



The Holy See

VISITA PASTORALE IN SVIZZERA

DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II AI MEMBRI DEL CONSIGLIO FEDERALE DELLA CONFEDERAZIONE

*Palazzo di rappresentanza a Lohn
Giovedì, 14 giugno 1984*

Mr. President, Gentlemen of the Federal Council,

1. I am very touched by the noble words you have just addressed to me. For my part, as the object of the hospitality of this country, I am happy to make a courtesy call that I usually make on my visits, as part of what I consider to be my duty. I come to pay my cordial respects to him who has the honour of presiding, with the Federal Council, over the destiny of the Swiss Confederation, and of representing the whole people of Switzerland. The deference and the courtesy with which you as a body welcome me, as also the friendliness of the people I meet, touch my heart, and for that I express to you my ardent thanks.

The pastoral visit I am making in this country, as I have already mentioned, is principally focused on the Swiss community of Catholics, and on the other Christians or believers who have been willing to meet me for an exchange about our common spiritual concerns. However, my feelings of fellowship go out to all the people of Switzerland, and where would I find a better occasion to express to them my warm and respectful esteem than here before their highest governing body? I cannot help but call to mind in this regard how original your homeland and your history appear to the eyes of a friendly outsider.

2. The majority of the countries of Europe have been fashioned by reason of the natural unity of their territory, of their language, or of their religion. Switzerland, however, in its genesis, in its growth and in its duration was much more the result of the common resolve and of the

perseverance of its children. The action of men, however, no matter how tenacious, could not have braved the centuries as the Confederation has for nearly seven hundred years, unless it had been founded from the beginning on a certain idea of what man is. It is by remaining faithful to this original humanist vocation that Switzerland has in fact succeeded in withstanding the vicissitudes of a history and an environment which have been rather tumultuous.

Among the lights of this fundamental vision of man there has never ceased to shine the guiding star of liberty, a very precious good and the supreme risk of the human person, without which the fullness of human life is not assured. However, in order to develop all its richness and to have an external effect, personal liberty needs to blossom in the heart of cities which are equally free and in control of their destinies. That is the lesson that the members of the Confederation have learned from their first alliance and which they have carefully preserved throughout the course of their history.

3. And yet, where history united them, geography might have divided them. Situated at the crossroads of highways, and later of empires and of civilizations, the Swiss have had to learn very early to live with diversity and, without renouncing their individual identity, to welcome that of others and to respect the other as such. Thus was accomplished the long apprenticeship of tolerance, the greatest instruction in which was received from St Nicholas of Flue, tutelary father of the concord of the Confederation.

Doubtless it was from this first exercise of tolerance - rendered more difficult still when the great rent in western Christianity extended itself to the member states of the Confederation - that the Swiss neutrality was born. Originally an unformulated maxim based on immediate interests at hand for the Swiss, it had the merit of protecting the Cantons from the centrifugal forces that could have broken their fragile unity. But in the course of the years it was inevitable that other nations, above all their closest neighbours, recognizing in Swiss neutrality a pledge of peace and stability for all of Europe, should find that it was of benefit also to themselves.

It then became necessary to go even further, and no longer to consider neutrality simply as the means of protection from the turbulence of high politics. It became urgent to bring out more strongly its external and altruistic aspects, in a spirit of solidarity and participation. In a word, to open oneself ever more widely to the immense and suffering world. In the face of the problems which assail the great human family and its unending trials, it would not be in keeping with the sign which decorates the Swiss flag to remain inactive witnesses. Switzerland is called to work, as far as its resources will allow, for the common good of the suffering brotherhood of humanity. Such is the hope we form for her future.

