



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI  
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS  
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE**

*Sala Regia*

*Monday, 7 January 2013*

**[Video]**

*Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

As at the beginning of each New Year, I am happy to receive you, the distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, and to offer you my greetings and personal good wishes, which I extend to all the beloved nations which you represent, together with the assurance of my constant thoughts and prayers. I am especially grateful to your Dean, Ambassador Alejandro Valladares Lanza, and to your Vice-Dean, Ambassador Jean-Claude Michel, for the kind words which they addressed to me in the name of all. In a special way I wish to greet those who take part in this meeting for the first time. Your presence is a significant and valued sign of the fruitful relations which the Catholic Church entertains with civil authorities the world over. It involves a dialogue which has at heart the integral spiritual and material good of each man and woman, and seeks to advance their transcendent dignity everywhere. As I stated in my [Address on the occasion of the last Ordinary Public Consistory for the creation of new Cardinals](#): “the Church, from its origins, is oriented *kat’holon*, it embraces the whole universe”, and with it each people, each culture and each tradition. This “orientation” does not represent an intrusion in the life of the different societies, but serves rather to illumine the right conscience of their citizens, encouraging them to work for the good of each person and for the progress of the human race. It is in this context, and with the aim of fostering fruitful cooperation between Church and State in the service of the common good, that in the past year bilateral Accords were signed between the Holy See and Burundi, and with Equatorial Guinea, and the Accord with Montenegro was ratified. In this same spirit, the Holy See takes part in the work of various International Organizations and

Institutions. In this regard, I am pleased that this past December its request to become an Extra-regional Observer in the Central American Integration System was accepted, not least by reason of the contribution which the Catholic Church offers in several sectors of the societies of that region. The visits of the various Heads of State and of Government whom I received in the course of the past year, as well as the memorable Apostolic Journeys which I made [to Mexico, Cuba](#) and [Lebanon](#), were privileged occasions for reaffirming the civil commitment of Christians in those countries, and for promoting the dignity of the human person and the foundations of peace.

Here I am also pleased to mention the valued work accomplished by the Papal Representatives in constant dialogue with your Governments. I would like in particular to recall the esteem enjoyed by Archbishop Ambrose Madtha, Apostolic Nuncio in Côte d'Ivoire, who died tragically a month ago in an automobile accident, together with the chauffeur who was accompanying him.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Gospel of Luke recounts that on Christmas night the shepherds heard choirs of angels who gave glory to God and invoked peace on mankind. The Evangelist thus emphasizes the close relationship between God and the ardent desire of the men and women of every age to know the truth, to practise justice and to live in peace (cf. Blessed John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 [1963], 257). These days, we are sometimes led to think that truth, justice and peace are utopian ideals, and mutually exclusive. To know the truth seems impossible, and efforts to affirm it appear often to lead to violence. On the other hand, according to a now widespread way of thinking, peacemaking consists solely in the pursuit of compromises capable of ensuring peaceful coexistence between different peoples or between citizens within a single nation. Yet from the Christian point of view, the glorification of God and human peace on earth are closely linked, with the result that peace is not simply the fruit of human effort, but a participation in the very love of God. It is precisely man's forgetfulness of God, and his failure to give him glory, which gives rise to violence. Indeed, once we no longer make reference to an objective and transcendent truth, how is it possible to achieve an authentic dialogue? In this case, is it not inevitable that violence, open or veiled, becomes the ultimate rule in human relationships? Indeed, without openness to the transcendent, human beings easily become prey to relativism and find it difficult to act justly and to work for peace.

The consequences of forgetfulness of God cannot be separated from those resulting from ignorance of his true countenance, the root of a baneful religious fanaticism which, again in 2012, reaped victims in some countries represented here. As I have often observed, this is a falsification of religion itself, since religion aims instead at reconciling men and women with God, at illuminating and purifying consciences, and at making it clear that each human being is the image of the Creator.

