



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL I

TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS *Consistory Hall*

Thursday, 31 August 1978

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We warmly thank your worthy spokesman for his words, which were full of deference, or rather of goodwill and trust. Our first reaction would be to admit to you our embarrassment at these remarks that give us honour and these sentiments that give us comfort. But we are well aware that this homage and this appeal are addressed through us to the Holy See, to its highly spiritual and humane mission, and to the Catholic Church, whose children are particularly desirous to build, together with their brothers and sisters, a more just and harmonious world.

We have not previously had the honour of making your acquaintance. Until now our ministry was limited to the dioceses entrusted to us and to the pastoral duties that this entailed around Vittorio Veneto and Venice. Nonetheless, it was already a sharing in the ministry of the universal Church.

But now, in this See of the Apostle Peter, our mission has indeed become universal and places us in relationship not only with our Catholic sons and daughters but with all peoples, with their qualified representatives, and more particularly with the diplomats of the countries that have established relations on this level with the Holy See. On these grounds we are very happy to receive you here and to tell you of our esteem for you, our trust in you and our understanding of your noble role. We are happy also to greet through you each one of the nations that you represent. We look on each of them with respect and affection, with an ardent desire for their progress and peace. These nations will become still more familiar to us according as we meet not only their bishops and faithful, but also their civil leaders.

Everybody knows how much was achieved in this field of diplomatic relations by our venerated predecessor. During his pontificate the missions of which you are the heads grew in number. We too wish these relations to be ever more cordial and fruitful for the good of your fellow-citizens, for the good of the Church in your countries, and for the good of universal concord. Moreover, the

relationships that you can have with each other at the Holy See also serve understanding and peace. We offer you our sincere collaboration in accordance with the means that belong to us.

In the range of diplomatic posts your role here is unique, just as the mission and competence of the Holy See are unique. Obviously we have no temporal goods to exchange, no economic interests to discuss, such as your States have. Our possibilities for diplomatic interventions are limited and of a special character. They do not interfere with purely temporal, technical and political affairs, which are matters for your Governments. In this way, our diplomatic missions to your highest civil authorities, far from being a survival from the past, are a witness to our deep-seated respect for lawful temporal power, and to our lively interest in the humane causes that the temporal power is intended to advance. Similarly, you are here your Governments' spokesmen and watchful witnesses of the Holy See's spiritual activity. On both sides there is presence, respect, exchange and collaboration, without confusing the competences.

Our services, consequently, are of two orders. It can be, if we are invited, participation by the Holy See as such, at the level of your Governments or of the international entities, in the search for better solutions to the great problems that see at stake détente, disarmament, peace, justice, humanitarian measures and aid, development, etc. Our representatives or delegates take part in that search, as you know, speaking freely and disinterestedly. That is one appreciable form of cooperation or mutual aid that the Holy See has the possibility of contributing, thanks to the international recognition that it enjoys and the representation of the whole of the Catholic world that it ensures. We are ready to continue in this field the diplomatic and international activity already undertaken, to the extent that participation by the Holy See proves desired and fruitful, and is in correspondence with our means.

But our activity, at the service of the international community is also—we would say, chiefly—situated on another level, one that could be more specifically called pastoral and which belongs properly to the Church. It is a matter of contributing, through documents and commitments of the Apostolic See and of our collaborators throughout the Church, to forming consciences—chiefly the consciences of Christians but also those of men and women of good will, and through these forming a wider public opinion—regarding the fundamental principles that guarantee authentic civilization and real brotherhood between peoples. These principles are: respect for one's neighbour, for his life and for his dignity, care for his spiritual and social progress, patience and the desire for reconciliation in the fragile building up of peace; in short all the rights and duties of life in society and international life, as they have been set forth in the Council's Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* and in so many messages by the late Pope Paul VI. Such attitudes, which in the logic of evangelical love the Christian faithful take or should take for their salvation, contribute to the gradual closer transformation of human relationships, the social fabric, and institutions. They help peoples and the international community to ensure more effectively the conditions for the common good and to discover the final meaning of their forward march. They have a civic and political impact. Your countries are trying to build a modern civilization, dedicating

to this task efforts that are often ingenious and generous and have our full understanding and encouragement, as long as they are in conformity with the moral laws written by the Creator in the human heart. But we have confidence in God's help. The Holy See will employ all its strength in that work. It also deserves your full interest.

From today on, our most cordial wishes accompany you in the mission that will be yours with us, as it was with Pope Paul VI. And we invoke upon each of you, on your families, on the countries that you represent, and on all the peoples of the world, abundant blessings from the Most High.