



The Holy See

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

Monday, 9 January 1995

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. The traditional New Year meeting with the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See is always for me a source of great satisfaction.

Once more, your worthy spokesman, Ambassador Joseph Amichia, has expressed in elegant terms the good wishes which you desire to offer me. They go straight to my heart and are a source of comfort. I thank you cordially!

2. Again this year the number of countries with representatives to the Successor of Peter has increased: in fact 10 nations have established diplomatic relations with the Holy See: the Republic of South Africa, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the State of Israel, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Federated States of Micronesia, Western Samoa, the Republic of Suriname, the Kingdom of Tonga and the Republic of Vanuatu. I am very pleased to see thus increased the number of representatives to the Apostolic See.

3. The destiny of the great human family, of which these widely differing peoples form part, is certainly marked by many successes, but also by too many setbacks. Your Dean has evoked before us, a few moments ago, the lights and shadows which go with us. Yet believers know that man, created in the image and likeness of God, is capable of doing good. This is why, as I in my turn address to you my fervent good wishes for a good and happy New Year, I address them also to your fellow countrymen and all your leaders. To each one I say, in the very words of the Apostle Paul: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21)! Yes, for the happiness of all, it is my wish that at the threshold of the year 1995 the path of the people of the world should be illuminated by that divine light and serenity which the crib at Bethlehem reflects in

such a marvellous way.

4. Alas, there are still rising today from this world too many cries of despair and pain, the cries of our brothers and sisters in humanity, crushed by war, injustice, unemployment, poverty and loneliness. Very near to us, in the winter cold, the peoples of Bosnia Hercegovina continue to suffer in their own flesh the consequences of a pitiless war. While it is still fragile, the recent ceasefire could lead to the resumption of serious negotiations. Faced with this tragedy which in a way seems like the shipwreck of the whole of Europe, neither ordinary citizens nor political leaders can remain indifferent or neutral. There are aggressors and there are victims. International law and humanitarian law are being violated. All of this demands a firm and united reaction on the part of the community of nations. Solutions cannot be improvised at the whim of conquests by either side. And may law never reach the point of sanctioning results obtained by force alone! That would be the ruin of civilization and a fatal example for other parts of the world.

The conflicts tearing apart the Caucasus and very recently once more the Russian Federation, in Chechnya, pose to the international community serious questions about the means to be taken in order to ensure genuine coexistence between different peoples. Yet again it has to be remembered that negotiation, if necessary with the help of international institutions, is the only possible path for overcoming obstacles to harmony in these ethnic, religious and linguistic mosaics of our world, in such a way that the original character of each of the separate parts will be respected.

5. For too many peoples, violence and hatred remain a temptation and an easy solution. Thus I am thinking of Africa, with its still smouldering fires: Liberia, Somalia and Southern Sudan, where no one is yet able to think about the future. Angola, which remains a land where violence and devastation still reign. Rwanda, which is struggling to emerge from the abyss into which it has been plunged by systematic and barbarous genocide, while neighboring Burundi could itself blunder into the senseless adventure of a further ethnic conflict. A great country like Zaire has still not attained the hoped for restoration of democracy. And we are witnessing, on the shores of the Mediterranean, ravages being perpetrated in Algeria by a brute force which is not even sparing the small Catholic community. There too, it is necessary that a way be speedily found to work out means for indispensable national dialogue.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we cannot allow a great continent like Africa to go adrift. Yes, for Africa I ask for a major effort of international solidarity: in the first place, to make those confronting one another with arms in their hands for reasons of race, power or prestige to listen to reason; secondly, to bring an end to the ignoble arms trade, which encourages those who trust in violence alone; finally, to come to the aid of the peoples living below the poverty level. In fact one cannot fail to feel concern, for international aid for Africa has gone down considerably this year. And it has been noted that of the 40 poorest countries in the world 30 are in Africa.

6. International solidarity becomes all the more urgent as the world in these first days of 1995 appears sharply divided into areas of wealth and peace and regions plagued by crisis, poverty and even war. All this represents a continuing threat to global stability.

For example, we know that in Latin America, with a few exceptions, democracy has made real progress. Let us hope that the people of Haiti and the people of Cuba too will find, in their respective situations, the most appropriate paths to consolidate democratic life in these countries, which have already endured so much. But, on the other hand, it must be stated that although this continent has experienced the beginnings of economic growth, vast social reforms are still needed in order that the real cancers of poverty and injustice may be eliminated. These are the cause, among other things, of such phenomena as drug trafficking and crime, which are as subversive as the guerrilla movements of the past.

Asia and the Pacific are becoming increasingly aware of their distinctiveness and their human and economic potential. This is a good thing. But in order to contribute to peace-making and peace itself, co-operation, which is taking place above all in the economic sphere, must also be translated into a solidarity which takes into account the great diversity of countries and their languages, ethnic groups, cultures and religions, so that material growth will never come about at the expense of human rights and peoples legitimate aspirations.

In the vast expanse of our world, my attention now turns to the people of Sri Lanka and of East Timor, still being subjected to distressing trials. Nor do I forget the great peoples of China and of Viet Nam who are engaged in a vast economic and social renewal. I think particularly of the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church who live in these countries and generously contribute to them; unfortunately they still do not enjoy satisfactory conditions for practising their faith fully.

7. In today's interdependent world, a whole network of exchanges is forcing nations to live together, whether they like it or not. But there is a need to pass from simply living together to partnership. Isolation is no longer appropriate.

