ, God and Man, the Prince of Peace, the Author of justice. The occasion enables us to speak to you, gentlemen, on a theme emerging from the reasons that underlie the presence of diplomats of the various States around the Vicar of Christ.

In other words, the occasion enables us to speak of the professional relationships between the Church and the civil world, or, to use openly a current phrase, on the so-called «policy of the Church». For this purpose we are immediately assisted by what the Council said on the matter. The Council spoke in affirmations so clear and luminous that from the very start they dispel any misunderstanding, let us say even any uneasiness, to which this phrase might give rise in the extremely sensitive minds of the men of today.

The Church's policy? This is it, in the words of the Second Vatican Council: «The Church, founded on the Redeemer's love, contributes to the wider application of justice and charity within and between nations. By preaching the truth of the gospel and shedding light on all areas of human activity through her teaching and the example of the faithful, she shows respect for the political freedom and responsibility of citizens and fosters these values... It is always and everywhere legitimate for her to preach the faith with true freedom, to teach her social doctrine, and to discharge her duty among men without hindrance. She also has the right to pass moral judgments, even on matters touching the political order, whenever basic personal rights of the salvation of souls: make such judgments necessary (*Gaudium et Spes*, 76). These words were echoed last autumn by the bishops gathered in the Synod. As you are well aware, the bishops chose, as one of the themes that were the object of the proposals recommended to us, «Justice in the World» as a fruit of the Church's presence; and they expressed, the hope that «every people, as active and responsible members of human society, should be able to cooperate for the attainment of the common good on an equal footing with other peoples» (III, International Action, 8 c).

Justice, gentlemen, is a value which resides in relationships in every field of living together: economic, social, political, cultural and religious. It is a value which involves all; individuals, families, social groups (whatever be the reason for their existence and operation), public powers and institutions working on a continental or world scale. All are therefore called to contribute to its realization, which is identical with the realization of genuine peace, each individual, however, making the contribution which corresponds to his nature and vocation. This is highly important and is also a demand of justice.

Now we must ask ourselves these questions: what role does the Church have to play in this vast field, which involves all the political forces of the world? What is the task that she has the duty to carry out? What are its characteristics?

We must first of all clearly affirm – though this may seem a paradox in view of the function that we have claimed for the Church in the international field – the Church's separateness from political activity as specifically understood. The Church's mission is different; it is essentially spiritual. In no way does she indulge in active political action, indeed she keeps herself distinct and aloof from it: «Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's» (*Mt.* 22, 21). As was stressed by the Second Vatican Council, «the role and competence of the Church being what it is, she must in no way be confused with the political community, nor bound to any political system. For she is at Once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendence of the human person. In their proper spheres, the political community and the Church are mutually independent and self-governing. Yet, by a different title, each serves the personal-and social vocation of the same human beings» (*Gaudium et Spes*, 76). In like manner, the Church shuns all violent action, for she takes as her sole model Christ, who was «gentle and humble in heart» (*Mt.* 11, 29), she takes her inspiration from the Gospel law of love, She aims to persuade with her immeasurable store of hope, both present and eschatological, knowing that the law of true progress is not

revolution but evolution and transformation. This presupposes a change from within, one whose fruits are lasting, for they spring from inner freedom, from the renewed vigour of resolutions that take their origin in «a love that transcends man» and therefore from «a genuine readiness to serve» (cf. *Octogesima Adveniens*, n. 45)

Thus it is evident that this aloofness of the Church does not mean inaction and disengagement on the part of citizens, the laity, who are faithful to ecclesial life; in particular it does not mean absence from the life of the nation. Indeed they want to be the leaven in the flour (cf. *Mt 7- 13:33*). The Letter of Diognetus defines them, we may say, as the soul of the world: «Christians are to the world what the soul is to the body» (*Epistula ad Diognetum*, 6, 1: *PG 2*, 1173). As the Council stated, lay people, who draw their life from ecclesial communion, are called through their «prophetic and royal» duty to be in the forefront in collaborating «vigorously so that by human labour, technical skill, and civic culture created goods may be perfected for the benefit of every last man, according to the design of the Creator and the light of his Word. Let them work to see that created goods are more fittingly distributed among men, and that such goods in their own way lead to general progress in human and Christian liberty» (*Lumen Gentium*, 36).

