



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS*

Saturday, 13 January 1990

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I would like to extend my best wishes for a happy and prosperous New Year to you and your families, and to the peoples and governments that you represent. These sentiments of mine are expressed in prayer to the One who “became flesh and dwelt among us” (cf. Jn 1:14). May he bless you and make your labours fruitful in the service of greater understanding among men; may he comfort those among you who have experienced sorrow or who have faced trials.
2. I wish to express once again my joy in welcoming the diplomats recently accredited to the Holy See and to assure them that I and my collaborators depend very much on their cooperation. I am also pleased to note the presence among you of the Ambassador of Poland, a country which, after a long interruption, has renewed diplomatic relations with the Holy See.
3. Finally, I must cordially thank your Dean, the Ambassador of Côte d’Ivoire, who with his usual courtesy has voiced your thoughts and hopes. Besides the positive developments, often unexpected, which have left their mark on the international situation during the past year, you also mentioned, Mr Ambassador, the efforts of the international community to remedy the crises and situations of injustice from which too many peoples still suffer today, often among the most deprived. I am grateful to you for the warm words of appreciation which you expressed with regard to the activity of the Catholic Church and of the Apostolic See, which, by spreading the Gospel, seek to make their own specific contribution to the cause of justice and the search for peace.
- 4 Your presence clearly shows that for your peoples and their leaders the Church and the Holy See are by no means strangers to their achievements and their hopes, much less to the problems and adversities that mark their path. As you know from personal experience, the Church, by her

presence in the world, and the Holy See, by its diplomatic activity in particular, seek to make a contribution to strengthening and perfecting the unity of the human family. You will recall the words of the Second Vatican Council in this regard, in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: "By her mission and nature the Church is not bound to any one culture or to any political, economic or social system. Hence by her very universality she can be a very close bond between the various communities of men and nations, provided they have trust in the Church and acknowledge her right to true freedom to carry out her mission" (No. 42).

5. By reason of this solicitude and interest in the spiritual and material well being of all people, the Holy See has welcomed with satisfaction the great transformations which have recently marked the life of many peoples, especially in Europe.

The irrepressible thirst for freedom which we have witnessed there has accelerated the process of evolution; it has brought down walls and opened doors. All this has the appearance of a veritable overthrow. And you will no doubt have noted that the point of departure or rallying point has often been a church.

Little by little candles were lit, forming, as it were, a pathway of light, as if to say to those who for many years claimed to limit human horizons to this earth that one cannot live in chains indefinitely. Before our eyes a "Europe of the spirit" seems to be coming to birth, in direct correspondence to those values and symbols which brought her into being, to "that Christian tradition which unites all her peoples" (Address to Members of an International Study Group on Martin Luther, 24 March 1984).

Even as we point to this happy evolution which has led so many peoples to recover their identity and their equal dignity, we must remember that nothing is ever achieved once and for all. The after effects of the Second World War which broke out fifty years ago call for vigilance. Ancient rivalries can always reappear; conflicts between ethnic minorities can be sparked off anew; forms of nationalism can increase. That is why a Europe conceived as a "community of nations" must be firmly established on the basis of the principles adopted in such timely fashion at Helsinki in 1975 by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

6. That Conference ended by insisting, in effect, on the fundamental conviction that the peace of the Continent depends not only on military security but also, and perhaps above all, on the trust that every citizen must be able to have in his own country and on trust between peoples. Furthermore, the year 1989 began with the adoption on 19 January in Vienna of the Final Document of the Third Follow up Meeting of that same Conference. The text which the thirty five participating countries adopted was an important one. By means of concrete agreements and by the balance it established between the military, humanitarian and economic aspects of security, the text clearly emphasized that stability within the community of European nations rests upon shared values and upon a rigorous code of conduct. That code does not permit national leaders to

become the masters of thought over their fellow citizens, nor does it permit stronger nations to impose themselves on more vulnerable nations and show contempt for their dignity

7. Warsaw, Moscow, Budapest, Berlin, Prague, Sofia and Bucharest, just to mention the capital cities, have become as it were the stages on a long pilgrimage towards freedom. We must honour those people who, at the cost of immense sacrifices, have courageously undertaken this pilgrimage; we must also honour the political leaders who have assisted it. What is admirable in the events that we have witnessed is the fact that whole peoples have spoken up: women, young people and men have overcome their fear. The human person has shown the inexhaustible resources of dignity, courage and freedom concealed within itself. In countries where for years a party has told people what to believe and the meaning to be given to history, these brothers and sisters have shown that it is not possible to stifle the fundamental freedoms that give meaning to human life: freedom of thought, conscience, religion expression, and political and cultural pluralism.

