



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS OF THE NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE*

2 February 1981

Dear Friends,

I AM PLEASED to welcome here the members of the NATO Defence College and their families. I understand that for the past six months you have been involved in an educational programme, studying the cultural and moral objectives aimed at strengthening international solidarity. I appreciate the importance of this undertaking since its ultimate goal is the furthering of world peace.

As you know, I have spoken many times of my great concern for peace. I am convinced that, with God's help, the attainment of peace for all people and between all nations is within our human capabilities. Yet a true peace often eludes our grasp precisely because we view it more as a framework to be imposed from without rather than a process to be cultivated from within. Peace expresses a dynamic reality that is grounded in a harmonious relationship of persons and, as such, it requires our continual efforts. To achieve lasting peace, we must first study its components and this will include an investigation of the dangers that threaten peace.

In my recent Encyclical I pointed out that foremost among the threats to peace was not only the stockpiling of atomic weapons, but a manipulation of the very notion of peace itself for the purposes of self-interested parties. In this regard I stated: "The technical means at the disposal of modern society conceal within themselves not only the possibility of self-destruction through military conflict, but also the possibility of a 'peaceful' subjugation of individuals, of environments, of entire societies and of nations, that for one reason or another might prove inconvenient for those who possess the necessary means and are ready to use them without scruple. An instance is the continued existence of torture, systematically used by authority as a means of domination and political oppression and practised by subordinates with impunity".

Thus there can be no peace where the dignity of human individuals is denied. For wherever we find the domination by one person over another in the latter's choice of destiny or rightful access to the truth, there we will already discover the seeds of a bitter resentment or deepseated animosity. Yes, guaranteeing freedom is an essential part of working for peace. That is why I chose as the theme for the World Day of Peace: "To serve peace, respect freedom".

During these past months in Rome, you have studied the complexities of world peace and gained an increased awareness of the necessity of its attainment. Your investigation now places you among those men and women to whom others will look for leadership in this area.

I pray that your vision of human dignity will never fail you in the pursuit of peace. May you always acknowledge the incomparable worth of every human life, even from the very moment of conception. May you contribute to the building of peace by always appealing to what is most noble in the heart of every person.

And may that peace which reflects the very goodness of God himself fill your hearts and your homes, thereby encouraging you to be tireless workers in the cause of peace.

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