These therefore are the reasons why the Church, though in herself and essentially aloof from political action, nevertheless claims a place in the civil world. In the first place; because she is made for men, and made up of men. By her profession of religious faith, by her healing and sanctifying teaching, and by her upholding of the primacy of spiritual reality, she inculcates in them respect for the rights of each, and the fulfilment of the duties of each for the establishment of an organic and genuine brotherhood. The second and principal reason is that she is called to this mission by the mandate received from her Founder, that of saving man, communicating to him the Word that sets free and the Life that sanctifies, and thus of collaborating in the complete raising up of man.

It is therefore obvious that the Church also cannot but feel herself obliged to make her own contribution to the realization in the world of peace in justice and justice in peace. And this contribution, as the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* observes, she makes in particular by bringing «light kindled from the Gospel» and placing at mankind's «disposal those saving resources which the Church herself, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, receives from her Founder» (n° 3).

This is the reason for which we proposed in 1968 that in the whole world, and in particular within the Church, the Day of Peace should be celebrated as a concrete testimony of that contribution to the building up of tranquillity of order to which the Church feels herself strictly obliged. We gladly take this occasion to express here also our heartfelt appreciation of the attention that individual Heads of State, the authorities and the peoples of their States, give each, year to our initiative, and in particular, this year, to our appeal, «If you want Peace, work for justice», which, as you know, is the main theme of our message, for the celebration of the fifth World Day of Peace.

We must all work for this end, with complete sincerity, for the service of man. For the demands of justice, gentlemen can only be gathered in the light of truth, that truth which is man – man, who is revealed in his essential components, in all his dimensions and his lawful aspirations when he is seen in Christ, true God and true Man, in whom humanity finds its full expression and affirmation.

The Church's contribution to the realization of justice takes concrete form firstly in an activity of educating its own members. This ceaseless and many-sided activity is aimed not solely at making men ever more conscious of the content of justice in its widening extent, but also at giving rise to, developing and strengthening the resolve to translate these demands into concrete terms, of daily life. This will be done by conquering, through the power of love, the limitations of one's own selfishness and that of others, by influencing, in order also to humanize them, legal structures in case's in which these structures may have become an instrument of injustice.

When necessary, therefore, the Church's presence – which finds its normal expression in positive forms, forms of advancement and exhortation – can sometimes become one of healthy criticism: it can be a touchstone encouraging a continuous testing as to whether the conditions reached really correspond to the ideal of justice and peace. The bishops meeting in the Synod noted this duty in their statement: that educating to justice can awaken a critical sense, which will lead us to reflect on the society in Which we live and on its values», and in their recognition of the fact that in certain cases the mission of bishops «demands that we should courageously denounce injustice, with charity». (III, Educating to Justice).

In this regard, gentlemen, may we draw your attention for a few moments to what is perhaps the most disconcerting phenomenon of our time: the arms race. It is an epidemic phenomenon; no people now seems able to escape its contagion. The result is that world expenditure on armaments today already adds up to astronomical figures: every country shares in it; Great and medium ones, even the weak nations those of the so called «Third World».

What is most disconcerting that this phenomenon is occurring at time when men have become more aware of their own dignity and have livelier sense of being members of the same human family; when individual's and people are more keenly, aspiring to peace in justice, and when among the younger generation – for many of whom the human family is already a living unity – protests against the arms race are becoming ever more widespread.

What is the explanation for so deep rooted and distressing a contradiction between the growing sincere desire for peace on the one hand and the growing fearsome production of instruments of war on the other?

These are some who see in armaments, at least for the great and medium Powers, as it were a necessity of their economic system, which is based on their production, if they are to avoid economic imbalance and mass unemployment.

But such a motivation is radically opposed to the spirit of civilization and still more to that, of Christianity. How can it be admitted that there is no way of finding work for hundreds of thousands of workers other than setting them to making instruments of death?

This is all the more true in that, we are living in an era where there is an urgent need in many fields to undertake quite different constructive and beneficial works: of vast proportions on a continental and world scale in order to eliminate the scourges of hunger, ignorance and disease.

For these unfortunately as yet not all that the tragic human situation of so many of our brother, demands has been done, in spite of the generosity of so many people. There is likewise a need to safeguard goods that are indispensable for the lives of all; for the example, the protection of the environment from the various polluting factors.

It is further observed that there continues to be a widespread conviction that while the policy of armaments cannot be justified in itself, it can however be explained by the fact that, if peace is possible today, it can only be one based on a balance of armed forces.

«Whatever is to be thought of this method of deterrence», declares the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, «men should be convinced that the arms race in which so many countries are engaged is not a safe way to preserve a steady peace. Nor is the so-called balance resulting from this race a sure and authentic peace» (n° 81).