8. These aspirations, expressed by the various peoples, must be satisfied through the rule of law in every European nation. Ideological neutrality, the dignity of the human person as the source of rights, the fact that the person comes before society, respect for democratically agreed juridical norms, pluralism in the organization of society: these are the irreplaceable values without which it is impossible to build in any lasting way a common home from East to West, one accessible to all and open to the world. In that home there can be no society worthy of man unless there is respect for transcendent and permanent values. When man makes himself the sole measure of all things, without reference to him from whom all things come and to whom this world returns, he very soon becomes a slave of his own finiteness. As for the believer, he knows from experience that man is truly man only in accepting himself from God and in agreeing to cooperate in the plan of salvation: "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52).

9. The time has come for Western Europeans, who have the advantage of having lived for many years in freedom and prosperity, to help their brothers and sisters in Central and Eastern Europe to regain fully their due place in the Europe of today and tomorrow. Yes, the moment is ripe to gather up the stones of the walls that have been torn down and to build together a common home. Unfortunately, too often the western democracies have not known how to use the freedom won not so long ago at the cost of bitter sacrifices. One can only regret the deliberate absence of any transcendent moral reference in the administration of the so called "developed" societies. Side by side with generous impulses towards solidarity, with genuine concern for the promotion of justice and a constant concern for the effective respect for human rights, one has to note the presence and the spread of such counter values as selfishness, hedonism, racism and practical materialism. It should not happen that those who have newly arrived at freedom and democracy should be disappointed by those who in a certain way are "veterans" of these things. All Europeans are providentially called to rediscover the spiritual roots which made Europe. In this regard, I wish to repeat before this distinguished assembly the words I spoke in October of 1988 to the Members of

the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg: "If Europe wants to be faithful to itself, it must be able to gather all the living forces of this continent, respecting the original character of each region, but rediscovering in its roots a common spirit.... In expressing the ardent wish to see intensified the cooperation, already taking shape, with other nations, particularly those of the Center and East, I have the feeling of gathering together the desire of millions of men and women who know that they are bound together by a common history and who await a destiny of unity and solidarity on the scale of this continent" (Address to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 8 October 1988). Ladies and Gentlemen, this, it seems to me, is not only Europeans hope for, but it is what the whole world expects continent that has given so much to others.

10. For this reason, I confidently welcome the efforts being made by the leaders of the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics out of concern for dialogue and peace. My contacts with them have enabled me to note their desire to put international cooperation on more solid foundations, so that the two countries will be considered more and more as partners and not rivals.

This will be so only if all the members of the community of nations, especially those with a greater influence and therefore a greater responsibility for safeguarding peace, make efforts to respect scrupulously the principles of international law which have so happily contributed to strengthening harmonious cooperation between States.

The new climate which has thus been progressively establishing itself in Europe has fostered substantial progress in negotiations on nuclear, chemical and conventional disarmament. The year 1989 may well have marked the decline of what was called "the Cold War", of the division of Europe and the world into two ideologically opposed camps, of the uncontrolled armaments race, and of the confinement of the communist world in a closed society. Thanks be to God, whose will it has been to inspire people with those "thoughts of peace" which Christ, in coming among us on Christmas Night, bestowed on each individual as a heritage and a leaven capable of changing the world!

11. Very happily, this new atmosphere has also spread well beyond Europe. Peacemaking efforts have made progress, thanks especially to the far sighted action of the United Nations, which I am glad to honour here.

Free elections have taken place in Namibia which should soon attain the independence so eagerly awaited by the population.

Negotiations in Angola and Mozambique are to be encouraged, so that the goodwill of all may make it possible to remove the stubborn obstacles which hinder a resolution. Thus will there be an end to the cruel trials suffered by peoples, already materially disadvantaged, who will be better

able to shape their own development.

The political and constitutional reforms towards which the Republic of South Africa seems to be heading need to be further transformed into reality, so that the climate of trust and dialogue for which all the population feels an urgent need may be fostered.

Burundi too now seems to be making progress towards a definitive settlement of the ethnic conflicts which until recently were tearing it apart.

Also on the African continent, we must note the birth of the Arab Maghrebine Union, a starting point for necessary regional] cooperation with a view not only to economic changes but also towards the peaceful solution of existing problems and beneficial relations with the European Economic Community.

Finally, a long way from there, in Latin America, the holding of democratic elections, most recently in Chile and Brazil, represents an important stage in the progress of the nations of this region towards greater freedom and democracy

12. But just as at dawn, when the sun begins to rise on some countries while others are still in darkness, so it is with the international scene: while some progress can be noted here or there, numerous countries still remain in the grip of trial and uncertainty.

