



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE*

Saturday, 12 January 1974

Your Excellency, Gentlemen,

We are deeply grateful to your worthy spokesman for his very kind words and we thank you all heartily for your presence here and for the respectful tribute you wish to pay us in this way, every year, on the occurrence of the Christmas and New Year feasts.

This time naturally brings back to our mind the subject of peace, which is both an old and a new one; and the meeting with the Diplomatic Corps makes us think about it even more intensely. For you diplomats indeed, it is not just a word calling for joyful wishes or sad forecasts, or even just a theoretical subject of meditation and study. It is, we can say, the centre and the purpose of your»mission«, with all the rich significance attached to this noble term.

You are not just onlookers, beneficiaries or victims of the ups and downs of peace in the world. You are, for a special reason and with a quite particular responsibility, the protectors and defenders of peace.

A fairly widespread opinion today, based on approximate knowledge or on memories of bygone ages, seems to remember only some exterior aspects of diplomacy, aspects that are more decorative than substantial or certain manifestations in poor taste, degenerate forms of real diplomatic action, which may, alas, have been current in certain periods of the past, but which are rejected, today, by the conscience of those dedicated to this high service and which, moreover, would no longer correspond, at present, to the requirements and aims of this service itself.

Nowadays, in fact, the development of the relations of forces and interests has the effect that the weal or woe of one part of the international community cannot be considered the good of ill or

another part of it: and happily the world finds itself almost obliged to seek the common advantage together, if it wishes to avoid common injury or even common catastrophe.

It is true that even among those most responsible for the lives of peoples, not all succeed in grasping or keeping in mind, as they should, this fundamental truth. And that is why it is not uncommon, particularly among those who are or think they are the strongest, for one or other, to succumb to the temptation of solving situations of tension or conflicts in his favour, by force or violence.

But it is no less true that reality takes vengeance for these miscalculations. Unfortunately, those who pay the price are as often as not innocent victims, among whom there may sometimes figure those very persons who had endeavoured to dissuade the protagonists.

It is, therefore, more necessary than ever that the community of nations should be able to combat effectively the reasons of force – which are frequently unjust and which, today more than in the past, prove powerless to ensure the general advantage or even the advantage of those who have resulted to it – with the force of reason, justice and fair and generous understanding of the rights and interests of all.

The effort in question is such a vast one, such a noble one – such a difficult one, too – that it is impossible to stress its importance enough and to pass over in silence the serious commitment it calls for an effort in which diplomacy worthy of the name is called to play a very important part.

Diplomacy has been defined as «the act of making peace», but it has been thought possible to tax this definition with over-simplification. Many other activities, indeed, fall into the framework of diplomacy. And how can we ignore the activity of politicians and men of thought, who contribute to forming the conscience of men and the public opinion of peoples? It cannot be denied, however, that the pursuit of peace is, as we have just said, the central point of the diplomatic mission in international life. And to say so is not just to hand out praise, which, in any case, would often be merited. It is to recognize what is for you the very essence of your mission, your purpose, your programme: to make peace.

This means in the first place protecting it and defending it where it exists; and then re-establishing it where it has ceased to exist. This presupposes that with great wisdom and indefatigable patience the attempt will be made to solve according to justice and fairness the questions dividing States or Governments, that everything will be done to prevent opposition from being exasperated, and conflicting positions from reaching the point of rupture, that all possible formulas of fair reconciliation will be studied and proposed; that alongside the just defence of the interests and the honour of one's own side, there will be the equally just understanding of, and respect for, the reasons of the other side and the requirements of the general good. That is the specific task – and what a noble one! – of diplomacy.

