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

1 JANUARY 1979

« TO REACH PEACE, TEACH PEACE »

To all of you who desire peace:

The great cause of peace between the peoples needs all the energies of peace present in man's heart. It was to the releasing and cultivation of these energies - to the training of them - that my predecessor Paul VI decided, shortly before his death, that the 1979 World Day of Peace should be dedicated:

" TO REACH PEACE, TEACH PEACE "

Throughout his pontificate, Paul VI walked with you along the difficult paths towards peace. He shared your anxiety when peace was threatened. He suffered with those engulfed by the misfortunes of war. He encouraged all efforts to restore peace. In every circumstance he kept up hope, with indomitable energy.

Convinced that peace is something built up by everyone, he launched in 1967 the idea of a World Day of Peace, with the desire that you would take it over as an undertaking of your own. Every year since then his Message offered to the leaders of the nations and of the international organizations the opportunity to renew and express publicly that which legitimizes their authority: the enabling of free, just and fraternal human beings to progress and co-exist in peace. Widely differing communities met to celebrate the inestimable benefit of peace and to affirm their willingness to defend and serve it.

I take from the hands of my revered predecessor the pilgrim's staff of peace. I am on the road, at your side, with the Gospel of peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers." I invite you to celebrate the World Day at the beginning of the year

1979, placing it, in accordance with the last wishes of Paul VI, under the banner of teaching peace.

I. A HARD TASK

An irrepressible aspiration

The attainment of peace is the summing-up and crowning of all our aspirations. We sense that peace is fullness and joy. To achieve peace between countries, many attempts are made through bilateral or multilateral exchanges and international conferences, and some people take courageous personal initiatives to establish peace or to ward off the threat of a new war.

Confidence undermined

But at the same time, we see that individuals and groups never bring to a conclusion the settling of their secret or public conflicts. Is peace therefore an ideal beyond our grasp? The daily spectacle of war, tension and division sows doubt and discouragement. In places the flames of discord and hatred even seem to be kindled artificially by some who do not have to pay the cost. And too often gestures of peace are ridiculously incapable of changing the course of events, even if they are not actually swept away and in the end taken over by the overbearing logic of exploitation and violence.

In one place, timidity and the difficulty of carrying out needed reforms poison relations between human groups in spite of their being united by a long or exemplary common history; new desires for power suggest recourse to the overpowering influence of sheer numbers or to brute force, in order to disentangle the situation, and this under the impotent and sometimes self-interested and compliant gaze of other countries, near or far; both the strongest and the weakest no longer place confidence in the patient procedures of peace.

Elsewhere, fear of a precarious peace, military and political imperatives, and economic and commercial interests lead to the establishment of arms stockpiles or to the sale of weapons capable of appalling destruction. The arms race then prevails over the great tasks of peace, which ought to unite peoples in new solidarity; it fosters sporadic but murderous conflicts and builds up the gravest threats. It is true that at first sight the cause of peace seems to be handicapped to a crippling extent.

From words of peace...

And yet, in nearly all public statements at the national level or that of the international organizations, rarely has there been so much talk of peace, detente, agreement, and the rational solution of conflicts in conformity with justice. Peace has become the slogan that reassures or is meant to beguile. In a sense, we do have something positive: the public opinion of the nations would no longer tolerate the justifying of war or even taking the risk of an offensive war.

... to convictions for peace

But if we are to accept the challenge presented to the whole of humanity confronted with the hard task of peace, we need more than words, whether sincere or demagogical. The true spirit of peace must make itself felt in particular at the level

of the statesmen and of the groups or centres that control, more or less directly, more or less secretly, the decisive steps either towards peace or towards the prolonging of wars or situations of violence. At the least, people must agree to place their trust in a few elementary but firm principles, such as the following. Human affairs must be dealt with humanely, not with violence. Tensions, rivalries and conflicts must be settled by reasonable negotiations and not by force. Opposing ideologies must confront each other in a climate of dialogue and free discussion. The legitimate interests of particular groups must also take into account the legitimate interests of the other groups involved and of the demands of the higher common good. Recourse to arms cannot be considered the right means for settling conflicts. The inalienable human rights must be safeguarded in every circumstance. It is not permissible to kill in order to impose a solution.

