*ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS**

Thursday, 11 January 1973

We are very touched, Mr. Ambassador, by the address you have just delivered to us, on behalf of all the members of the diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See and yourself. We are happy to be once again with this assembly, an image of the diversity of the world, gathered at this moment to present to us its New Year wishes. You recalled what characterizes not only the activity of our pontificate, but the motives of the spirit and the heart which determine our daily attitudes, set the tone of our interventions, bring about our initiatives. You seek our image, as it is reflected, as in a mirror, in our words and acts; you examine the significance of the function that we are trying to carry out in the midst of all of you, and with regard to the peoples whose noble representatives you are here.

In fact, Gentlemen, this function is not comparable to the one you may have witnessed in other diplomatic posts. Your presence induces us, as it were, to define again the system of the original relations between the Church and the States, between the Holy See and the field of international activity, constituted by the relations between countries of with the highest universal authorities.

Actually, there is no need, today, for a long speech on this subject. Last year we spoke at length on the particular role of the Church, alien to political action as such, and yet very much present in men's quest along the ways of justice, what is more, working in the service of men to educate their consciences and collaborate, in her own way, in cultural and social advancement. Today, her quite original place in the family of nations no longer needs to be proved. All men of goodwill understand that we have no other line of conduct but the one laid down by our divine Founder: «Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's».

The two orders are really distinct and it is the good fortune of our times to have redefined this fundamental distinction between the temporal power and the Kingdom of God which the Church

incarnates, beyond the vicissitudes and the necessities of history which may have led to certain confusions on both sides. In this sense, we have not, as the spokesman of the Gospel, to indicate the political ways, the concrete means that citizens must use, in such and such a precise situation, to bring about the progress of their own country.

Do not draw the conclusion, Gentlemen, that the two orders do not have deep relations to maintain. Does not your presence here, the fruit of a common desire of your country and the Holy See, bear witness to the contrary? This is the point that we would like to stress today. Even if your function as Ambassador to the Holy See takes on a peculiar character, imposes on you a particular form of activity, it is a very important role, the usefulness of which is seen to be more and more fruitful every day, a role which is an keeping with the modern situation.

In the first place, of course, we have to define more clearly the frontiers of our respective competence. You can also observe, as friendly witnesses, the positions or the lines of action of the Holy See, in order to pass them on to your governments. We have above all to collaborate together for the common good of each of your countries and of the whole of mankind. This is the perspective we take the liberty of offering your understanding and your possibilities of action.

In this sense, as you know, we are not neutral. We mean: the Gospel forbids us to be indifferent when it is a question of the good of man, his physical health, the development of his spirit, his fundamental rights, his spiritual vocation; and also when the social conditions to which a population is subjected, endanger these goods, or again when an international Institution needs to be supported in order to play the humanitarian role expected of it.

The Holy See, as the active witness and the central organ of the great Catholic family, benevolently welcomes, therefore, the confidences, the wishes, the plans, you kindly communicate to it. It is grateful to you, too, for making its own wishes known to those you represent. These wishes are those of Christian conscience, although it contributes itself, with the different means at its disposal, including the media of social communication, to educating men’s hearts along these lines.

Consequently, these relations established freely and at the highest level between the Church and civil society, appear as a new form of the Church’s presence in the world, in the line of the conciliar Constitution Gaudium et Spes. This presence excludes subordination, concession, compromise or confusion between the two institutions. The relations that are set up here with the Holy See keep as their immediate aim, it is true, settlement of the problems that may arise between the State and the local Christian community, even if this community is a small one. But we cannot stop at this today. It is a question in mutual respect of competences, to unite efforts aimed at promoting human initiatives and speed works beneficial to all. This seems to us one of the present aims of pontifical diplomacy.

You see then what you can expect from this centre of the Church. It is not a question of haggling over interests, as between two States the aims of which may be different or in opposition. We are working here, you and ourself, for the spiritual and temporal good of the same individuals, the same community. And the Holy See will not ask for any privilege, as you know, except the rights of religious freedom.

In practice, the Church is committed with you to making more efficient the principles capable of enlightening and guiding in the best way the social life of all these men whose fate deeply concerns the leaders of nations as well as the Church. Now the transformations of modern life are changing customs so radically that it is necessary for all of us to look boldly at new questions, and to watch closely, al every step, the way we take, for it weighs heavily on the future.

