



The Holy See

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

1 JANUARY 1985

PEACE AND YOUTH

GO FORWARD TOGETHER *To all of you who believe in the urgency of peace,*

To you, parents and educators, who want to be the promoters of peace,

To you, political leaders, who bear direct responsibility for the cause of peace,

To you, men and women of culture, who seek to build peace in today's civilization,

To all of you who suffer for the sake of peace and justice,

And above all to you, the young people of the world, whose decisions about yourselves and your vocation in society will determine the prospects for peace today and tomorrow,

To all of you, and to all people of good will, I send my message on the Eighteenth World Day of Peace because peace is an overriding concern, an unavoidable challenge, an immense hope.

1. The problems and the hopes of the world confront us every day

It is true: the challenge of peace remains with us. We are living in a difficult time when the threats of destructive violence and war are many. Profound disagreements pit different social groups, peoples and nations one against the other. There are many situations of injustice that do not break forth into open conflicts solely because the violence of those who retain power is so great that it deprives the powerless of the energy and opportunity to claim their rights. Yes, there are people today who are prevented by totalitarian regimes and ideological systems from exercising their fundamental right to decide for themselves about their own future. Men and women today suffer insupportable insults to their human dignity through racial discrimination, forced exile and torture. They are victims of hunger and disease. They are prevented from practising their religious beliefs or from developing their own culture.

It is important to discern the ultimate causes of this state of conflict that makes peace precarious and unstable. The effective promotion of peace demands that we should not limit ourselves to deploring the negative effects of the present situation of crisis, conflict and injustice; what we are really required to do is to destroy the roots that cause these effects. Such ultimate causes are to be found especially in the ideologies that have dominated our century and continue to do so, manifesting themselves in political, economic and social systems and taking control of the way people think. These ideologies are marked by a totalitarian attitude that disregards and oppresses the dignity and transcendent values of the human person and his or her rights. Such an attitude seeks political, economic and social domination with a rigidity of purpose and method that is closed to any authentic dialogue or real sharing. Some of these ideologies have even become a sort of false secularistic religion, claiming to bring salvation to the whole of humanity but without providing any proof of its own truth.

But violence and injustice have deep roots in the heart of each individual, of each one of us, in people's everyday ways of thinking and behaving. We have only to think of the conflicts and divisions within families, between married couples, between parents and children, in the schools, in professional life, in the relationships between social groups and between the generations. We have only to think of the cases where the basic right to life of the weakest and most defenceless human beings is violated.

Faced with these, and many more evils, it is still not right to lose hope - so abundant are the energies that continually spring up in the hearts of people who believe in justice and peace. The present crisis can and must become the occasion for conversion and for the renewal of mentalities. The time we are living in is not just a period of danger and worry. It is an hour for hope.

2. Peace and youth go forward together

The present difficulties are really a test of our humanity. They can be turning points on the road to lasting peace for they kindle the boldest dreams and unleash the best energies of mind and heart. Difficulties are a challenge to all; hope is an imperative for all. But today I want to draw your attention to the role that youth is called upon to play in the endeavour to bring about peace. As we prepare to enter a new century and a new millennium, we must be aware that the future of peace and therefore the future of humanity have been entrusted, in a special way, to the fundamental moral choices that a new generation of men and women are being called upon to make. In a very few years, the young people of today will hold responsibility for family life and for the life of nations, for the common good of all and for peace. Young people have already begun to ask themselves all over the world: What can I do? What can we do? Where does our path take us? They want to make their contribution to the healing of a wounded and weakened society. They want to offer new solutions to old problems. They want to build a new civilization of fraternal solidarity. Taking inspiration from these young people, I wish to invite everyone to reflect on those realities. But I want to address myself in a special and direct way to the young people of today and tomorrow.