For this reason the realization of peace in justice demands – and attempts to attain this are already being carried out with courageous and wise initiatives – that the opposite road be followed: that of progressive disarmament. For its part, the Church, the People of God, cannot but enliven its commitment to educate man to have confidence in man; that is, to see others not as probable aggressors but as possible future collaborators, made capable of doing good for the building of a more human world.

But ultimately this presence of the Church in civil society is not limited to being simply a presence. Where necessary, where possible, where required, always with respect for the exigencies of the Church's nature – this presence is also service: brotherly; humble and concerned service for the Church, in carrying out her activity in the world, is not moved by ambition and earthly aims; she «seeks but a single goal to carry forward the work of Christ himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit. Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth; to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served», as was declared in that most widely quoted Constitution of the Council on the Church and the modern world (*Gaudium et Spes*, 3). The image of herself that the Church presents today to the world is essentially that of being at the service of men, of being open to the world in order to serve it in its problems (cf. Y. M.-J. Congar, *L'Eglise et monde dans la perspective de Vatican II* in *L'Eglise dans le monde de ce temps*, T. III, *Réflexions et perspectives*, Paris 1967, pp. 32 ff.).

The Church wishes to serve the community of peoples by dedicating herself above all, as her essential and specific task, to educating consciences to forming the hearts of men, who, when they accept the proclamation of salvation know that they are loved by God, directed to him as the centre of their lives and united in him and for him in love for all, their brethren who are in his image and redeemed by his only begotten Son. It is an enterprise of universal and general scope, which by divine command knows no limit of people or time or space (cf. *Mt 28, 18-20*).

In particular furthermore, the Church offers her collaboration in serving mankind for the most urgent problems at given moments of history. Today she knows that this activity is especially to be directed on the level of culture and of social assistance, where the lamentable situations and the tragic consequences of mankind afflictions which we have already referred to are mainly to be seen. Thus the Church promotes the advance of culture also among the minority groups in individual nations (Congar, op., 59; cf. 53-62). This she does especially through fostering literacy, because «basic education is the first objective of a plan of development» (*Populorum Progressio*, 35). She strives that the most assiduous care to be given to the field of education, so that schools may form the whole man for the professional ethical and social responsibilities of life. This service, furthermore is extended as far as possible to the various forms of assistance (the struggle against hunger, against unemployment against disease and against social insecurity).

Following the example of her founder, the Church cannot but be aware of the need to contribute the realization of peace through these innumerable good initiatives. These initiatives of hers are undertaken in so many countries of the world, often in advance of, or in integration with, those fostered by civil society. They are aimed above all at relieving and raising up the poor, that is those who are suffering or who are stricken with affliction or neglect or who are in a condition of weakness, of whatever nature this may be. Certainly; amid so much activity some defects or perhaps even some abuses and distortions may occur. But one cannot but feel amazed and saddened that such negative aspects, which are quite marginal, are taken as pretext for discrediting the whole area of the initiatives that we have referred to. If they are evaluated with serene objectivity, these latter cannot but reveal themselves for what they really are: the testimony of an active love and the expression of an authentic human nobility, deserving rather of guidance and support than of indiscriminate aspersions.

It is in this sense, gentlemen, that we speak of the «policy» of the Church: the Church's policy is nothing other than a keen readiness, a deeply felt demand to carry out her commitment, her mandate, and her vocation to announce the Gospel and to serve others. This was also the significance and the value of the recent Synod on the topic of justice; and, as we have said, the celebration of the Day of Peace has had, now has, and will have, no other purpose.

The Church stands side by side with all nations that work sincerely for the raising up of their peoples; she does so at the cost of persevering service and even of sacrifice. She offers her collaboration to all, so that the strong desire, to be seen today at all levels, for greater respect for

man may be no mere vague and empty Utopian aspiration, but may become a concrete reality. We invite everyone to work sincerely for this goal. We express the wish that the Church's offer may always receive a response in the good will and commitment of all States, while we pray the Lord to grant his aid where human strength fails.

With these wishes we assure each of your nations of our great esteem and of our fatherly benevolence. For each of them we desire the fulfilment of all the happiness they wish for, and we invoke upon all the blessing of God, without whom human fragility ultimately can do nothing. May he fulfil the aspiration we all share for the prosperity of the world, and may he grant to all your peoples to live in justice and in peace.

**ORa* n.3 p.6-7, 12.