I think first of the Middle East, which is still a prey to injustice and violence. The future of Lebanon, despite the great number of efforts made on her behalf, remains precarious. It is now urgently necessary that the Lebanese should be allowed to decide their own future with sovereign freedom, in fidelity to the civilized values which have shaped the distinct features of that country.

Not far from Lebanon, the people of the West Bank and Gaza are still subjected to sufferings that are hard to accept. How can I fail to repeat, yet again, that negotiation alone can adequately guarantee for the opposing parties respect for their legitimate aspirations, immediate peace and security for the future?

In the Gulf, now that the war between Iraq and Iran has ended, the problem of repatriating the prisoners of war still remains. This is a human problem par excellence. With the New Year celebrations, a time of happy family gatherings, just ended, we cannot forget the lot of those, mostly young people, who are still kept far from their own people without a justifiable reason

Farther East, a similar problem is posed by the Afghan refugees waiting to be able to return to their land. The international community cannot ignore their situation, nor, for that matter, the situation of the people inside Afghanistan who are daily experiencing the devastating effect of violent conflict. There, too, it is high time that the parties concerned redouble their efforts to ensure

that, in respect for the legitimate aspirations of all, the persistent hostilities and the sufferings imposed on innocent civilians come to an end.

13. A rapid glance at the vast area of Eastern Asia shows us great peoples, with noble cultural and religious traditions, who should be able to make a greater contribution to the harmonious progress of international life. Unfortunately, side by side with positive and hopeful signs, painful situations continue to exist.

I think of Cambodia, where, despite a first attempt at negotiation, we are still awaiting a peaceful transition towards a future in which all can trust. Let us hope that effective international cooperation will prevent the return of the fearful ordeals already suffered by an entire people.

Sri Lanka unfortunately continues to be torn by conflicts of every sort. These have taken their toll in numerous victims, practically throughout the whole of last year, and they dangerously threaten the cohesion of a nation which is nevertheless so peace loving.

Mention must likewise be made of Vietnam. I would like to encourage the modest signs of openness which have recently appeared, including those within the sphere of religious freedom. The Church and the Holy See are obviously well disposed to any dialogue capable of improving the situation in this area. The international community, for its part, should further encourage the brave people of Vietnam by helping them ever more effectively to take their proper place within the community of nations. And the serious question posed by the refugees from this country will only be resolved by the same international solidarity.

Finally, I could not leave this region without mentioning the Chinese nation. The grave events of June 1989 left me deeply moved, and from the beginning, acting as it were as the voice of all who are concerned for the fate of mankind, I did not fail to express, along with my feelings of sorrow, my sincere wish that so much suffering should not be in vain, but rather should help to renew the national life of that noble land. On the threshold of the New Year, I cannot fail to express this same wish once more, convinced as I am that the problems of peace in today's world are so great that they concern all men and women of good will. All the peoples of the world, in fact, are called to work for peace while respecting truth, justice and freedom.

14. In Central America, the prospects of beginning the peace process anew under the auspices of the United Nations, prospects which aroused so much hope, have been somewhat dampened. Recently, El Salvador was the scene of violent strife which mainly affected the civilian population. We recall in particular the barbarous murder of six religious of the Society of Jesus. The desire to solve society's problems through violence is quite simply an illusion a suicidal illusion. For this reason, I welcomed the summit held last month in San José, Costa Rica by the Presidents of the countries of Central America. These leaders declared in a timely way their deep conviction that it is indispensable to rouse in people's conscience the need to reject the use of force and terror as a

way of attaining political ends and objectives (San Isidro de Coronado Declaration, 12 December 1989).

The plague of violence and terrorism, aggravated by the detestable narcotics trade which is often its cause, has ravaged Peru and Colombia, to the point of endangering the social stability of these countries. In this climate of anarchy, we must deplore the cowardly murder of a bishop, the pastor of the Colombian Diocese of Arauca, Monsignor Jesus Jaramillo Monsalve.

The crisis in Panama has very recently been added to these concerns. There too, it is the civilian population which has suffered most. It is to be hoped that the Panamanian people will be able to return without delay to a normal life, marked by the dignity and freedom to which all sovereign peoples have a right.

15. Finally, in completing this survey of the world scene, it seems appropriate to pause on the continent of Africa, where for years two peoples in particular have been suffering a tragic fate. The Sudan, in fact, has seen added to natural calamities the even more dreaded ones arising from the war in the South of the country. The devastation of villages and the exodus of their inhabitants have caused tragic suffering, including that of the many refugees. It is clear that international aid is urgently needed, yet such aid can only be ensured if a truce is observed, as we await the resumption of what had been very promising peace talks. To the cease fire there must be added genuine respect for the fundamental rights of all members of Sudanese society, particularly the minorities, in power sharing and in the production and use of natural resources. All this must be accomplished with full freedom and without discrimination by reason of race or religion.

