



# The Holy See

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**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE  
WORLD DAY OF PEACE**

*1 January 1984*

**" FROM A NEW HEART, PEACE IS BORN "**

*To the political leaders of the nations,*

*To those active in economic, social and cultural life,*

*To the young, who hope for a world of fraternity and solidarity,*

*To all of you, men and women, who desire peace!* I address myself to you at the dawn of the year 1984 which presents itself everywhere full of questions and anxiety, but at the same time rich in hope and prospects. My appeal on the occasion of the 17th World Day of Peace springs from the depths of my heart, and I know that I re-echo the desire of many men and women who yearn for fraternity in a divided world. The message that I send to you is both simple and demanding, for it concerns each of you personally. It invites each one to do his or her share in the establishment of peace in the world without passing this duty on to others. The theme that I propose today for your consideration and action is this: "From a new heart, peace is born". 1. **A paradoxical situation** Today, one cannot help being struck by shadows and threats, but at the same time without forgetting the lights and hopes. Truly, *peace is fragile*, and injustice abounds. Implacable wars are being waged in several countries; and they continue despite the accumulation of death, grief and ruin; and without any apparent progress towards a solution. Violence and fanatical terrorism do not spare other countries, and it is the innocent who too often pay the price, while passions increase and fear risks leading to all sorts of extremism. In many regions human rights are violated, freedom is mocked, people are imprisoned unjustly, summary executions are perpetrated for partisan reasons and, in this twentieth century which has seen a multiplication of Declarations and of courts of appeal, humanity is ill-informed, or if it is informed, it remains almost helpless to stop these abuses. Numerous countries are engaged in the painful struggle to overcome hunger, disease and underdevelopment, while the rich countries reinforce their position and the arms race continues to absorb unjustifiably resources that could be better used. The build-up of conventional, chemical, bacteriological and, especially, nuclear weapons causes an oppressive threat to weigh upon the future of the nations, notably in Europe, and causes justifiable concern to their population. A new and grave uneasiness fills public opinion, and I understand it. The contemporary world is, as it were, imprisoned in a web of tensions. The tension between what is commonly called East and West affects not only relations between the countries directly involved; it also affects and even aggravates many other difficult situations in other parts of

the world. Faced with such a situation, we must take note of the formidable danger represented by this growing tension and large-scale polarization, especially when we consider the unprecedented means of massive and unheard-of destruction which are available. And yet, though fully aware of this danger, the protagonists experience great difficulty, not to say helplessness, in halting this process, in finding ways to reduce these tensions by means of concrete steps towards de-escalation, towards the reduction of the levels of armaments, towards agreements which would make it possible to devote more efforts to the priority aims of economic, social and cultural progress. Although the tension between East and West, with its ideological background, monopolizes the attention and fuels the apprehension of a great number of countries, especially in the northern hemisphere, it should not overshadow another more fundamental tension *between North and South* which affects the very life of a great part of humanity. Here it is the question of the growing contrast between the countries that have had an opportunity to accelerate their development and increase their wealth, and the countries locked in a condition of underdevelopment. This is another gigantic source of opposition, bitterness, revolt or fear, especially as it is fed by many kinds of injustice. It is in the face of these enormous problems that I propose the theme of a renewal of "heart". It may be thought that the proposal is too simple and the means disproportionate. And yet, if one reflects well on it, the analysis outlined here permits us to go to the very depths of the problem and is capable of calling into question the presuppositions that precisely constitute a threat to peace. Humanity's helplessness to resolve the existing tensions reveals that the obstacles, and likewise the hopes, come from something deeper than the systems themselves.

