



The Holy See

**DISCOURS DU SAINT-PÈRE JEAN-PAUL II
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Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very grateful for the expression of good wishes which your Dean, Ambassador Joseph Amichia, has just presented in your name and on behalf of the Governments which you represent. I thank you most sincerely.

Your presence here this morning brings to mind the achievements and expectations of the peoples of the earth. Providence has given me the joy of visiting a great number of them; at this moment I picture once more all those I have been able to meet, and the others are close to my heart.

For my part, I would offer you my fervent good wishes for your own happiness and that of your families, as well as for your success in carrying out the important duties entrusted to you. Nor do I forget your Governments or your fellow-citizens, may God enable them to achieve their shared aspirations, so that each society will know greater justice, greater spiritual and material well-being, and consequently greater peace. Such is my hope. Such is my prayer.

I am likewise pleased to welcome the diplomats who have taken up their duties in recent months, and I am gratified to see the family of nations ever more fully represented at the Holy See. I am all the more satisfied because this increased presence is the sign, for many peoples, of a return to democracy. For the Catholic Church, this is always an occasion to manifest to each country desirous of maintaining diplomatic relations with the Apostolic See the Church's resolve to stand beside those nations which are working wholeheartedly for the progress of peoples.

Ambassador Amichia has perceptively set forth a panorama of the principal events of 1991, as

well as the more notable activities of the Catholic Church and of the Holy See. In fact, the past year was filled with foreseeable developments, but also with unexpected events.

2. Unfortunately, 1991 was to be a year in which war played a leading role. As you recall, the so-called "Gulf War" broke out only a few days after our meeting on 12 January. Like every war, it left behind a sinister wake of dead and wounded, of devastation, hostility and still unresolved problems. The consequences of the conflict cannot be forgotten: even today the people of Iraq continue to suffer terribly. The Holy See has recalled, as you know, the ethical imperatives which must prevail in all circumstances: the sacredness of the human person, of whatever side; the force of law; the importance of dialogue and negotiation; respect for international agreements. These are the only "weapons" which do honour to humanity, according to God's plan!

3. The year 1991 likewise ended amid the clash of arms. Disturbing images have shown us civilian populations literally crushed by the battles rending Yugoslavia and particularly Croatia. Houses destroyed, inhabitants forced to flee, an economy wiped out, churches and hospitals systematically bombed: who is not appalled by these actions which reason condemns? My numerous appeals for peace and for dialogue are known to you. The position of the Holy See regarding the recognition of States newly emerged from the changed situation in Europe is familiar to you. Today I will limit myself to stressing that peoples have the right to choose their own way of thinking and living together. It is their right to endow themselves with the means which enable them to attain their legitimate aspirations, determined freely and democratically. Moreover, the community of nations has produced juridic documents and instruments which appropriately define each one's rights and duties, just as they foresee structures of cooperation geared to balancing essential relations between sovereign States, on both the regional and international level. Bombs are certainly not the way to build the future of a country or a continent.

4. We must also recall another conflict to which it seems we have become accustomed: I am thinking here of Northern Ireland. For years, the continuance of violence has counteracted attempts to reach a political solution. Can one be resigned to this calamity which disfigures Europe? No cause can justify the degree to which human rights, respect for legitimate differences and the observance of the law in that land have been trampled on. I invite all those involved to reflect before God on their way of acting.

At this time I recall the words of a "European" saint whom I recently canonized, Father Raphael Kalinowski. When Poland was fighting to preserve its national dignity and independence in the last century, although taking part himself in this struggle, he dared to exclaim: "Our homeland needs sweat, not blood!".

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: Europe needs men and women ready to come together to work in order that hatred and the rejection of others will no longer be tolerated on this continent which has raised up saints, models of humanity - on this continent which has been a source of

productive thinking and has spread institutions which honour the genius of man.

5. In addition to these uncurbed wars other situations of conflict still disturb the life of the earth's peoples. Since it is not possible to cite them all, I will mention the ethnic rivalries which characterize the Horn of Africa. While the Eritreans have obtained their autonomy, other centrifugal forces continue to undermine Ethiopia. In nearby Somalia, the State has collapsed and the fragmentation of society is making humanitarian aid practically impossible. The federal system is still a promise in the Sudan, debilitated by a war which began in 1983. Still farther from us, Sri Lanka continues to agonize amid offensives and reprisals which reap victims by the thousands.