No less worrying is the situation of the people of Ethiopia, whom the Catholic Church has not ceased to assist through its charitable organizations, in cooperation with the initiatives of the local bishops and the efforts of governments and non governmental organizations. There too, the tragic effects of drought, sickness and famine have exacerbated the effects of internal conflicts. Let us hope that assistance to the inhabitants of Tigre can be resumed so that a tragedy of immense proportions may be averted. Furthermore, the current negotiations with Eritrea and Tigre should likewise contribute to strengthening the conviction that a military solution to the conflict cannot be found. It goes without saying that any solution must take into account the legitimate aspirations of the beloved Eritrean people who have already suffered so much.

16. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: such is the setting, with its alternating lights and shadows, in which the Catholic Church is called by her Lord to bring the witness of faith, hope and love. It is brightened by the good will of her most humble laity, by the untiring devotion of her bishops and priests, and by the unconditional commitment of her men and women religious. As a pilgrim to the Far East and the Island of Mauritius, I was recently able to note once again the abundant fruits brought forth by the apostolic labours and perseverance of so many workers of the Gospel both yesterday and today. Thanks be to God for them!

I fervently hope that in the new climate of freedom which seems to be spreading everywhere believers will be able not only to practise their faith since certain countries and certain majority religions do not always permit them to do so but also to participate actively and with full right in the political, social and cultural progress of the nations to which they belong

Unbelief and secularization pose challenges which must be taken in account by all believers. who are called to bear joint witness to the primacy of God over all things. For this reason, besides the freedom of religion which the State must guarantee them, it is essential that better understanding and better co operation should exist between religions. In this regard, I was recently able to note the beneficial effects of such interconfessional understanding in Indonesia, where the principles of Pancasila enable Islam and the other religions practised by the inhabitants of that country to come together in a harmonious dialogue which benefits the whole of society. Unfortunately, such is not always the case. I cannot remain silent about the disturbing situation experienced by Christians living in certain countries where Islam is the majority religion. Expressions of their spiritual distress constantly reach me: often deprived of places of worship, made the object of suspicion, prevented from organizing religious education or charitable activities in accordance with their faith, they have the painful feeling of being second-class citizens. I am convinced that the great traditions of Islam, such as welcoming strangers, fidelity in friendship, patience in the face of adversity, the importance given to faith in God, are the principles which ought to enable unacceptable sectarian attitudes to be overcome. I express my earnest hope that if Muslim believers nowadays rightly find in countries of Christian tradition the facilities needed for satisfying the demands of their religion, then Christians will similarly be able to benefit from a comparable treatment in all countries of Islamic tradition. Religious freedom cannot be limited to simple tolerance. It is a civil and social reality, matched by specific rights enabling believers and their communities to witness without fear to their faith in God and to live out all the demands of that faith.

17. Never has the contribution of believers been so valuable as it is today, in a world where so many people are searching for the real meaning of existence and history. I am particularly convinced that the witness of prayer, of community life within the Church and of effective charity is as necessary to the development of this world as is technical progress or material prosperity. This is the point I wished to make in a message to the European Ecumenical Assembly in Basel last May: "Political agreements and negotiations are necessary means to arrive at peace, and our gratitude is great towards those who devote themselves to these matters with conviction, perseverance and generosity. But, to be lastingly fruitful, these measures need a soul. For us, it is a Christian inspiration which can supply them with one through an intrinsic reference to God, Creator, Saviour and sanctifier, and to the dignity of every man and every woman, created in his image" (L'Osservatore Romano, 18 May 1989).

Yes, may the power of the Spirit gain for mankind everywhere a renewed spiritual energy which will draw it nearer to its Creator! In our age where material gain is so important, where there is such concern for freedom, may there never be lacking signs of transcendence, of concern for the

most defenceless and of respect for the aspirations of others!

18. The year 1990 begins the decade which will bring us to the end of the second millennium of the Christian era. For every Individual, for every people, for our earth, let us make this time an "advent". Let us prepare the way of God who never ceases to come to us, as on Christmas Night, so as to enrich us by his life and by his presence. There always remains a space in the heart of man which he alone can fill. May we be able, each of us in our own place and by fulfilling the duties entrusted to us by Providence, to help the men and women of our time to discover ever more clearly, in wonder and trust, that God is their highest good!

These are my wishes for you, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, for your fellow-citizens, and for the entire human family! With all my heart, I entrust them "to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine" (Eph 3:20). May his blessing be with you all!

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