Every person of good will can find these principles of humanity in his or her own conscience. They correspond to God's will for the human race. In order that these principles may become convictions in the minds of both the powerful and the weak, and in order that they may come to imbue all activity, they must have their full force restored to them. At every level, this calls for long and patient education.

II. EDUCATION FOR PEACE

1. BRINGING VISIONS OF PEACE BEFORE OUR EYES

To overcome this spontaneous feeling of impotence, an education worthy of the name must have as its first task, and produce as its first beneficent result, the ability to see beyond the unfortunate facts in the foreground, or rather to recognize, in the very midst of the raging of murderous violence, the quiet progress of peace, never giving in, untiringly healing wounds, and maintaining and advancing life. The movement towards peace will then be seen as possible and desirable, as strong and already victorious.

Rereading history

Let us first learn to reread the history of peoples and of mankind, following outlines that are truer than those of the series of wars and revolutions. Admittedly the din of battle dominates history. But it is the respites from violence that have made possible the production of those lasting cultural works which give honour to mankind. Furthermore, any factors of life and progress that may have been found even in wars and revolutions were derived from aspirations of an order other than that of violence: aspirations of a spiritual nature, such as the will to see recognition given to a dignity shared by all mankind, and the desire to save a people's soul and its freedom. Where such aspirations were present, they acted as a regulator amid the conflicts, they prevented irreparable breaks, they maintained hope, and they prepared a new chance for peace. Where such aspirations were lacking or were impaired in the heat of violence, they gave free play to the logic of destruction, which led to lasting economic and cultural retrogression and to the death of whole civilizations. Leaders of the peoples, learn to love peace by distinguishing in the great pages of your national histories and throwing into relief the example of your predecessors whose glory lay in giving growth to the fruits of peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Esteem for the great peacemaking tasks ot today

Today you will contribute to education for peace by highlighting as much as possible the great peacemaking tasks that

fall to the human family. In your endeavours to reach a rational and interdependent management of mankind's common environment and heritage, to eradicate the misery crushing millions of human beings, and to strengthen institutions capable of expressing and increasing the unity of the human family on the regional and world level, men will discover the captivating appeal of peace, which means reconciliation of human beings with each other and with their natural universe. By encouraging, in spite of all the current forms of demagogy, the search for simpler ways of life that are less exposed to the tyrannical pressures of the instincts of possessing, consuming and dominating and more open to the deep rhythms of personal creativity and friendship, you will open up for yourselves and for everyone immense room for the unsuspected possibilities of peace.

The light of many different examples of peace

Just as it is inhibiting for the individual to feel that humble efforts in favour of peace, in the limited area of each one's responsibilities, are nullified by the great world debates which are held prisoner by a logic of simple relations of force and the arms race, so it is liberating to see international bodies that are convinced of the possibilities of peace and passionately attached to the building of peace. Education for peace can then benefit also from a renewed interest in the everyday examples of simple builders of peace at all levels: the individuals and families who by controlling their passions and by accepting and respecting each other gain their own inner peace and radiate it; the peoples, often poor and sorely tried, whose age-old wisdom has been forged on the anvil of the supreme good of peace and who have succeeded in repeatedly resisting the deceptive seductions of rapid progress obtained by violence, convinced that such gains would bring with them the poisonous seeds of fresh conflicts.

Yes, without ignoring the drama of violence, let us bring bef ore our eyes and those of the rising generation these visions of peace: they will exercise a decisive attraction. Above all, they will set free the aspiration for peace which is an essential part of man. These new energies will lead to the use of a new language of peace and new gestures of peace.

2. SPEAKING A LANGUAGE OF PEACE

Language is made for expressing the thoughts of the heart and for uniting. But when it is the prisoner of prefabricated formulas, in its turn it drags the heart along its own downward paths. One must therefore act upon language in order to act upon the heart and avoid the pitfalls of language.

It is easy to note to what an extent bitter irony and harshness in making judgments and in criticizing others, especially "outsiders", and systematic contestation and insistence on our claims overrun our speech relationship and strangle both social charity and justice itself . By expressing everything in terms of relations of force, of group and class struggles, and of friends and enemies, a propitious atmosphere is created for social barriers, contempt, even hatred and terrorism and underhanded or open support for them.. On the other hand, a heart devoted to the higher value of peace produces a desire to listen and understand, respect for others, gentleness which is real strength, and trust. Such a language puts one on the path of objectivity, truth and peace. In this regard the social communications media have a great educational task. The modes of expression in the exchanges and debates of political confrontations, both national and international, are also influential. Leaders of the nations and of the international organizations, learn to find a new language, a language of peace: by its very self it creates new room for peace.

