



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 11 January 1975

We are very grateful to the distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for their presence and for the courteous good wishes which they wish to express to us today through their Dean at the beginning of the new year that Providence has allowed us to begin. We heartily reciprocate these wishes to each one of you to your families, to the Heads of State and to all the people whom you represent.

With richness of words and reflections your spokesman has emphasized the lofty symbolism – one of the symbolisms – of the rite of the Opening of the Holy Door which we had the good fortune to carry out on Christmas Eve, with the presence also of the representative of the States which maintain official relations with this Apostolic See.

This was an event of a religious nature, an event which was meant to remind the Catholic world, and in addition all those in the world who are sensitive to the spiritual and moral values that the Christian message has, in so many ways, in common with the other religious confessions, of the duty of inward renewal and of reconciliation. Reconciliation in the first place with God, in the intimacy of one's own heart and conscience, and then, by an inevitable consequence and at the same time as a necessary condition, with all one's brethren, in life and in social relationships.

For this very season, such a reminder of a religious and moral nature could not fail to have importance also for the life and the relationships of that great family of nations which at this moment you render, as it were, symbolically present.

The message of reconciliation that the Catholic Church extends to mankind in this Holy Year seems to us indeed to have a very special importance precisely for the international community,

no less than for the peoples that live together in the different national communities and for the groups into which they are divided.

We shall not conceal from you that our gaze cannot fall today without growing preoccupation upon the developments of a world situation that – as it seems to us and to not a few others appears to be gradually deteriorating to the extent that it causes some to speak of a transition, already begun, from a «post war» to a «pre-war» phase.

This is a prospect – should it in fact come to correspond to reality – whose fearful, indeed terrifying import we would not need to underline to you who are the experts in such problems.

Has there not perhaps been in fact hitherto a sort of convergence of judgments – and of fears – concerning what could be the meaning for the world of the outbreak of a conflict that –should it prove impossible to keep it in proportion, always very painful for the victims thereof, but at least territorially limited – would almost inevitably become atomic, because of its seriousness and extension.

This «terror», of which laborious efforts are being made to ensure a kind of «balance», has been, indeed, and is currently considered to be the main, if not perhaps the only guarantee against happenings that would appear for that veil reason too dangerous for the very people who would have felt sufficiently strong to be able to win by surviving the other contenders.

As you know, the Holy See has never shown itself enthusiastic for the formula of the «balance of terror» as a means of safeguarding peace. Without ignoring the practical, even if in cause negative: advantages that such a formula can temporarily present, it has always seemed to this Apostolic See to be too detached from the moral basis upon which alone peace can prosper. It has likewise seemed too extravagant. through continual competition in equalling and surpassing one another in terms of power and arms, too extravagant, we say, of means and energies that ought on the contrary to be devoted to quite other ends – to the well-being and progress of all peoples. It has seemed destructive of thoughts of harmony and mutual understanding; it has seemed, finally, too fragile a shield against the onslaught of temptations to predominance and oppression which are at the root of so many situations of tension and conflict, also because of the justified reasons of defence that they evoke or sometimes, because of the clanger of an erroneous calculation in preventing the feared manifestations resulting to one's own disadvantage.

This fragility is confirmed unfortunately, by the present situation, to which we have referred.

Our good wishes for peace – traditional at this New Year period, still suffused as it is by the light of Christmas, and as it were made spontaneous through the presence of such a distinguished group of persons who have as their specific mission precisely that of preventing and resolving misunderstandings and conflicts and of ensuring good, or at least correct relations between States

– this year become more lively, more insistent, more urgent, almost imploring.

They implore God, the author of peace, but they implore also men, in particular those who have the greater possibility, and upon whom therefore rests more heavily the responsibility, of taking action in this field.

To the voice of force – which still seems to wish to justify its own reasons for a violent, or at least compelling, solution of the confusion of interests and rights that have been forming anew since the end of the last world war, and which are becoming steadily more complicated – we must untiringly oppose the strong and serene voice of reason. That voice which is the function and special mission of wise and good diplomacy, not to allow oneself to be intimidated by the astuteness of others or enfeebled by one's own lack of confidence, lest one find oneself unexpectedly imposed upon by the clamour of arms.

Yes, the world needs – today perhaps more than in past years – the courageous and persevering action of wise diplomacy oriented towards the safeguarding of peace, in all its dimensions, in its causes and in the conditions that render it possible and secure.

Our message is therefore one of praise for all those who are dedicating themselves in this way (and more than once we have had occasion to express this sentiment directly in the meetings which we have recently been able to have with Jon: of these «makers of peace»). It is a message of encouragement not to lose heart when confronted with difficulties, but to redouble efforts, with indomitable commitment, with tenacity, with lucidity and wisdom. Having faith at all times in the human arguments for justice, the foundation of all true and durable peace. Our message is and wishes to be one of reassurance of the ever firm will of this Apostolic See to give to the cause and to the causes of peace not only its moral support but also all the concrete help which is within its power.

In this there lie, we believe, the profound significance and importance of the fact that the Holy See is accepted and received with almost universal deference as a member of the international Community. And in this we see one of the essential purposes of the diplomatic relations which the Holy See has established and continues to establish with an ever increasing number of States.