3. *Young people, do not be afraid of your own youth*

The first appeal I want to address to you, young men and women of today, is this: Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid of your own youth, and of those deep desires you have for happiness, for truth, for beauty and for lasting love! Sometimes people say that society is afraid of these powerful desires of young people, and that you yourselves are afraid of them. Do not be afraid! When I look at you, the young people, I feel great gratitude and hope. The future far into the next century lies in your hands. The future of peace lies in your hearts. To construct history, as you can and must, you must free history from the false paths it is pursuing. To do this, you must be people with a deep trust in man and a deep trust in the grandeur of the human vocation - a vocation to be pursued with respect for truth and for the dignity and inviolable rights of the human person.

What I see arising in you is a new awareness of your responsibility and a fresh sensitivity to the needs of your fellow human beings. You are touched by the hunger for peace that so many share with you. You are troubled by so much injustice around you. You sense overwhelming danger in the gigantic stockpiles of arms and in the threats of nuclear war. You suffer when you see widespread hunger and malnutrition. You are concerned about the environment today and for the coming generations. You are threatened by unemployment, and many of you are already without work and without the prospect of meaningful employment. You are upset by the large number of people who are oppressed politically and spiritually and who cannot enjoy the exercise of their basic human rights as individuals or as a community. All this can give rise to a feeling that life has little meaning.

In this situation, some of you may be tempted to take flight from responsibility: in the fantasy worlds of alcohol and drugs, in shortlived sexual relationships without commitment to marriage and family, in indifference, in cynicism and even in violence. Put yourselves on guard against the fraud of a world that wants to exploit or misdirect your energetic and powerful search for happiness and meaning. But do not avoid the search for the true answers to the questions that confront you. Do not be afraid!

4. *The inevitable question: What is your idea of man?*

Among the inevitable questions that you must ask yourselves, the first and foremost is this: What is your idea of man? What, to you, makes up the dignity and the greatness of a human being? This is a question that you young people have to ask yourselves but which you also put to the generation that has preceded you, to your parents and to all those who at various levels have had the responsibility of caring for the goods and values of the world. In the attempt to respond to this question honestly and openly, young and old can be led to reconsider their own actions and their own histories. Is it not true that very often, especially in the more developed and richer nations, people have given in to a materialistic idea of life? Is it not true that parents sometimes feel that they have fulfilled their obligations to their children by offering them, beyond the satisfaction of basic necessities, more material goods as the answer for their lives? Is it not true that, by doing

this, they are passing on to the younger generations a world that will be poor in essential spiritual values, poor in peace and poor in justice? Is it not equally true that in other nations, the fascination with certain ideologies has left to the younger generations a legacy of new forms of enslavement without the freedom to pursue the values that truly enhance life in all its aspects? Ask yourselves what kind of people you want yourselves and your fellow human beings to be, what kind of culture you want to build. Ask yourselves these questions and do not be afraid of the answers, even if they will require of you a change of direction in your thoughts and loyalties.

5. The fundamental question: Who is your God?

The first question leads to an even more basic and fundamental one: Who is your God? We cannot define our notion of man without defining an Absolute, a fullness of truth, of beauty and of goodness by which we allow our lives to be guided. Thus it is true that a human being, "the visible image of the invisible God", cannot answer the question about who he or she is without at the same time declaring who his or her God is. It is impossible to restrict this question to the sphere of people's private existence. It is impossible to separate this question from the history of nations. Today, a person is exposed to the temptation to refuse God in the name of his or her own humanity. Wherever this refusal exists, there the shadow of fear casts its ever darkening pall. Fear is born wherever God dies in the consciences of human beings. Everyone knows, albeit obscurely and with dread, that wherever God dies in the conscience of the human person, there follows inevitably the death of man, the image of God.

6. Your answer: Choices based on values

Whatever answers you give to these two interconnected questions will set the direction for the rest of your lives. Each of us, during the years of our youth, has had to struggle with these questions and, at some point, has had to come to some conclusion that has shaped our future choices, our future paths, our future lives. The answers which you, young people, give to these questions will also determine how you respond to the great challenges of peace and justice. If you have decided that your God will be yourself with no regard for others, you will become instruments of division and enmity, even instruments of warfare and violence. In saying this, I wish to point out to you the importance of choices that incorporate values. Values are the underpinnings of the choices that determine not only your own lives but also the policies and strategies that build life in society. And remember that it is not possible to create a dichotomy between personal and social values. It is not possible to live in inconsistency: to be demanding of others and of society and then decide to live a personal life of permissiveness.