2. ***War springs from the human spirit*** It is my deep conviction, it is the leitmotiv of the Bible and of Christian thought, and is, I hope, the intuition of many men and women of good will, that war has its origins in the human heart. It is man who kills and not his sword, or in our day, his missiles. The "heart" in the biblical sense is the innermost depth of the human person, in his or her relationship to good, to others, to God. It is not primarily a question of affectivity, but of conscience, of convictions, of the system of thought to which one is bound, as also the passions which influence one. In his heart, man is sensitive to the absolute values of good, to justice, brotherhood and peace. The disorder of the heart is notably the disorder of the *conscience* when the latter calls good or bad what it intends to choose for the satisfaction of its material interests or its desire for power. Even the complex nature of the exercise of power does not exclude that there exists always the responsibility of the individual conscience in the preparation, beginning or extension of a conflict. The fact that responsibility is shared by a group does not alter this principle. But this conscience is often solicited, not to say subjugated, by *socio-political and ideological systems* that are themselves the work of the human spirit. To the extent to which people allow themselves to be seduced by systems that present a global vision of humanity that is exclusive and almost Manichean, to the extent that they make the struggle against others, their elimination or enslavement the condition of progress, they shut themselves up within a war mentality which aggravates tensions and they reach the point of being almost incapable of dialogue. Sometimes their unconditional attachment to these systems becomes a form of power-worship, the worship of strength and wealth, a form of slavery that takes away freedom from the leaders themselves. Over and above ideological systems properly so-called, *the passions* that disturb the human heart and incline it to war are also of many kinds. People can allow themselves to be carried away by a sense of racial supremacy and by hatred of others for this reason, or by jealousy, envy of the land and resources of others, or in a general way, by the desire for power, by pride, by a desire to extend their control over other peoples whom they despise. Certainly, passions are often born of the *real frustrations* of individuals and peoples when others have refused to guarantee their existence or when social conditions are slow to adopt democracy or the sharing of wealth. *Injustice* is already a great vice in the heart of the exploiter. But passions are sometimes fed deliberately. It is difficult for wars to start if the people on both sides do not have powerful feelings of mutual hostility, or if they are not convinced that the claims of their opponents threaten their vital interests. This explains the ideological *manipulations* resorted to by those with aggressive intentions. Once fighting

has begun, hostility is bound to increase, for it is nourished by the sufferings and atrocities experienced by each side. Psychoses of hatred can then result. In the final analysis, therefore, the fact of recourse to violence and to war comes from man's sin, from his blindness of spirit and the disorder of his heart, which invoke the motive of injustice in order to spread or harden tension or conflict. Yes, war is born *from the sinful heart of man*, ever since the jealousy and violence that filled the heart of Cain when he met his brother Abel, according to the ancient biblical narrative. Is it not a question really of an *even more profound rupture*, when people become incapable of agreeing on what is good and evil, on the values of life of which God is the source and guarantor? Does not this explain the drifting of man's "heart", when he fails to make peace with his fellowman on the basis of truth, with uprightness of spirit and goodness of heart? The re-establishment of peace would itself be of short duration and quite illusory if there were not a true change of heart. History has taught us that, even in the case of countries that have been occupied or where rights have been suppressed, the "liberation" for which people had yearned for so long has proved a disappointment, in that the leaders and the citizens have held on to their narrowness of spirit, their intolerance and their hardness, without overcoming their antagonisms. In the Bible itself, the Prophets denounced these ephemeral liberations when there was no real change of heart, no real "conversion".<sup>3</sup> ***From a new heart, peace is born*** If the present systems generated by the "heart" of man turn out to be incapable of ensuring peace, then it is the "heart" of man that must be renewed, in order to renew systems, institutions and methods. Christian faith has a word for this fundamental change of heart: it is "conversion". Speaking generally, it is a matter of rediscovering clear-sightedness and impartiality with freedom of spirit, the sense of justice with respect for the rights of man, the sense of equity with global solidarity between the rich and the poor, mutual trust and fraternal love. In the first place individuals and nations must acquire a true *freedom of spirit* in order to become conscious of the sterile attitudes of the past, of the biased and partial character of philosophical and social systems which begin from debatable premises and which reduce man and history to a closed system of materialistic forces, which rely on nothing but the force of arms and the power of the economy, which shut human beings into categories in opposition to each other, which present one-sided solutions, which ignore the complex reality of the life of nations and hinder their being treated as free. So a re-examination is needed of these systems that manifestly lead to deadlock, that freeze dialogue and understanding, develop mistrust, increase threats and dangers, without resolving the real problems, without offering true security, without making people truly happy, peaceful and free. This transformation in depth of the spirit and the heart certainly calls for great courage, the courage of humility and clear-mindedness. It must influence the collective mind, by first touching the conscience of the individual. Is this an impossible hope? The impotence and danger in which our contemporaries find themselves urge them not to put off this *return to the truth* which alone will make them free and capable of better systems. This is the first condition for creating the "new heart". The other positive elements are well known. It is enough to mention them. Peace is authentic if it is the fruit of *justice, Opus iustitiae pax*, as the Prophet Isaiah said (cf. *Is 32, 17*): justice between social partners and between peoples. And a society is just and human if it respects the *fundamental rights of the human person*. Moreover, the spirit of war rises and grows strong where the inalienable rights of man are violated. Even if dictatorship and totalitarianism temporarily suppress the complaint of exploited and oppressed human beings, the just person clings to the conviction that nothing can justify this violation of the rights of man; he has the courage to intercede for others who suffer and he refuses to surrender in the face of injustice, to compromise with it; and likewise, however paradoxical it may appear, the person who deeply desires peace rejects any kind of pacifism which is cowardice or the simple preservation of tranquillity. In fact those who are tempted to impose their domination will always encounter the resistance of intelligent and courageous men and women, prepared to defend freedom in order to promote justice. Equality also demands a strengthening of the relationships of justice and *solidarity with poor countries*, and especially those experiencing poverty and famine. The phrase of Paul VI has become