How can we, for example, guarantee the freedom of individuals and groups, and encourage liberating initiatives while maintaining, at the same time, the exigencies of the common good, or rather giving people the desire to promote this common good? How can we establish or restore justice for all social categories, without some of them being harmed, or at least in want, while the others are prosperous? How can we encourage economic expansion, and at the same time allow men to master it, to ensure an ecological balance, and to appreciate the value of the qualitative progress of persons, of their spirit, their heart, their soul? How can we adapt the legislation to the legitimate aspirations of the modern world and to the new scientific possibilities, without man himself, the quality of love, the respect of life, the value of the family, the responsibility of human conscience, having to suffer as a result, today or tomorrow? These are the deep interests that we have to guarantee together. This Apostolic See aspires only to contribute to this effort, and you are, Gentlemen, in the foreground of this dialogue between it and the governments of your country.

Alongside the pursuit of these common principles, you can also experience here a marked fraternity between the different countries of the world. There are differences between some of these countries which certainly cannot find their solution in the Vatican. But the level of relations here with the Church, eager for peace and respectful of all rights, and even more the fact of being in the presence of the Mystery of the Christian faith, create an atmosphere which should contribute to bringing hearts nearer one another, to setting them before them highest responsibility, to preparing peace.

In addition to this atmosphere of motherhood, the Holy See, as you know, is ready to do everything in its power to give international selfishness which seems to prevent the States from expressing the good sentiments of their peoples in collective action. On this earth, however, the world will be saved, it is our conviction, only by growing solidarity transcending suspicious nationalisms.

A long apprenticeship is still required, no doubt, to teach the nations to respect one, another, to

exchange in justice and peace, to share, to turn together to priority aims, and even to accept, if necessary, the control of an international authority. The Catholic Church, by her vocation, is particularly sensitive to this universality. If united, world action were to slow down or waste away, leaving the actual great decisions in the hands of two or three powers, it would, in our eyes, be a step backwards and a threat. The international institutions, which mankind has at last given itself, are called, thanks to a fair representation all the participating nations, to express and implement reason, fight and justice; to carry out, with the cooperation of all or at least quasi-unanimity, as strict and peaceful law capable of regulating international relations (cf. Message for Peace Day 1973). In our eyes they represent, we do not hesitate to repeat, «the obligatory way of modern civilization and of world peace» (Address to the United Nations, 4 October 1965, A.A.S. 57, 1965, p.1878). We will not cease to invite the peoples to rise to the level of this universal common good which corresponds to the plan of the Creator of mankind, and which would in a word, ensure their own good.

Is it necessary to cite an example? The whole world is beginning to be moved by the recrudescence of violence: we are speaking of international terrorism. It is a grave and urgent problem, which it devolves on all the partners to solve together, with an honest approach, without omitting to draw attention too, to the causes of this phenomenon, its methods and its motives. But who would dare to sustain that the end justifies the means, that tenor can be an arm for legitimate causes, that violent action against innocent people is justified in the cause considered good? We hope it will be possible to find adequate means to gain a hearing and prepare efficacious remedies, in a wide united action.

As for the Gospel which is the charter of the Church, it is our conviction and our experience that it contributes to setting men, not only on the way to God, but also on the way to a full humanism. The moral values to which it educates, bring a powerful remedy for the evils that disfigure the face of humanity and reach its heart: their names are truth, justice, freedom, forgiveness, peace. They have their source in love, the dynamism of which must replace that of hate everywhere. And they bring with them trust, what is more, unshakable hope: with what is best in man and with God's help, what we wish is possible. Why stop, then, at the inevitable disappointments, why let ourselves be discouraged by certain facts, why wait before setting out again patiently along the ways of agreement? We are grateful to you for having recalled this hope of our recent message: yes, peace is possible.

Such is, Gentlemen, on the temporal plane, the significance of this Apostolic See and of the friendly dialogue it is keeping up with your governments, through you; such is, too, the meaning of our pontifical representations that correspond to your Embassies: to help the world to become one, to smooth the ways to its unity, its solidarity, unceasingly. Our voice wishes to be the echo of the Gospel. It may seem weak, we know, it is deprived of the means that are in the hands of States; but it is not alone: with it are raised the voices of our many Brothers in the episcopate, the mission of whom – is it necessary to recall? – is inseparable from ours, and the voices, too, of

those who share Christian faith, hope and charity, and who are working, in their place, to offer the same testimony.

You, too, Gentlemen, are working in this service of humanity, in a role that we esteem, honour and encourage. Through your persons, we respectfully greet each of your nations: we form for them wishes for happiness and peace, and we rejoice at the fact that they are taking their active place in this march towards an increasingly wide and increasingly united human Community. To you and to your families, Gentlemen, we present our heartfelt wishes at the threshold of the New Year, invoking divine assistance on your mission and the abundant blessings of the Almighty on your persons.

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