Consequently, if the glorification of God and earthly peace are closely linked, it seems evident that

peace is both God's gift and a human task, one which demands our free and conscious response. For this reason, I wished my annual [Message for the World Day of Peace](#) to bear the title: *Blessed are the Peacemakers*. Civil and political authorities before all others have a grave responsibility to work for peace. They are the first called to resolve the numerous conflicts causing bloodshed in our human family, beginning with that privileged region in God's plan, the Middle East. I think first and foremost of Syria, torn apart by endless slaughter and the scene of dreadful suffering among its civilian population. I renew my appeal for a ceasefire and the inauguration as quickly as possible of a constructive dialogue aimed at putting an end to a conflict which will know no victors but only vanquished if it continues, leaving behind it nothing but a field of ruins. Your Excellencies, allow me to ask you to continue to make your Governments aware of this, so that essential aid will urgently be made available to face this grave humanitarian situation. I now turn with deep concern towards the Holy Land. Following Palestine's recognition as a Non-Member Observer State of the United Nations, I again express the hope that, with the support of the international community, Israelis and Palestinians will commit themselves to peaceful coexistence within the framework of two sovereign states, where respect for justice and the legitimate aspirations of the two peoples will be preserved and guaranteed. Jerusalem, become what your name signifies! A city of peace and not of division; a prophecy of the Kingdom of God and not a byword for instability and opposition!

As I turn my thoughts towards the beloved Iraqi people, I express my hope that they will pursue the path of reconciliation in order to arrive at the stability for which they long.

In [Lebanon](#), where last September I met the various groups which make up society, may the many religious traditions there be cultivated by all as a true treasure for the country and for the whole region, and may Christians offer an effective witness for the building of a future of peace, together with all men and women of good will!

In North Africa too, cooperation between all the members of society is of primary concern, and each must be guaranteed full citizenship, the liberty publicly to profess their religion and the ability to contribute to the common good. I assure all Egyptians of my closeness and my prayers at this time when new institutions are being set in place.

Turning to sub-Saharan Africa, I encourage the efforts being made to build peace, especially in those places where the wounds of war remain open and where their grave humanitarian consequences are being felt. I think particularly of the Horn of Africa, and the East of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where new acts of violence have erupted, forcing many people to abandon their homes, families and surroundings. Nor can I fail to mention other threats looming on the horizon. Nigeria is regularly the scene of terrorist attacks which reap victims above all among the Christian faithful gathered in prayer, as if hatred intended to turn temples of prayer and peace into places of fear and division. I was deeply saddened to learn that, even in the days when we celebrated Christmas, some Christians were barbarously put to death. Mali is also torn

by violence and marked by a profound institutional and social crisis, one which calls for the effective attention of the international community. In the Central African Republic, I hope that the talks announced as taking place shortly will restore stability and spare the people from reliving the throes of civil war.

The building of peace always comes about by the protection of human beings and their fundamental rights. This task, even if carried out in many ways and with varying degrees of intensity, challenges all countries and must constantly be inspired by the transcendent dignity of the human person and the principles inscribed in human nature. Foremost among these is respect for human life at every stage. In this regard, I was gratified that a resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in January of last year, called for the prohibition of euthanasia, understood as the intentional killing by act or omission of a dependent human being. At the same time, I must note with dismay that, in various countries, even those of Christian tradition, efforts are being made to introduce or expand legislation which decriminalizes abortion. Direct abortion, that is to say willed as an end or as a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law. In affirming this, the Catholic Church is not lacking in understanding and mercy, also towards the mother involved. Rather, it is a question of being vigilant lest the law unjustly alter the balance between the right to life of the mother and that of the unborn child, a right belonging equally to both. In this area, the recent decision of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights regarding in vitro fertilization, which arbitrarily redefines the moment of conception and weakens the defence of unborn life, is also a source of concern.

Sadly, especially in the West, one frequently encounters ambiguities about the meaning of human rights and their corresponding duties. Rights are often confused with exaggerated manifestations of the autonomy of the individual, who becomes self-referential, no longer open to encounter with God and with others, and absorbed only in seeking to satisfy his or her own needs. To be authentic, the defence of rights must instead consider human beings integrally, in their personal and communitarian dimensions.