We must not resign ourselves to this state of affairs. Political leaders most especially have the grave duty to favour everything that can end fratricidal conflicts. They must support the growth of dialogue, promote plans for society which are in harmony with their people's aspirations and increase necessary humanitarian assistance. Fortunately, diplomacy, especially in its multilateral aspect, enables exchanges and agreed solutions in an increasingly interdependent world; in this regard the United Nations Organization has an importance and a significance recognized by all. I express the hope that after the able leadership of Mr Javier Perez de Cuellar, the new Secretary General, Mr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, drawing on his international experience, can continue to make this irreplaceable Institution a privileged forum for the promotion of peace and the negotiated settlement of disputes.

6. When a new year begins, a year filled with uncertainties, each of us is prompted to chart our position and to look to the future.

The persistence of the conflicts and tensions which I have just called to mind gives rise to a sense of sadness. Sadness at having to acknowledge that the lessons of history, long past or recent, are never fully learned. In the end, to place one's trust solely in armed conflict in order to impose one's point of view, to appeal to situations inherited from the past in order to feel dispensed from opening new paths of understanding and of justice, to destroy systematically all that constitutes the richness of the societies one opposes or openly to flout law and humanitarian conventions the better to dominate one's adversary, all this represents a step backwards. Peace and reconciliation always begin with a benevolent outlook which respects in others - individuals or peoples - their dignity.

7. In this context, Europe has a specific responsibility precisely by reason of its high degree of civilization. Europe is on the path towards unity. It possesses a whole juridic patrimony and rules of international conduct which should permit it to face the uncertainties of the immediate future with a certain confidence.

The changes taking place in Yugoslavia or in what was until a few weeks ago the Soviet Union appear to demand the establishment of new structures of political cooperation. It is also likely that

a greater solidarity will be required of all so as to come to the assistance of increasingly impoverished populations and to ensure that the changes taking place do not occur against a backdrop of poverty.

Security, cooperation and the safeguarding of the human dimension must be the pillars on which the future of peoples will rest. This is the case for the Baltic Republics which have regained their independence, for Albania which has taken its place once again in the wider European family, as well as for the new reality which has emerged in the Soviet Union. The affirmation of national particularities poses and will continue to pose problems which will need to be resolved with wisdom so that all can have trust in their future, can walk at their own pace, see themselves respected in their uniqueness and take their place in the Europe of tomorrow, a community with a common destiny.

These are tasks which involve all Europeans. Now that the walls have fallen no one can appeal to lack of information about the living conditions of his neighbour in order to justify indifference: solidarity in the broadest sense of the term has at this stage become a prime duty. Either Europeans will be saved together or they will perish together!

8. Christians - Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants - will find themselves on this path; they are called to play a leading role and desire to keep the place which is theirs. Many of the values typical of the modern age have their roots in Christianity and today as in the past the disciples of Jesus, faithful to the teaching of their Master, owe it to themselves to be the "salt of the earth" (Mt 5:13). Still, it is necessary that they be given the possibility of doing this.

One can observe, in fact, even in countries of established Christian tradition that the Churches do not always find help and understanding for their projects and their efforts. The Catholic school, for example, is at times more tolerated than considered a partner in the national enterprise of education. But who could deny the services which it renders to society, if only for its contribution to the formation of consciences? In government schools, religious instruction is too often marginalized. If information is at once a right, a duty and a good, we must without doubt be grateful for the importance and the accomplishments of the means of social communication. Often they are a decisive factor in people's personal and social maturity. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon - and this is altogether regrettable that information about religion is reduced to folklore, or that religion and its noblest expressions are treated with derision. Who, today, can think of Europe without Christians? This would be to cut her off from one of her fundamental dimensions, to impoverish her memory and to forget the crucial role played by Christians in the changes which took place in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and in 1990.