You must then decide what values you want to build society upon. Your choices now will decide whether in the future you will suffer the tyranny of ideological systems that reduce the dynamics of society to the logic of class struggle. The values that you choose today will decide whether relations between nations will continue to be overshadowed by tragic tensions that are the product

of undeclared or openly touted designs to subdue all peoples to regimes where God does not count, and where the dignity of the human person is sacrificed to the demands of an ideology that attempts to deify the collectivity. The values that you commit yourselves to in your youth will determine whether you will be satisfied with the heritage of a past in which hatred and violence suffocate love and reconciliation. Upon the choices of each one of you today will depend the future of your brothers and sisters.

7. *The value of peace*

The cause of peace, the constant and unavoidable challenge of our day, helps you to discover yourselves and your values. The realities are stark and frightening. Millions spent on weapons. Resources of material and intellectual talent devoted solely to the production of arms. Political stances that at times do not reconcile and bring peoples together, but rather erect barriers and isolate nation from nation. In such circumstances a just sense of patriotism can fall victim to overzealous partisanship, and honourable service in defence of one's country can become the subject of misinterpretation and even ridicule (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 79). In the midst of many siren calls of self-interest, the man and woman of peace must learn to heed first the values of life and then move with confidence to put those values into practice. The call to be peacemakers will then rest firmly on the call to conversion of heart, as I suggested in last year's World Day of Peace Message. It will then be strengthened by a commitment to honest dialogue and sincere negotiations based on mutual respect, coupled with a realistic assessment of the just demands and legitimate interests of all partners. It will seek to diminish the weapons whose existence in great numbers strikes fear into people's hearts. It will devote itself to building the bridges - cultural, economic, social, political - that will allow greater exchange among nations. It will promote the cause of peace as the cause of everyone, not by slogans that divide or by actions that needlessly arouse passions, but by the calm confidence that is the fruit of a commitment to true values and to the good of all humanity.

8. *The value of justice*

The good of all humanity is ultimately the reason why you must make the cause of peace your own. In saying this, I invite you to direct your attention away from an exclusive concentration on the threat to peace usually referred to as the East-West problem and, instead, to think about the whole world, and thus the so-called North-South tensions as well. As in the past, so today I wish to affirm that these two issues - peace and development - are interrelated and must be addressed together if the young people of today are to inherit a better world tomorrow.

One aspect of this relationship is the deployment of resources for one purpose (armaments), rather than for another (development). But the real connection is not simply the use of resources, important as that may be. It is between the values that commit one to peace and the values that commit one to development in the true sense. For as certainly as true peace demands more than just the absence of war or merely the dismantling of weapons systems, so too development, in its true and integral sense, can never be reduced solely to an economic plan or to a series of technological projects, no matter how good they may be. In the whole area of progress that we call peace and justice, the same values have to be applied that spring from the idea

we have about who man is and who God is in relation to the whole human race. The same values that commit one to be a peacemaker will be the values that impel one to foster the integral development of every human being and of all peoples.

9. *The value of participation*

A world of justice and peace cannot be created by words alone and it cannot be imposed by outside forces: it must be desired and must come about through the contribution of all. It is essential for every human being to have a sense of participating, of being a part of the decisions and endeavours that shape the destiny of the world. Violence and injustice have often in the past found their root causes in people's sense of being deprived of the right to shape their own lives. Future violence and injustice cannot be avoided when and where the basic right to participate in the choices of society is denied. But this right must be exercised with discernment. The complexity of life in modern society demands that people delegate the power of decisionmaking to their leaders. They must be able to trust that their leaders will make decisions for the good of their own people and of all peoples. Participation is a right, but it carries with it obligations: to exercise it with respect for the dignity of the human person. The mutual trust between citizens and leaders is the fruit of the practice of participation, and participation is a cornerstone for building a world of peace.