henceforth the conviction of many: "Development is the new name for peace". The rich countries then emerge from their collective egoism in order to think in new terms about exchanges and mutual aid, opening themselves to a worldwide horizon. Still more, the new heart seeks to banish the fear and psychosis of war. It replaces the axiom which holds that peace results from the balance of arms, with the principle that true peace can be built up only in *mutual trust* (cf. Ioannis XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 113 ). Certainly, it remains alert and clear-sighted in order to detect lies and manipulation, and in order to go forward with prudence. But it dares to undertake and ceaselessly resume dialogue, which was the subject of my message last year. In a word, the new heart is the heart which allows itself to be inspired by *love*. Already Pius XI stated that there cannot "be true external peace between individuals and peoples where the spirit of peace does not possess minds and hearts..., minds, in order to recognize and respect the rights of justice; hearts, in order that justice be linked with charity and that charity may even prevail over justice, for if peace must be the work and fruit of justice..., it belongs rather to charity than to justice" (Pii XI, *Allocutio*, die 24 dec. 1930: AAS 22 [1930], p. 535). It is a question of renouncing violence, falsehood and hatred, of becoming - in intentions, feelings and whole conduct - a fraternal being, one who recognizes the dignity and the needs of the other person, and seeks to cooperate with him or her in order to create a world of peace.

**4. Appeal to political leaders and those who form public opinion** As it is necessary to acquire a new heart, to promote a new mentality of peace, all men and women, whatever their place in society, truly can and must assume their share of responsibility in the construction of a true peace, in the circle where they live, in the family, at school, in business, in the city. In their cares, conversations and actions, they must feel concerned for all their brothers and sisters who are part of the same human family, even if they live at the other end of the world. But obviously responsibility has various degrees. The responsibility of *Heads of State, of political leaders*, is primary for the establishment and development of peaceful relations between the different parts of the nation and between peoples. They more than others must be convinced that war is in itself irrational and that the ethical principle of the peaceful settlement of conflicts is the only way worthy of man. Of course, one is obliged to take into consideration the massive presence of violence in human history. It is the sense of reality in the service of the fundamental concern for justice which forces one to maintain the principle of legitimate defence in this history. But the dreadful risks of the arms of massive destruction must lead to the working out of processes of cooperation and disarmament which will make war in practice unthinkable. Peace must be won. All the more so, the conscience of political leaders must forbid them to allow themselves to be carried away in dangerous adventures in which passion overrides justice. They must not sacrifice uselessly the lives of their fellow-citizens in such adventures, or provoke conflicts among others, or use the pretext of the precariousness of peace in one region in order to extend their authority into new territories. These leaders must weigh all this in their minds and consciences, and exclude political opportunism; they will render account for this to their peoples and to God. But I say again that peace is the duty of everyone. The *International Organizations* also have a large role to play in order to make universal solutions prevail, above partisan points of view. And my appeal is directed especially to all those who exercise through the media an influence on *public opinion*, all those who *are engaged in the education of young people and adults*: it is to them that is entrusted the formation of the spirit of peace. In society, can one not count especially on *the young*? In the face of the threatening future which they foresee, they certainly aspire more than others to peace, and many of them are prepared to devote their generosity and their energies to peace. Let them show inventiveness at its service, without abandoning clear-sightedness, and so let them show the courage to weigh up all the aspects of long-term solutions! In short, everyone, all men and women, must contribute to peace, contributing their particular sensitivities and playing their particular roles. Thus *women*, who are intimately connected to the mystery of life, can do much to advance the spirit of peace, in their care to ensure the preservation of life and in their conviction that real love is the only power which can make the world liveable for everyone.

