



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Signs of hope at the end of this century

1. A deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit's action in the Church and in the world encourages us to pay attention to the "signs of hope present in the last part of this century, even though they often remain hidden from our eyes" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 46). It is true, in fact, that our century is marked by very serious crimes against humanity and is darkened by ideologies that have encouraged neither the liberating encounter with the truth of Jesus Christ nor integral human development. But it is also true that God's Spirit, who "fills the world" (*Wis 1:7*; cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 11), has not ceased to scatter abundant seeds of truth, love and life in the hearts of the men and women of our time. These seeds have produced fruits of progress, humanization and civilization, which are authentic signs of hope for humanity on its journey.

2. In the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, among these signs I first mentioned "scientific, technological and especially medical progress in the service of human life" (n. 46). Without doubt, human life in our world, at the social and personal level, has known and continues to experience remarkable improvement, thanks to extraordinary scientific developments.

Technological progress, when it respects authentic and integral human advancement, must also be accepted with gratitude, even if — as is obvious — science and technology are not enough to satisfy man's deepest longings. Among today's technological developments showing particular promise for humanity's future, I would like to mention those that have occurred in the medical field. In fact, when they improve man's overall life by lawful means, they eloquently reflect the creative and saving plan of God, who wanted man in Christ to have the fullness of life. Nor can we forget the enormous progress in the area of communications. If the *mass media* are handled in such a

way that they are under full democratic control and are used to convey authentic values, humanity will be able to enjoy many benefits and will feel it is one great family.

3. Another sign of hope is represented by a “greater awareness of our responsibility for the environment” (ibid.). Today, in part as a reaction to the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources that has often accompanied industrial development, human beings are rediscovering the meaning and value of the environment as a hospitable dwelling (*oîkos*), where they are called to live their life. The threats that hang over humanity’s future, because of the lack of respect for the balance of the ecosystem, are spurring men of culture and science, as well as the competent authorities, to study and implement various measures and projects. They aim not only at repairing the damage caused thus far, but especially at mapping out a social development that is in harmony with respect for and appreciation of the natural environment.

This keen sense of responsibility for the environment must also encourage Christians to rediscover the deep meaning of the creative plan revealed by the Bible. God wanted to entrust man and woman with the task of filling the earth and having dominion over it in his name, as his representative (cf. *Gn 1:28*), extending and in a certain way bringing to completion his own creative work.

4. Among the signs of hope in our time, we must also recall the “efforts to restore peace and justice wherever they have been violated, a desire for reconciliation and solidarity among different peoples, particularly the complex relationship between the North and the South of the world” (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 46). In the century now drawing to a close, we have witnessed the terrible tragedy of two world wars and today there are further wars and tensions resulting in great suffering for peoples and nations throughout the world. Never as in this century have such enormous masses of people experienced and continued to experience conditions of life unworthy of man — due in part to pernicious mechanisms of exploitation.

For this reason too, the human conscience, urged by the mysterious action of the Spirit, has grown in its resolve to make peace and justice indispensable priorities. Today conscience sees the persistence of unjust conditions, underdevelopment and the violation of human rights as an intolerable crime. Moreover, war is rightly rejected as a way to resolve conflicts. There is a growing understanding that only the paths of dialogue and reconciliation can heal the wounds caused by history in the life of nations. They alone can lead to a positive resolution of the problems which still arise in international relations.

The contemporary world is definitely being structured into a system of interdependence at the economic, cultural and political levels. It is no longer possible to reason solely on the basis of the interests, however legitimate, of individual peoples and nations: a truly universal awareness must be achieved.

5. For this reason my venerable Predecessor Pope Paul VI wanted prophetically to focus humanity's sights on the goal of a "civilization of love", in which it would be possible to achieve the ideal of one human family, while respecting the identity of each of its members and with a mutual exchange of gifts.

On the way towards this "civilization of love", believers, docile to the action of the Holy Spirit, are called to make their irreplaceable contribution, radiating in history the light of Christ, the Word of God made flesh. As the Council recalls, he "reveals to us that 'God is love' (1 Jn 4:8), and at the same time teaches that the fundamental law of human perfection, and consequently of the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love. He assures those who trust in the charity of God that the way of love is open to all men and that the effort to establish a universal brotherhood will not be in vain" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 38).

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we approach the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, "there is need for a better appreciation and understanding of the signs of hope present in the last part of this century" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 46). Such signs include developments in science, technology and medicine, so long as they respect the ethical demands of human life and dignity. Another reason for hope is the increasing sense of responsibility for the environment, which is an invitation to Christians to rediscover the deeper meaning of God's plan in creation. We can also perceive the Holy Spirit's work in efforts to safeguard peace and justice, and to overcome conditions of underdevelopment and the violation of human rights.

In a world marked by growing economic, cultural and political interdependence, the challenge is to bring about a new sense of solidarity, that will make everyone more aware of the needs and interests of others. Christians have a particular responsibility to build such a civilization of love, and in this task they must follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who teaches us that the fundamental law of human perfection is none other than Christ's new commandment of love.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, the Holy Father said:

I extend a special greeting to the *NATO Defense College*. At a time when tension and conflict continue to threaten certain parts of the world, I encourage you always to see your professional commitment in terms of the preservation and promotion of peace. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Finland, Sweden and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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