I am confident that, despite the temporary difficulties affecting ecumenical dialogue, the great spiritual families rooted in this "old" continent will be able to rise to the historic tasks which lie before them, so as to give Europe a "reinforcement of spirit", the indispensable condition for this

continent's harmony and growth. In this regard, the gathering of young people at Czestochowa last August and the recent Special Assembly of the Synod for Europe fill me with hope.

9. One cannot, in fact, despair of man! We need to trust in his good will, in his creativity. First and foremost, because he is capable of love, having been "made in the image of God" (cf. Gen 1:26). Secondly, because he possesses a capacity for good which is perhaps not always fully appreciated. The various international agencies, including Catholic ones, bear striking witness to this desire for effective brotherhood. Their work to alleviate suffering as well as to promote the spirit of tolerance and of service contributes to harmony in human relationships and to the solution of pressing problems. Thanks to them, many people rediscover joy and hope. The Holy See for its part follows all these activities with interest, thanks especially to some of its agencies which have been present in the past year on many humanitarian "fronts". Here I would mention the activity of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* and the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers.

If we consider the activity carried on in the diplomatic sector, there too we perceive some promising signs. I am thinking, for example, of last autumn's Madrid meeting, where for the first time Arabs and Israelis were seated at the same table and agreed to speak of subjects which until then had been considered prohibited. The perseverance of enlightened people who desire to work for peace resulted in a structure of dialogue and of negotiations being set in place, one which will enable the peoples of the region - in particular the most exposed, the Palestinians and the Lebanese to face the future with greater confidence. It is the entire international community which ought to mobilize itself in order to accompany these peoples of the Middle East on the arduous paths of peace. What a blessing it would be if this Holy Land, where God spoke and Jesus walked could become a special place of encounter and prayer for peoples, if the Holy City of Jerusalem could be a sign and instrument of peace and reconciliation!

There too, believers have a mission of primary importance to accomplish. Forgetting the past and looking to the future they are called to repentance, to reexamine their behaviour and to realize once again that they are brothers and sisters by reason of the one God who loves them and invites them to cooperate in his plan for humanity. I consider dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims to be a priority. In coming to know each other better, in growing to esteem one another and in having out, with respect for consciences, the various aspects of their religion, they will be, in that part of the world and elsewhere "artisans of peace". As I wrote in my Message for the XX World Day of Peace, "a religious life, if it is lived authentically, cannot fail to bring forth fruits of peace and brotherhood, for it is in the nature of religion to foster an ever closer bond with the Godhead and to promote an increasingly fraternal relationship among people" (n. 2).

Unfortunately, I know also how difficult this fellowship between believers can be. How many appeals arrive at the Holy See to deplore situations where Christians in particular are the object of out right and unjustifiable discriminations, both in the Middle East and in Africa! There are

countries, for example, where Islam is the majority religion and where Christians still today do not even have the possibility of having a single place of worship at their disposal. In other cases, it is not possible for them to take part in the political life of the country as equal citizens. In still other cases, they are advised simply to leave. In this regard I appeal to all the leaders of countries which have had the beneficial experience of interreligious dialogue to deal with this problem seriously and realistically. At stake is respect for the conscience of the human person, peace in society and the credibility of international agreements.

10. If we shift our attention to Asia, we recognize the emergence of a regional identity which is becoming more and more strengthened, thanks especially to the persevering action of regional organizations which promote cooperation and friendship between peoples and civilizations, often quite diverse. Thus, in the course of the past months some courageous political actions have been made possible: the two Koreas have drawn closer together, and in Cambodia an accord has been reached, allowing the current factions to set out together on a path which friendly and disinterested countries are helping to delineate.

Two other countries have also drawn the attention of public opinion. The immense country of China has been very present on the world scene. Let us hope that fruitful international cooperation can be established with it. The Holy See looks sympathetically upon this vast country, with its highly developed culture and extraordinary human and natural resources. The Holy See also strives to follow the life of the small Catholic community which lives there. The Pope encourages his Chinese sons and daughters to continue to live their faith in fidelity to the Gospel and to Christ's Church. He exhorts them to serve generously their nation and their brothers and sisters, as they have always done.