In this task, the diplomacy of the States has the Holy See as its ally and collaborator: a staunch ally, whenever it is a question of safeguarding or re-establishing a just and substantial peace; a collaborator which, though having its own specific nature and means, does not hesitate to unite its action with that of the States and their representatives, in order to further peaceful relations among the nations, on the basis of the principles that must govern a well-ordered common life, on the international plane

We asked ourself recently, in a circumstance similar to the present one (Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 12 January 1970) if the Holy See was «right to use this form of activity which is called diplomacy». Our answer, then as in other circumstances, was affirmative, provided it is a question of real diplomacy: the diplomacy that takes as its aim peace within each people and its relations with other peoples

We continue to ask our self this question. And it is not just to confirm our responsible attitude in the presence of the doubts or contestations that may arise. It is rather to study more deeply and define more clearly the essential reasons for the participation of the Holy See in the life of peoples and in the problems of their mutual relations, a participation which is resolved not to limit itself to the enunciation of general principles, but which, in the forms characteristic of our moral and spiritual mission, does not hesitate to take concrete action, if necessary.

This attitude, you know as we do, gives rise to criticism. Some people see in it a kind of «compromise» which, far from elevating the Holy See, lowers it, on the contrary – and the Church with it – to the status of a «power», one among so many others, even if it keeps its particular distinctive features. Without turning it away completely from its mission, this attitude, they say, makes the Church less free, less «credible» in the exercise of this mission which is a «prophetic» one, consisting of announcing and denouncing, without being afraid of breaking with a changeable, aged reality, which must soon give way to a new world, still in gestation.

We are not closed to these voices which come from different directions, nor offended by their tone, which is sometimes pressing and almost impetuous. We are always ready to reflect again with a serious serene conscience, on our altitudes and on the methods of our action, in order that they may meet better and better, to the extent that that depends on us, the requirements of the apostolic ministry and the old and new needs of the times in which we live

But, if we are not mistaken, what the Church and the Holy See is reproached with here is with not taking a clear and active altitude by proclaiming and accelerating the decline of a world order that is deemed obsolete and decayed, in order to hasten the rapid establishment, in its place, of a new order, which is portrayed with the messianic features of justice, freedom, perfect equality, without discrimination *de iure* or *de facto*.

It is thought that the Church and the Holy See, to the extent to which they support initiatives aimed

at easing states of tension or curing social wounds, to the extent to which they facilitate the suspension of the conflicts in progress or seek to prevent others, are playing into the hand of «conservatism», preventing or delaying the day of liberating revolution. Some people do not hesitate to propose the latter as the plan best suited to the maturation of the times, the aspirations of peoples – particularly oppressed peoples – and even, it is added, to the Chi rattan view of history, for which lesson they seek for demonstrations and proofs even of a theological nature.

Confronted by criticisms of this kind, the first consideration that comes into our mind is that certain radical tendencies are not only very often inaccurate and unjust owing to their partial or one-sided way of judging reality and the responsibilities that correspond to it, but are also dangerous into the bargain, both because of what they would like to see carried out and because of what they do not want to see carried out or what they manage to prevent from being carried out. In other words, by striving for radical upheavals – which, very often, are far from respecting the limits of the licit – the situations reached may possibly be less just and less stable than those it was desired to change. Above all it may well happen that energies and efforts are wasted in impulsive attempts, whereas they could be used in a far more useful way for achievements that are less rapid, perhaps, and less sensational, and not entirely satisfactory, no doubt, but which represent nevertheless a real step toward for mankind.

What seems to us more in harmony with our mission, and with what the Church can and must do in favour of the world whose lot she shares, though she is distinct from it, is that the Church should be, of course, a prophetic voice, the city of man's conscience, as it were, but that at the same time she should understand human reality, with its harshness, its inadequacy, its resistance to conformity with the ideals that mankind should and must pursue with courage and tenacity, in order to be worthy of itself and equal to its responsibilities before God and before history.

Instead of merely deploring or denouncing shortcomings, we think that our duty in this field is to recall and clarify principles, to encourage men to apply them faithfully, and not to refuse our collaboration in the concrete attempts to solve the problems that this application involves; not, of course, as regards the technical aspects which are outside the sphere of our competence, but as regards the moral and human aspects of justice and fairness, which are no less important than the former.