4. Today, you yourselves are the chief representatives of this country, a country which rests upon a solid constitutional order whose pillars are direct democracy, federalism, and a State based on law. More than one nation might envy this wisdom! How can one help hoping that the Swiss, for

their own well-being, may continue to develop their positive sense of liberty and equality of all the inhabitants of their country before the law, their respect for diversities – I am thinking of the ethnic minorities as regards their language, their customs, their social and economic life – their active participation in public life, and their loyal collaboration for the good of the whole? Your forefathers, likewise, chose to promulgate the Federal Constitution in the name of Almighty God: this brings honour to all Swiss, and at the same time charges them with a particular responsibility.

5. You are able also to make a contribution to the progress of peace and justice beyond your frontiers, that is, between the peoples of Europe and of the world, to the extent that you yourselves affirm and guarantee the rights of the human person, the dignity of the worker and his sharing in the responsibilities. You contribute likewise by according priority to persons rather than possessions, by welcoming those who are in flight from violence or endemic poverty in their own country, by seeking to provide solutions through free negotiation. In short, you contribute by affirming and guaranteeing the requirements of social justice, liberty and peace.

Indeed your history, your culture, your political system ought to encourage you to carry out your role in the community of peoples. Work, as in the past, toward intensifying relations and exchanges between the men and women of this world over and above political frontiers and economic interests. For in this way they will be better able to discover their ties of unity and interdependence which flow from the nature which they hold in common. Your voice in international organizations, many of which profit from your hospitality, your voice in your relations with the other nations of the globe, will have that much more authority if you continue to proclaim the necessity of basing relations between men and between peoples on the love of justice.

6. Your Excellency, you are aware of the interest and the contributions which the Holy See, for its part, in correlation with its spiritual mission, brings to these humanitarian goals. It seeks to profit all men, whatever their race, their political organization or their religion as much in the area of its bilateral relations with sovereign states as in its activities having to do with international organizations.

Moreover, it was during the First World War that Pope Benedict XV proposed to the Federal Council a common project in favour of war victims, which resulted in the "work of the internees". Following on this collaboration, regular relations between the Holy See and the Swiss Confederation which had previously existed, though with certain vicissitudes, for more than three centuries, were renewed under the form of an Apostolic Nunciature.

During the Second World War, the Holy See and Switzerland were together able to carry out an unbiased project of providing material and~ moral aid to so many people battered and distressed by the human tragedy that enveloped so many countries of Europe. Thanks to the unique position of your country and that of the Holy See, in the midst of parties engaged in conflict, how many men and women have been able to save their lives, to find provisional asylum where the

necessary care, sustenance and liberty were assured! Certainly, we have not been able to ease all suffering, nor to remedy evil in its full extent in these dark and difficult times. But many have laboured, in one way or another, with a profound sense of responsibility, with generosity and a spirit of sacrifice, in the name of God and from brotherly love. This story is now well known by honest minds who insist on recourse to objective information.

Our relations are conducted at present in a climate of loyal understanding and respectful friendship. The Holy See appreciates the fact that the Confederation and the civil authorities, at different levels, make possible the peaceful pursuit of Catholic religious life in the entire country. Henceforth, without having to demand any privileges, the Catholic Church in Switzerland, in communion with the Apostolic See, is able to sustain the faith of its members and to work, along with other Christians, in order that the message of life and love of Jesus Christ continue to be the leaven of a social life rooted in Christianity.

I hope also that on the world scene the efforts of Switzerland and the Holy See will converge still more with regard to promoting solutions of peace, commitments of aid to the most indigent, and guarantees of respect for man who always retains a divine dignity.

7. These few days spent in your country, impressive in its beauty will permit me, I am sure, to value your compatriots even more highly, justly reputed as they are for their love of work, their orderliness and their prudence, their virtue of hospitality, and also for their faith. My stay makes me familiar with their human and spiritual problems, and with me I bring my witness, that of the Catholic Church.

I am certain that the dear people of Switzerland will continue to draw inspiration from its Christian history and to hold itself open to the appeal of the humanitarian needs of those who, throughout the world, lack the same material and cultural possibilities. I beg God to bless all the children of this land, with a special thought for you, Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Federal Council and I thank you again for your welcome.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 29 p.3.