A word also for beloved Viet Nam whose efforts towards economic openness should be supported. In that nation also there is a Catholic community whose apostolic vigour is praiseworthy. The Holy See ardently desires that the dialogue undertaken with the government leaders be intensified and that the situation and growth of the local Church, so close to the aspirations of the country, be acknowledged.

In calling to mind the condition of these enormous populations, we must not forget the men and women who are perhaps, the most deprived and most exposed to uncertain circumstances of every sort: expatriates and refugees. Let us recall, for example, the tragedy being undergone by those among them who are in camps in Hong Kong, Thailand Malaysia and other countries or by those who have been forcibly repatriated. In this regard, while reaffirming that these individuals have the same rights as other people, it is necessary to insist on the duty of the international community to accept its responsibility to welcome them and, at the same time, to promote in the countries from which they come socio-political conditions which permit them to live with freedom, dignity and justice.

I would not wish to bring to a close this brief look at Asia without mentioning a place of persistent tension: East Timor which I have had the great joy of visiting. A persevering dialogue, which I have called for in the past, is needed so that all the parties which play a role in the life of Timor will lay the foundations for a political and social life in harmony with the aspirations of the people. The Holy See for its part has taken every opportunity, both on the ecclesial level and on the diplomatic level, to invite those responsible and concerned for the well-being of this region to strive to put an end to contrasts which have endured too long.

11. We must now pause at Africa, where the winds of democratization are blowing. One fact seems to capture our attention, and it represents a great step forward: those who are working to bring about new societies are striving to strengthen freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and the possibility of freedom of action. There, it is a question of an evolution which should be encouraged both from the point of view of political assistance, as well as from the point of view of economic and technical assistance. As I wrote in the Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, it is necessary "to abandon a mentality in which the poor as individuals and as peoples are considered a burden, as irksome intruders trying to consume what others have produced. The poor ask for the right to share in enjoying material goods and to make good use of their capacity for work, thus creating a world that is more just and prosperous for all" (n. 28).

There are other positive signs in Africa to take note of. South Africa, for example, has not allowed itself to be overwhelmed by the difficulties which accompany its transformation into a society without "apartheid". Angola is taking its first steps as an independent nation, and Mozambique seems to be committed to a peace process. All of this has been accomplished because of the tenacity of those who act within their own nations, as well as through the mediation and assistance of friendly countries. This is a good example of international solidarity, and one would like to see it applied to other centres of tension which cause grave concern.

12. Nevertheless, the welcome changes which I have pointed out in Africa are far from being the case in all the countries of that continent. How can one forget the ethnic rivalries which trouble Rwanda, or Burundi, where a process of national reconciliation has been initiated? I have appealed to the international community not to abandon these peoples to themselves. Zaire is of intense interest at present. The breakdown of structures of government there does nothing to make it easier to set out a plan for society which corresponds to the aspirations of the majority. Sadly too, the people of Chad in these last weeks have experienced troubles which threaten its already precarious civil peace. Elsewhere, hesitation over democracy in Togo is a cause of preoccupation, and everything must be done to avoid disastrous confrontations. Liberia too, continues to be assailed by a civil war which has not only destroyed the entire infrastructure of the country but has likewise forced many people to flee. Madagascar, where for many months a deep political, social and economic crisis seems to have held the whole population hostage, again appears to be in the grip of changes which are cause for concern. May the peoples of these countries, already tried by so many natural disasters, by a stormy history and by endemic poverty,

not be abandoned! This is the call which I issue in their name to the whole international community!

13. To leave Africa on a more optimistic note, I would like to go back to a small nation which, after thirty years of war, is only now enjoying the first months of peace. I refer to Eritrea. The fruits of this peace have, it is true, a bitter taste when one thinks of the orphans, of the food shortages, and of the great task of reconstruction. But, with the return of peace and the support of good friends, all becomes possible. May these people no longer lack help and understanding! Obviously, neighbouring Ethiopia should not be overlooked. For Ethiopia it is a matter of creating institutions capable of dealing with the diversity of peoples which make it up.