This effort of contact with concrete problems, which Statesmen and diplomats tackle daily, helps us to realize more and more fully the complexity of things and the difficulties to be overcome. This does not induce us, of course, to excuse what is not excusable – abuse of power, excess in repression, use of torture, undue economic pressure, etc – or to be easily content with minimal or insufficient results; but it leads us to assume attitudes that are conscientious and responsible in appreciation, generous in cooperation

All that will let you know, Excellencies and Gentlemen, the spirit which you and your Governments,

your peoples and their communities, and the whole international community, can expect to find in us and in the Holy See: a spirit of friendship which, even if it excludes an indulgence that would be out of place, always aims at encouraging and helping those in charge in the just, noble and difficult enterprises which the life of their nations and the life of the family of peoples present as challenges to their wisdom and goodwill.

As our words have in view above all what constitutes your Mission more specifically, we mean the relations of peoples with one another, we will tell you that it is in this spirit of friendship that we follow the problems of peace. And we conceive the latter not just, according to its first and rather negative acceptance, as absence of conflict, but in its wider and more complete meaning of good and friendly relations.

The invocation of peace frequently recurs on our lips, with the exhortation to pursue it and the invitation to play to obtain it. But we do not intend our interest in such a great and fundamental cause to halt there. You are witnesses of our persevering efforts, you who are also, in a way, among the most direct collaborators of the Holy See in this field. It is to you, in fact, that it turns most often – as it turns to its own representatives in your countries – to get information, to collect and compare data and opinions, to discuss situations, to take counsel with you, sometimes, for peace initiatives.

You know, for example, the interest that the Holy See continues to manifest in one of the essential problems which are at the basis of a sure and lasting peace: the establishment of relations and exchanges in conformity with equity between the countries that have arrived at a high degree of development and those which are endeavouring to reach it, with enthusiasm, but often at the cost of great sacrifices.

This problem has been the object of our repeated statements, in particular in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, and it remains one of the points that have a very special claim on the attention of the Holy See. So we have followed with the keenest interest, in this connection, the recent contacts between the European Community of the Nine and the African countries, to draw up a possible model of organic cooperation or of economic, technical and commercial association. This negotiation, both because of the number and quality of the countries participating and on account of the breadth and importance of the purposes it proposes may really be a test of what the wisdom and courage of Governments, their capacity of vision and political imagination, and finally their spirit of collaboration, are capable of doing to meet objective needs of essential importance for the future of the human family.

One cannot fail to point out the highly moral character of initiatives of this kind and to hope that they may be multiplied. May those in charge not let themselves be discouraged by the difficulties! May they be able to harmonize the reasons of prudence with those of generosity, without forgetting that today, even more than in the past, the general advantage is ultimately the condition

of the real and stable prosperity of each of their nations.

The Holy See has set its heart, as you see, on being present in the family of international life. And it is present, thanks to the network of relations that the Diplomatic Corps presents and implements here, relations that are also maintained and fostered by our representatives in your different countries. Let us tell you, in conclusion, what this presence of the Holy See in international life aims at.

In the first place it aims at promoting honourable and peaceful contacts among the peoples at a level of responsibilities; then at encouraging the method of human and courteous dialogue, at substituting it, if possible, for the rumous and murderous clash of arms and the precarious balance of irreconcilable interests always ready to spring up with one-sided claims. Finally it aims, this presence of the Holy See, at creating not just a truce in conflicts between nations, but the taste, the honour, the stability of peace, so that the insuperable differences – ethnical, geographical, economic and cultural – will no longer be causes of rivalries and fratricidal snuggles, but will become on the contrary motives of brotherly understanding and complementary action, in a unique and superior tribute to justice. With these words, we are referring – quite clearly, it seems to us – to the situations which, on the threshold of this new year, appear as pathological cases for achieving concord among men, cases which offer themselves to the wise, the persevering, and let us add further, the Christian therapy of a real, dynamic peace.

If these painful abscesses persist, in spite of so many efforts expended in the course of the past year, if they continue to hold the anxious attention of the whole world, how much more they claim yours, Gentlemen. Are not diplomats, in some way, the doctors of the social body, when it is affected or threatened with the virus of discord and war?

But we all know that goodwill and human means are not enough. So, in order that your action, the action of the diplomats and statesmen of the whole world, may be effective and crowned with success in the course of the year that is beginning, we will invoke on it, and on the help-modest, but generously offered – that the Holy See will always be happy to give you, the abundance of Almighty God's blessings.

* *ORa* n.4 p.3-4.