10. *Life: a pilgrimage of discovery*

I invite all of you, young people of the world; to take up your responsibility in this greatest of spiritual adventures that a person will face: to build human life, as individuals and in society, with respect for the vocation of man. For it is true to say that life is a pilgrimage of discovery: the discovery of who you are, the discovery of the values that shape your lives, the discovery of the peoples and nations to which all are bound in solidarity. While this voyage of discovery is most evident in the time of youth, it is a voyage that never ends. During your whole lifetime, you must affirm and reaffirm the values that form yourselves and that form the world: the values that favour life, that reflect the dignity and vocation of the human person, that build a world in peace and justice.

A remarkable worldwide consensus exists among young people about the necessity of peace, and this constitutes a tremendous potential force for the good of all. But young people must not be satisfied with an instinctive desire for peace: this desire must be transformed into a firm moral conviction that encompasses the full range of human problems and builds on deeply treasured values. The world needs young people who have drunk deeply at the sources of truth. You have to listen to the truth and for this you need purity of heart; you have to understand it, and for this you need deep humility; you have to surrender to it and share it, and for this you need the strength to resist the temptations of pride, selfishness and manipulation. You must form in yourselves a deep sense of responsibility.

11. *The responsibility of Christian youth*

I wish earnestly to commend this sense of responsibility and commitment to moral values to you, the Christian youth, and together with you, to all our brothers and sisters who confess the Lord Jesus. As Christians you are conscious of being children of God, sharing in the divine nature, being enveloped in the fullness of God in Christ. The Risen Christ gives you peace and reconciliation as his first gift. God, who is eternal peace, has made peace with the world through Christ, the Prince of Peace. That peace has been poured into your hearts and it lies deeper than all the unrest of your minds, all the torments of your hearts. God's peace takes charge of your minds and hearts. God gives you his peace not as a possession which you can hoard, but as a treasure which you possess only when you share it with others.

In Christ, you can believe in the future even though you cannot discern its shape. You can hand yourselves over to the Lord of the future, and thus overcome your discouragement at the magnitude of the task and the price to be paid. To the dismayed disciples on the way to Emmaus, the Lord said: "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (*Lk 24: 26*). The Lord speaks those same words to each one of you. So do not be afraid to commit your lives to peace and justice, for you know that the Lord is with you in all your ways.

12. *International Youth Year*

In this year which the United Nations Organization has declared International Youth Year, it has been my wish to address my annual message for the World Day of Peace to all of you, the young people around the world. May this Year be for everyone a year of deeper commitment to peace and justice. May you make every choice with courage and live it with fidelity and responsibility. Whatever paths you set out upon, do so with hope and trust: hope in the future that, with God's help, you can shape; trust in the God who watches over you in all that you say and do. Those of us who have preceded you want to share with you a deep commitment to peace. Those who are your contemporaries will be united with you in your efforts. Those who come after you will be inspired by you so long as you seek the truth, and live by authentic moral values. The challenge of peace is great, but greater is the reward; for in committing yourselves to peace you will discover the best for yourselves as you seek the best for everyone else. You are growing, and with you peace is growing.

May this International Youth Year also be a time for parents and educators to take a new look at their responsibilities towards young people. Too often their guidance is refused and their achievements questioned. Yet they have so much to offer in wisdom, strength and experience. Their task of accompanying youth in the search for meaning cannot be assumed by anyone else. The values and models which they hold up to the young must, however, be clearly seen in their own lives, lest their words lack conviction and their lives be a contradiction which the young will rightly reject.

At the close of this Message I pledge my prayers every day of this International Youth Year that young people will respond to the call of peace. I urge all my brothers and sisters to join with me in this prayer to our Father in heaven that he may enlighten all of us who bear the responsibility for peace, but especially the young, so that youth and peace may indeed go forward together!

From the Vatican, 8 December 1984.

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