Africa is stirring, therefore she is alive. Her peoples are more and more aware of their dignity, and also better informed. They have a right to our concern. They look forward to it. The Catholic Church, as you know, has been realizing on that continent a patient and persevering work which often receives little recognition on the part of public opinion. This is the work of exemplary missionaries, whose detachment and self denial are admirable, and who often pay with their lives for their apostolic commitment. Here, before this audience, I am pleased to pay homage to them and to encourage them in their witness of faith and love, which brings honour to the whole Church.

14. Our last stop takes us to Latin America, which, in this year, 1992, will celebrate the Fifth Centenary of Christopher Columbus's odyssey to the Americas. It is also the anniversary of the first evangelization. God willing, I shall have the joy of presiding in Santo Domingo next October at the General Assembly of the Latin American Bishops. These lands have been made fruitful through the Gospel, and my Pastoral Visits have enabled me to ascertain that these communities live a deep faith and are motivated by the resolve to bear witness to Christ in every circumstance.

In Latin America, too, there is no lack of positive things for us to consider. Democratization has made progress. The countries of the region now have elected governments, and armed groups - in the exception of Peru - have laid down their arms or are negotiating such a move. I have in mind El Salvador, Guatemala and Colombia. Numerous projects exist to put into effect programmes which respect the right of indigenous and Afro American people to their own cultural identity. In addition, economic integration, along with the broad movement of regional and international solidarity which this presupposes, is going forward. All of this shows that it is possible to move from confrontation to cooperation.

Although all of this ought to be spreading, there remain, nonetheless, some areas of shadow. I particularly have in mind Haiti, where a whole population finds itself in the grip of poverty, a victim of an implacable logic of violence and hate, which does not allow it to express its aspirations towards peace and democracy. Here again I would hope that the international community might exert itself especially to help Haitians to be the builders of their own future. Nor do I forget Cuba, still isolated. The Holy See would like to see its people experience, under prosperous living

conditions, the joy of being able to build a society where each individual more and more thinks of himself as a partner in a common project which has been freely undertaken. Other, more general, problems affect some countries: for example, drug production and trafficking which affect the countries of the Andes, or the armed struggle which is subverting and destroying the political and social life of Peru and does not spare even the Church. Poverty and the foreign debt are also serious stumbling blocks to a peaceful and progressive development.

15. Happily, all these societies, imbued with the Christian tradition, possess moral and human resources which should not be overlooked, but rather should be made to bear fruit. The Catholic Church is very conscious of her mission on that "continent of hope", and her members are in the forefront of the vital forces of the countries that constitute it. They strive to bear witness to Christ. I had the privilege of seeing this for myself on my recent Apostolic Visit to Brazil. Catholics contribute to the advancement of that huge country, with such enormous potential, by their commitment to the political and social renewal which is so needed in order to achieve increased justice and greater development. During this year in which a broad range of observances will mark the celebration of the Fifth Centenary of the First Evangelization, they, in profound union with their Pastors, are called to make more intense their commitment to the renewal of society, to integral human development, and to safeguarding family values which, sad to say, some legislation aims at weakening.

Attentive listening to others, taking into account their needs and respecting their rights are the only civilized means whereby it is possible to get beyond self interest and to be open to the needs of the whole community. I refer, for example, to the urgent need for better and more peaceful collaboration between Ecuador and Peru. I strongly encourage the leaders of these countries, which are so deeply marked by the Gospel message of peace and charity, to avoid anything which might exacerbate their differences and to commit themselves courageously to the path of a clarifying dialogue and eventual contacts. The meetings between the Presidents of Ecuador and Peru, which are taking place in Quito during these days, represent a significant step. I pray that God will strengthen their resolution and shed light upon their exchanges.

16. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have come to the end of our meeting. We have called to mind the fortunes and the hopes of today's world, for which each one of us - in the place to which God has assigned us - is responsible. In the months ahead, let us together attempt to contribute to the temporal and spiritual good of individuals and of society. I ask God to give us wisdom, foresight and compassion, so that no suffering will leave us insensitive, no injustice will leave us indifferent, and no division leave us resigned to it.

Christians find a source of new vitality for their faith and hope in the inexhaustible Christmas mystery, which can be summarized in one word: "Peace"! Peace to those whom God loves and has visited.

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