We would also like to avail ourselves of this present opportunity to repeat some reflections which we have had occasion to make more than once with reference to the so-called «diplomacy of the Holy See».

This diplomacy is not inspired by a desire for self-affirmation and for human prestige or a wish to interfere in matters which are alien to the nature of the Catholic Church. It is not, therefore, the expression of a spirit alien to the Gospel. It is not in contradiction with the evangelizing mission of the Church, still less can it be directed to mating difficulties or obstacles to this mission.

On the contrary, the first and fundamental purpose of this diplomacy is precisely to render faithful service to the Church, to her possibilities of life and of action, in all places and in all historical, political or social situations, and to her legitimate freedom even if this service is not easy and not always adequately appreciated. The first and essential quality which is demanded of those who are taken into this service is therefore, an unhesitating faith, linked to a determination to exercise in this way, sincerely and disinterestedly, their own ecclesial ministry.

But this service of the Church is not without importance for the interests of civil society itself. This is so not only because of the «religious peace» to which this service is oriented, with due recognition of the rights of religion and at the same time with respect for the legitimate competence and the high, noble and necessary purposes proper to the State. It is also because of the guarantee which an organized development of the Church's activities offers to the education of citizens in moral and civic responsibility, in peaceful coexistence and in cooperation for the proper progress of the nation as a whole.

Then there is a commitment which the Holy See and its diplomacy consider particularly theirs: that which centres on the field of «human rights». These rights have already been accepted and professed by States and by their supranational organizations, and it is for the respect and ever more complete promotion of these rights that the Church offers the collaboration which is called for by fidelity to her teaching and which is rendered more valuable by the universality of presence and of her action.

On the vast scene of the contemporary world, the Holy See wishes to be a factor of international, modern and peaceful life, in faithfulness to its own principles and at the same time in loyalty to the other members of the community of nations, even if their respective positions do not always completely coincide on crucial problems. It advocates a diplomacy directed to dealing effectively with the ever new and increasingly complex problems that claim its attention, such as the problems of population, hunger and ecology, and that in a spirit of justice and cooperation, not of competition, let alone domination.

In other words, the Holy See intends to act with strength in order that operative principles of solidarity and brotherhood may replace those which are ever present as a continuing threat to the peaceful coexistence of peoples, namely egoism whether national, group-oriented, racial or cultural.

In other words again, and coming back to the symbolism spoken of by your eminent spokesman, the Holy See wishes to encourage men and peoples not to shut themselves in but to open their understanding and their hearts to the rights, the needs, the legitimate and justified expectations and aspiration of others, of all others, even those who are less close, or who, because of their weakness, are not able to support their requests with threats.

This causes us, as it must, to call for timely and effective action on peace, not to limit ourself only to those parts of the world where the situation appears capable of spreading the dangers of conflict to even wider areas, even to the point of involving the great Powers themselves and the groups allied to them. We are thinking here of the Middle East, about which we have had to speak so often and about which we must speak again, and of the new and more threatening complications caused by the so-called «war of energy sources». We repeat our pressing appeal to face these very serious problems, not only with political wisdom and foresight but in a spirit of justice and equity, and with respect for the norms of the rights of peoples.

There are other places in the world where peace does not reign and where the peoples continue to suffer the horrors of war or poverty or hunger or misery, if not to the complete, at least to the partial indifference of public opinion, tired or preoccupied with other concerns. We make our own these peoples' plea for tranquillity and justice. We are thinking in particular of the regions of Vietnam – so long the centre of the world's attention – and of Cambodia, which are witnessing in these days a menacing rekindling of the smouldering coals of hostility and guerrilla warfare, tending to endanger an equilibrium that has remained unstable even where agreements had committed all parties concerned to a gradual normalization of a situation that had been turbulent for too long. May the conscience of the civilized world not forget or disregard a tragedy that is no less painful because it is prolonged.

May the doors of understanding and compassion open also within the individual nations, where situations of conflict or of tension continue to produce disorder, not infrequently of a bloody nature, and reprisals no less serious, agitation and heavy-handed repression.

We would like the appeal which we made for the Holy Year to bring forth many fruits of reconciliation, generosity and forgiveness; and, at least, lead all to reflect seriously on the ever-present duty of never forgetting, even in the face of contrasting positions or in the clash of divergent interests, the respect that is due to the fundamental rights and dignity of the human person, including that of the enemy and even, within the limits of prudence, that of the guilty.

We could not end our talk without a frank word of optimism, that Christian optimism which imposes itself because it is based on the beneficent action of that Divine Providence which dominates history and to which we entrust in prayer the desires of all mankind, longing for peace and justice, serenity of life, well-being, and that moral, cultural and social progress to which every member of the great human family aspires. And likewise that human optimism that derives from a consideration of the capacity and fundamental goodness of the human race its will to realize on earth, through everyone's cooperation, its dream of a life worthy to be lived by all.

Perhaps more than a vision of the future, it is a hope. It is a wish – the same wish which we express, through you to the entire world community. And to this wish we add those which we formulate for each of you and for your high mission. May the Almighty bring them to fulfilment!

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