Pursuing our reflection, it is worth emphasizing that education is another privileged path to peacemaking. The current economic and financial crisis, among other things, has also made this clear. The crisis developed because profit was all too often made absolute, to the detriment of labour, and because of unrestrained ventures in the financial areas of the economy, rather than attending to the real economy. There is a need, then, to rediscover the meaning of work and proportionate profit. To that end, it would be well to teach people how to resist the temptations of particular and short-term interests, and to look instead to the common good. Furthermore, it is urgent to train leaders who will one day guide national and international public institutions (cf. *Message for the 2013 World Day of Peace*, 6). The European Union also requires farsighted representatives capable of making the difficult choices necessary to rectify its economy and to lay solid foundations for growth. Alone, certain countries may perhaps advance more quickly, but together, all will certainly go further! If the credit spread represents a source of concern, the

increasing differences between those few who grow ever richer and the many who grow hopelessly poorer, should be a cause for dismay. In a word, it is a question of refusing to be resigned to a “spread” in social well-being, while at the same time fighting one in the financial sector.

Investment in education in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America means helping them to overcome poverty and disease, and to create legal systems which are equitable and respectful of human dignity. Certainly, if justice is to be achieved, good economic models, however necessary, are not sufficient. Justice is achieved only when people are just! Consequently, building peace means training individuals to fight corruption, criminal activity, the production and trade in narcotics, as well as abstaining from divisions and tensions which threaten to exhaust society, hindering development and peaceful coexistence.

Continuing our meeting today, I would like to add that peace in society is also put at risk by certain threats to religious liberty: it is a question sometimes of the marginalization of religion in social life; sometimes of intolerance or even of violence towards individuals, symbols of religious identity and religious institutions. It even happens that believers, and Christians in particular, are prevented from contributing to the common good by their educational and charitable institutions. In order effectively to safeguard the exercise of religious liberty it is essential to respect the right of conscientious objection. This “frontier” of liberty touches upon principles of great importance of an ethical and religious character, rooted in the very dignity of the human person. They are, as it were, the “bearing walls” of any society that wishes to be truly free and democratic. Thus, outlawing individual and institutional conscientious objection in the name of liberty and pluralism paradoxically opens by contrast the door to intolerance and forced uniformity.

Moreover, in an ever more open world, building peace through dialogue is no longer a choice but a necessity! From this perspective, the joint declaration between the President of the Bishops’ Conference of Poland and the Patriarch of Moscow, signed last August, is a strong signal given by believers for the improvement of relations between the Russian and Polish peoples. I would also like to mention the peace accord concluded recently in the Philippines and I would like to underline the role of dialogue between religions for a peaceful coexistence in the region of Mindanao.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the end of the Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, whose fiftieth anniversary will be celebrated this year, my predecessor Blessed John XXIII remarked that peace remains “an empty word” if it is not nourished and completed by charity (AAS 55 [1963], 303). Indeed, it is at the heart of the diplomatic activity of the Holy See and, above all, of the concern of the Successor of Peter and of the whole Catholic Church. Charity cannot take the place of justice that has been denied; nor can justice, on the other hand, replace charity that has been refused. The Church daily practises charity in works of social assistance such as hospitals and clinics, her educational institutions such

as orphanages, schools, colleges and universities, and through help given to peoples in distress, especially during and after conflicts. In the name of charity, the Church wishes also to be near all those who suffer due to natural disasters. I am thinking of the flood victims in Southeast Asia and of those of the hurricane which struck the East coast of the United States. I am also thinking of those who experienced the earthquake that devastated some regions of Northern Italy. As you know, I wanted to go there personally and see for myself the earnest desire to rebuild what had been destroyed. In this moment of its history, I hope that such a spirit of tenacity and shared commitment will move the entire beloved Italian nation.

To conclude our encounter, I would like to recall that, at the end of the Second Vatican Council – which started fifty years ago - the Servant of God, Pope Paul VI, sent out messages which remain relevant, including one addressed to world leaders. He encouraged them in this way: “Your task is to be in the world the promoters of order and peace among men. But never forget this: It is God [...] who is the great artisan of order and peace on earth” (Message to Leaders, 8 December 1965, 3). Today, as I make those sentiments my own, I convey to you, the Ambassadors and other distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps, as well as to your families and colleagues, my very best wishes for the New Year. Thank you!