The embargo in particular, clearly defined by law, is an instrument which needs to be used with great discernment and it must be subjected to strict legal and ethical criteria. It is a means of exerting pressure on governments which have violated the international code of good conduct and causing them to reconsider their choices. But in a sense it is also an act of force and, as certain cases of the present moment demonstrate, it inflicts grave hardships upon the people of the countries at which it is aimed. I often receive appeals for help from individuals suffering from confinement and extreme poverty. Here I would like to remind you who are diplomats that, before imposing such measures, it is always imperative to foresee the humanitarian consequences of sanctions, without failing to respect the just proportion that such measures should have in relation to the very evil which they are meant to remedy.

8. These considerations are not utopian, for we are very happy to know of situations where the international community has shown itself to be far-sighted and effective. I wish to take this occasion in particular to encourage all involved in the Middle East peace process. Here we have proof that when people talk to one another the course of history can change.

We know of course that, in the Holy Land where Jesus was born almost 2,000 years ago, confrontations and restrictions still exist. The Palestinian people is still waiting to see its aspirations completely fulfilled. Lebanon has not recovered its full sovereignty. But let us not see those situations as inevitable.

Courageous men and women, ready to look at one another and listen, will never be lacking. They will be capable of finding fitting tools for building societies where each person is absolutely necessary to the others, and where diversity is recognized above all as a source of enrichment. One does not write peace with letters of blood, but with the mind and the heart!

South Africa shows us that this is so. This great country has been able to accept in a mature manner the challenge of multiracial elections. It provides an example to many other nations in Africa and elsewhere, by causing the spirit of reconciliation and of compromise to prevail over the tensions which are an inevitable element of transition. The ceasefire declared in Northern Ireland, followed by negotiations between representatives of the two sides which have been in conflict for decades, represents a happy development. I wish to encourage the parties concerned to devote themselves wholeheartedly to the search for a political solution, which can only be based on forgiveness and mutual respect.

Yes, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am convinced that though war and violence are alas contagious, peace is equally so. Let us give it every chance! In the face of the disintegration of societies once made compact whether people liked it or not, in the face of predatory nationalism, in the face of overt or covert attempts to dominate, the members of the international community must be of one mind in order that the forces of moderation and brotherhood which open the way to dialogue and co operation may finally triumph.

9. In a few months we are going to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the United Nations Organization: how could we fail to want the Organization to become ever more the instrument par excellence for promoting and safeguarding peace? In recent years it has increased the number of its peace-keeping operations, as also its interventions aimed at easing the transition to democracy in States rejecting a single-party regime. It has set up tribunals for trying those held to be responsible for war crimes.

These are significant developments which foster hope that the Organization will provide itself with means ever more suitable and effective, capable of sustaining its ambitions. In the end, the achievements of an Organization like the United Nations clearly demonstrate that respect for

human rights, the demands of democracy and observance of the law are the foundations upon which must rest an infinitely complex world, the survival of which depends upon the place attributed to man as true goal of all political activity.

10. It is in this spirit that the Holy See acted on the occasion of the recent Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in September 1994. In the face of an attempt to demote the person and his motivations, in a sphere as serious as that of human life and solidarity, the Holy See considered that it was its duty to remind the leaders of the nations of their responsibilities, and to make them realize the risk that there could be forced on humanity a vision of things and a style of living belonging to a minority. In doing so, the Holy See considers that it has defended man. Allow me to quote to you in this regard the unforgettable words of my predecessor Pope Paul VI, in his Christmas message of 1973: "Woe to the person who lays his hand on man: for man is born sacred in this life, from his mother's womb. He is born ever endowed with the perilous but divine prerogative of freedom. This freedom can be trained but is inviolable. Man is born as a person sufficient in himself, yet needing social companionship, he is born a thinking being, a willing being, a being destined for good but capable of error and sin. He is born for truth and he is born for love".

Many of those taking part in the Cairo Conference were expecting this statement and this witness from the Holy See. Such in fact is the reason why the Holy See has a place in the midst of the community of nations: to be the voice which the human conscience is waiting for without thereby minimizing the contribution of other religious traditions. Being a spiritual and worldwide authority, the Apostolic See will continue to provide this service to humanity, with no other aim than tirelessly to recall the demands of the common good, respect for the human person, and the promotion of the highest spiritual values.

What is at stake is the transcendent dimension of man: this can never be made subject to the whims of statesmen or ideologies. It is equally the service of man that must concern the leaders of societies: their fellow citizens, by giving them their trust, expect from them an indefectible attachment to what is good, persevering effort, honesty in the conduct of government, and the ability to listen to everyone, without any discrimination. There is a morality of service to the earthly city which excludes not only corruption but, even more, ambiguity and the surrender of principles. The Holy See considers itself at the service of this reawakening of conscience, without the least temporal ambition, the small Vatican City State being merely the minimum support necessary for the exercise of a spiritual authority which is independent and internationally recognized. Your presence here, Ladies and Gentlemen, bears witness to the fact that it is precisely thus that your leaders regard the Holy See.

11. It only remains for me to express to you my gratitude for the wisdom with which you carry out your duties, Ladies and Gentlemen, and to express to you once more my affectionate good wishes for yourselves, your families and the peoples whom you represent. With all my heart I hope that we shall co operate ever more closely in the creation of a climate of brotherhood and trust

between individuals and peoples, in order to prepare a world more worthy of humanity in the eyes of God. May God bless you and your fellow citizens, he "who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think" (Eph 3:20)!

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