3. MAKING GESTURES OF PEACE

What is set free by visions of peace and served by a language of peace must be expressed in gestures of peace. Without such gestures, budding convictions vanish, and the language of peace becomes a quickly discredited rhetoric. The builders of peace can be very numerous, if they become aware of their capabilities and responsibilities. It is the practice of peace that leads to peace. The practice of peace teaches those searching for the treasure of peace that the treasure is revealed and presented to those who produce humbly, day by day, all the forms of peace of which they are capable.

Parents, educators and young people

Parents and educators, help children and young people to experience peace in the thousands of everyday actions that are within their capacity, at home, at school, at play, with their friends, in team work, in competitive sport, and in the many ways in which friendship has to be established and restored. The International Year of the Child proclaimed by the United Nations for 1979 should draw everyone's attention to the original contribution of children to peace.

Young people, be builders of peace. You are workers with a full share in producing this great common construction. Resist the easy ways out which lull you into sad mediocrity; resist the sterile violence in which adults who are not at peace with themselves sometimes want to make use of you. Follow the paths suggested by your sense of free giving, of joy at being alive, and of sharing. You like to utilize your fresh energies - unconfined by *a priori* discriminations - in meeting others fraternally without regard for f rontiers, in learning foreign languages to facilitate communication, and in giving disinterested service to the countries with least resources. You are the first victims of war, which breaks your ardour. You are the hope of peace.

Partners in social endeavours

Participants in professional and social life, for you peace is often hard to achieve. There is no peace without justice and freedom, without a courageous commitment to promote both. The strength then demamded must be patient without yielding or flagging, firm without throwing down challenges, and prudent in actively preparing the way for the desired advances without dissipating energy in quickly fading outbursts of violent indignation. When confronted with injustice and oppression, peace is led to clear a path for itself by adopting resolute action. But this action must already bear the mark of the goal at which it is aimed, namely a better mutual acceptance of individuals and groups. It will be regulated by the desire for peace that comes from deep within man, and by the aspirations and the legislation of peoples. It is this capacity for peace, cultivated and disciplined, which provides the ability to find even in tensions and conflicts the breathing spaces that are needed for developing its fruitful and constructive logic. What happens in a country's internal social life has a considerable influence for better and for worse upon peace between nations.

Statesmen

But, we must insist once more, these many gestures of peace run the risk of being discouraged and partly nullified by an international policy that failed to find, at its own level, the same peace dynamism. Statesmen, leaders of peoples and of international organizations, I express to you my heartfelt esteem, and I offer my entire support for your of ten wearisome

efforts to maintain or reestablish peace. Furthermore, being aware that mankind's happiness and even survival is at stake, and convinced of my grave responsibility to echo Christ's momentous appeal "Blessed are the peacemakers", I dare to encourage you to go further. Open up new doors to peace. Do everything in your power to make the way of dialogue prevail over that of force. Let this find its first application at the inward level: how can the peoples truly foster international peace, if they themselves are prisoners of ideologies according to which justice and peace are obtained only by reducing to impotence those who, before any examination, are judged unfit to build their own destinies or incapable of cooperating for the common good? Be convinced that honour and effectiveness in negotiating with opponents are not measured by the degree of inflexibility in defending one's interests, but by the participants' capacity for respect, truth, benevolence and brotherhood or, let us say, by their humanity. Make gestures of peace, even audacious ones, to break free from vicious circles and from the deadweight of passions inherited from history. Then patiently weave the political, economic and cultural fabric of peace. Create - the hour is ripe and time presses - ever wider areas of disarmament. Have the courage to re-examine in depth the disquieting question of the arms trade. Learn to detect latent conflicts in time and settle them calmly before they arouse passions. Give appropriate institutional frameworks to regional groups and the world community. Renounce the utilization of legitimate and even spiritual values at the service of conflicts of interests, values which are then brought down to the level of these conflicts and make them more unyielding. Take care that the legitimate desire to communicate ideas is exercised through persuasion and not through the pressure of threats and arms.