**5. Appeal to Christians** Christians, disciples of

Jesus, caught up in the tensions of our age, we must recall that there is no happiness except for the "peacemakers" (cf. *Mt 5, 9*). The Catholic Church is celebrating the Holy Year of the Redemption: the whole Church is invited to allow herself to be taken over by the Saviour who said to the people, as he went to the extreme of love: "My peace I give you" (cf. *Jn 14, 27*). In her, all must share with their brothers and sisters the proclamation of salvation and the vigour of hope. The Synod of Bishops on Reconciliation and Penance recently recalled the first words of Christ: "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (*Mk 1, 15*). The message of the Synod Fathers shows us on which road we must go forward in order to be true peacemakers: "The Word calls us to repent. '*Change your heart*', it tells us, seek pardon, and *be reconciled with the Father*'. The plan of the Father for our society is that we live as one family in justice, truth, freedom and love" (Cf. *Nuntius Patrum Synodaliū ad Populum Dei*, die 29 oct. 1983). This family will only be united in deep peace if we hear the call to return to the Father, to be reconciled with God himself. Answering this call, cooperating with God's plan is to allow the Lord to convert us. Let us not count on our power alone, nor only on our so often failing will. Let us allow our lives to be transformed, for "all this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (*2 Cor 5, 18*). Let us rediscover the power of *prayer*: to pray is to be reconciled with him whom we invoke, whom we meet, who makes us live. To experience prayer is to accept the grace which changes us; the Spirit, united to our spirit, commits us to conform our life with the Word of God. To pray is to enter into the action of God upon history: he, the sovereign actor of history, has wished to make people his collaborators. Paul says to us about Christ: "For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (*Eph 2, 14*). We know what a great power of mercy transforms us in *the Sacrament of Reconciliation*. This gift overwhelms us. In that case, in all loyalty, we cannot remain resigned to the divisions and confrontations which set us against one another even though we share the same faith; we cannot accept, without reacting, the fact that conflicts are dragging on which are destroying the unity of humanity, which is called to become one single body. If we celebrate forgiveness, can we fight one another endlessly? Can we remain enemies while we invoke the same living God? If Christ's law of love is our law, shall we remain silent and inert while the wounded world looks to us to join the front ranks of those who are building peace? Humble and conscious of our weakness, let us come to the *Eucharistic table*, where he who gives his life for the multitude of his brethren gives us a new heart, where he puts into us a new spirit (cf. *Ezek 36, 26*). In the depth of our poverty and disarray, through him let us give thanks, for he unites us by his presence and the gift of himself, he "who came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near" (*Eph 2, 17*). And if it is given to us to welcome him, it is up to us to be his witnesses through our fraternal work in all the workshops of peace.

**Conclusion**

Peace has many different forms. There is peace between nations, peace in society, peace between citizens, peace between religious communities, peace within undertakings, neighbourhoods, villages and, especially, peace inside families. In addressing myself to Catholics, and also to other Christian brethren and to men and women of good will, I have deplored a certain number of obstacles to peace. They are grave, they present serious threats. But since they depend on the spirit, the will, the human "heart", with the help of God people can overcome them. They must refuse to give in to fatalism and discouragement. Positive signs are already piercing the darkness. Humanity is becoming aware of the indispensable solidarity which links peoples and nations, for the solution of the majority of the great problems: employment, the use of terrestrial and cosmic resources, the advancement of less favoured nations, and security. The reduction of arms, controlled and worldwide, is considered by many a vital necessity. There are many calls to use every means in order to banish war from the horizon of humanity. There are also many new appeals for dialogue, cooperation and reconciliation, and numerous fresh initiatives. The Pope is anxious to encourage them. "Blessed are the peacemakers!" Let us always unite clear-sightedness with generosity! Let peace be more genuine and let it take root in

man's very heart! Let the cry of the afflicted who await peace be heard! Let every individual commit all the energy of a renewed and fraternal heart to the building of peace throughout the universe!

*From the Vatican, 8 December 1983. JOANNES PAULUS PP. II*

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