



The Holy See

*Message of His Holiness Paul VI
to the Conference on the Peaceful Use of Outer Space**

At a time when, for the first time in the history of the world, an International Conference meeting on the exploration and peaceful use of outer space, we greet with feeling the highly qualified delegates from all the participating nations. We desire to offer them our best wishes as they begin their work and assure them of the profound interest with which the Catholic Church will follow its course.

With the exploration and utilization of outer space it can be said that human life is acquiring a kind of new dimension. Thanks to artificial satellites, which will probably continue to multiply and improve even further, hitherto unsuspected possibilities are now opening up before men and peoples for the transmission of knowledge and information in all fields; this is a new road which is opening up and it may prove to be enormously speedy and effective as a means of progress in education, cultural exchanges and inter-national assistance; it is perhaps - God wishes it! - a herald of the imminent collapse of the barriers which still impede peaceful relations among certain social and national groups, a sign of a forthcoming era of sincere cooperation among all the nations of the globe, a turning-point - and perhaps a decisive one - in mankind's anguished march towards peace.

Although the Church is not competent to give an opinion on the technical and scientific aspects of the exploration of space, it is nevertheless directly interested in the educational, cultural, moral and social consequences which will flow from this sudden expansion of the scope of human activity. It is concerned that the enormous progress in space technology, which the world has witnessed with admiration for some years now, should be put to the service of peace and the common welfare of mankind. And it believes that, by giving a timely reminder of the principles of moral and spiritual order so often proclaimed by Sovereign Pontiffs in recent years, it can make also in this field a useful contribution to the true good of society.

For it is clear to any impartial observer that forgetfulness or transgression of moral rules would

have particularly serious consequences in this area. If, for example, the benefits of the use of outer space should be put, in disregard of justice, to the profit of only one group of nations to the exclusion of the others; if the free circulation of information should produce the uncontrolled propagation of false news; if the increased transmission facilities became an instrument for ideological propaganda tending to spread subversion, stir up hatred, perpetuate racial discrimination and set peoples or social classes against each other instead of uniting them: who can fail to see that the recent and marvellous discoveries of science would then turn against man and work for his unhappiness rather than his happiness?

It has often been noted that scientific and technical progress is not always followed by comparable progress in morality, law and international cooperation. Yet, remarkable efforts have already been made and we sincerely wish to pay a tribute to them. A Treaty was concluded last year which defines the principles governing the activities of States in the exploration and use of space. This is a first step, to which the Holy See has given its support and which the Church welcomes. But the Church, without exceeding the limits of its mission, thinks that it can draw the attention of persons in authority to the urgent need for progress along this road. There must be no delay in drafting a whole body of "space law" to coordinate and discipline initiatives in these matters; any forthcoming conquests of science – and science is advancing swiftly – must already find in place the legal framework and the institutional arrangements to ensure that these conquests will be used for the common good and protected against abuse.

If this done the space age will advance in order and not in confusion and rivalry. If this is done it will benefit all peoples and not just the privileged few. We are thinking, in particular, of those whose low level of cultural and economic development has kept them, up till now, in an invidious and unjust state of inferiority and who now see opening up before them opportunities for rapid progress along the roads of educational and cultural development. Using for their benefit the resources offered by the exploration of outer space means working simultaneously for the advancement of mankind, for justice and for peace.

These are the wishes and recommendations which we make bold to put forward at the opening of the first United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Use of Outer Space. With all our heart we call down on its organizers and on all those who will take part in its work God's most abundant blessings.

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