By making resolute gestures of peace you will release the true aspirations of the peoples and will find in them powerful allies in working for the peaceful development of all. You will educate yourselves for peace, you will awaken in yourselves firm convictions and a new capacity for taking initiatives at the service of the great cause of peace.

III. THE SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION BY CHRISTIANS

The importance of faith

All this education for peace - peace between peoples, in one's own country, in one's neighbourhood, and within oneself - is intended for all men and women of good will, as we are reminded by Pope John XXIII's Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*. Peace is, at different degrees, within their capacities. And since "Peace on earth... can never be established, never guaranteed, except by the diligent observance of the divinely established order" (*Pacem in Terris*, 1; AAS 55, 1963, p. 257), believers find in their religion light, motivation and strength in order to work for education to peace. True religious feeling cannot fail to promote true peace. The public authorities, by recognizing - as they should - religious liberty, favour the development of the spirit of peace at the deepest level of people's hearts and in the educational institutions fostered by believers. Christians, for their part, are especially educated by Christ and led by him to be builders of peace: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (*Mt* 5: 9; cf. *Lk* 10: 5, etc.). The reader will understand that I am devoting special attention at the end of this Message to the sons and daughters of the Church, in order to encourage their contribution to peace and to place it within the context of the great Plan of Peace revealed by God in Jesus Christ. The special contribution made by Christians and the Church to the work done by all will be all the better assured if it draws its nourishment from its own special sources, from its own special hope.

The Christian vision of peace

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, the aspiration for peace that you share with all men and women corresponds to an initial call by God to form a single family of brothers and sisters, created in the image of the same Father. Revelation insists upon our freedom and our solidarity. The difficulties that we encounter in our journey towards peace are linked partly to our weakness as creatures, who must necessarily advance by slow and progressive steps. These difhculties are aggravated by our selfishness, by our sins of every sort, beginning with the original sin that marked a break with God, entailing a break between brothers and sisters. The image of the Tower of Babel well describes the situation. But we believe that Jesus Christ, by giving his life on the Cross, became our Peace: he broke down the wall of hate that divided the hostile brothers (cf. *Eph* 4:14). Having risen and entered into the glory of the Father, he mysteriously associates us with his Life: by reconciling us with God, he heals the wounds of sin and division and enables us to produce in our societies a rough outline of the unity that he is reestablishing in us. The most faithful disciples of Christ have been builders of peace, to the point of forgiving their enemies, sometimes even to the point of giving their lives for them. Their example marks the path for a new humanity no longer content with provisional compromises but instead achieving the deepest sort of brotherhood. We know that, without losing its natural consistency or its peculiar difficulties, our journey towards peace on earth is comprised within another journey, that of salvation, which reaches fulfilment in an eternal plenitude of grace, in total communion with God. Thus, the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Peace, with its own source, means and end, already permeates, without dilution, the whole of earthly activity. This vision of faith has a deep impact of the everyday action of Christians.

Christian dynamism for peace

It is true that we are advancing along the paths of peace with the weaknesses and the gropings of all those making the journey with us . With the latter we suffer from the tragic deficiencies of peace. We feel ourselves constrained to remedy them with even greater resolution, for the honour of God and for the honour of man. We do not claim to find in the Gospel text ready-made formulas for making today this or that advance towards peace. But on almost every page of the Gospel and of the history of the Church we find a spirit, that of brotherly love, powerfully teaching peace. We find, in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and in the sacraments, a strength drawn from the divine source. We find, in Christ, a hope. Setbacks cannot render vain the work of peace, even if the immediate results prove to be fragile, even if we are persecuted for our witness in favour of peace. Christ the Saviour associates with his destiny all those who work with love for peace.

Prayer for peace

Peace is our work: it calls for our courageous and united action. But it is inseparably and above all a gift of God: it requires our prayer. Christians must be in the first rank of those who pray daily for peace. They must also teach others *to pray for peace.* It will be their joy to pray with Mary, the Queen of Peace.

To everyone, Christians, believers, and men and women of good will, I say: Do not be afraid to take a chance on peace, to teach peace. The aspiration for peace will not be disappointed for ever. Work for peace, inspired by charity which does not pass away, will produce its fruits. Peace will be the last word of History.

From the Vatican, 8 December 1978.

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