



The Holy See

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

Monday, 12 January 1976

Madame and Messieurs Ambassadors,

We express first of all our deep gratitude to your distinguished spokesman for the kind and cordial greetings he has presented to us, on your behalf, at the beginning of this new year. In our turn we willingly offer you our good wishes, for yourselves, the peoples you represent and their rulers.

Today's meeting also gives us the opportunity to express our gratitude to the whole Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, in particular for its faithful and appreciated presence at the most outstanding moments of the celebration of the Jubilee Year which has just ended. Your participation not only gave prestige to the different events; it assumed, above all, a high significance: it rendered present in a certain way, in the person of their representatives, the States which have official relations with the Apostolic See. It is true that the international presence which you ensured was not complete, it did not reach that of the pilgrims who followed one another throughout the whole year; it was, however, considerable in view of the number and diversity of the peoples and civilizations of all continents which it represented!

In this way you have been able to be privileged observers, qualified and particularly attentive ones, of this Holy Year. Attentive not so much to the exterior and spectacular aspects of the event, but to its deep meanings.

That corresponded to your mission, to the duties inherent in it, which involve, as fundamental for your action, exact knowledge of «what is happening» at the Holy See and in the Church.

Of course, the representatives of Catholic countries, or of those in which the presence of Catholics is considerable, find interesting aspects in it for special and direct reasons. But even for the others,

there is, at least, the interest aroused by a «reality» which, without any doubt, has its importance and exercises its influence practically all over the world.

The Holy Year which has just ended, did not have, by far, the importance of the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, which was already the object of the observation and appreciation of the diplomats accredited to the Holy See. But it, too, was a «major» event in the life of the Church and the activities of the Apostolic See.

It took place, in fact, ten years after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, just at the moment when the ideas and thoughts, plans and initiatives which had their origin in the Council and were nourished by it, were fermenting in abundance and sometimes even in a tumultuous way; this is to say that the Holy Year was destined to feel its beneficial consequences just as, in our intention, it had the purpose of promoting and hastening its maturation, as fully and completely as possible.

Renewal, that is, the acquisition by the Church of new strength in the enriching freshness of her sources, in order to be able to meet the new challenges of new times with the vigour and enthusiasm of a restored body and spirit: this renewal (or «aggiornamento»), which was one of the fundamental aims and, in a certain way, a characteristic note of the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, was also the first of the purposes that we fixed – for the Church and for each of the faithful – for the celebration of the Holy Year. To it we added another, which was, so to speak, parallel and in any case vitally united with it, as is a fruit with its deep root: reconciliation, in its full significance and with its whole scope, reconciliation within consciences and in relations among men and among peoples. •

How, then, did the Holy Year pass off? How, to what extent, did it achieve its aims? What meaning can it have for the Church and, outside the Church, for the world in which she lives and acts? These are, without any doubt, the questions that you, diplomats accredited to the Apostolic See, have asked yourselves, with an interest, an earnestness, a concern for accuracy – and therefore objectivity – of a quite special kind, just as the nature, the purposes and the responsibilities of your mission in the service of your countries and the world, are of a quite special kind

What is the answer?

It is certainly not for us to suggest it: it might perhaps seem partial or interested. But, trusting fully in the gifts of penetration and love of truth which are characteristic of you, we take the liberty of drawing your attention to some points which can help you to guide your reflections.

1. In the first place, the Holy Year has confirmed, in a way that can hardly be denied, that the Catholic Church is alive (we speak of the Catholic Church because the Holy Year was a specific event of this Church, but our remarks could and should be applied more widely to Christianity,

religion, and the sense of God). The Church is alive in the countries of ancient Christian civilization; she is alive and flourishing in countries of new or even very recent evangelization; in the same way as we know that she continues to live or to survive, thanks he to God, even where she is subjected to restrictions, pressure or oppression

She is alive, not just, and not so much, in exterior manifestations, as rather in the depth of the adherence of conscience and will: the Holy Year has indeed given an ample and consoling testimony of this.

2. The Church has presented herself with the countenance that the Second Vatican Council proposed, with refound purity not shut up within herself, or in jealous pursuit of her own ideas, but – while watching carefully over the integrity of the doctrine entrusted to her and the authenticity of her witness – open to good relations with other Christian denominations and even with other religions (which made a point, on various occasions, of being present at religious events of the Holy Year), relations also with all men of goodwill. She presented herself proclaiming in a loud voice the invitation to mutual understanding, reciprocal aid, sincere and generous reconciliation of spirits. A Church, therefore, that is really «catholic», that is, universal: a Church for everyone, even for those who do not belong to her, but who can find in her the word of friendship, brotherhood and peace.

3. Finally the presence in Rome, at the tomb of the Prince of Apostles and the Chair of his humble successor, of representatives of the particular Churches, has offered, in our-eyes and in those of the world, a kind of panorama of the situation of these Churches (we are not speaking of their internal «state») in the different parts of the world: some, free; others oppressed and others limited in the exercise of their rights, as was expressed by their absence or their reduced participation, but so appreciated in the great Jubilee gathering.

More than complaints or regrets, this last confirmation has suggested and suggests to us a wish and an appeal.

You, Gentlemen, in the variety of the States you represent, so different as regards their geographical situation, their cultural traditions, their ethnical and religious composition, their political and social systems, you proclaim by your very presence the conviction of your Governments of the usefulness of organic and trusting relations with the Apostolic See. This usefulness does not refer, always and exclusively, to the field of bilateral relations and problems, if any, which concern the life and activity of the Church in your respective countries: these problems are sometimes of modest dimensions, owing to the fact that the presence of the Church in some of your countries is itself a modest one. It refers rather, in a number of cases, to the problems of life and international order, peaceful common life, and real cooperation among peoples.

We cannot but wish that this conviction become more and more widespread. We do not say so

because it would be in our interest or in the interest of the Apostolic See, but because we ourselves are convinced, on the one hand, of the seriousness of the problems that weigh upon relations among peoples, and, on the other hand, of the possibility although it is far more limited than we would like, of contributing to the effort to find solutions for them.

We must recall, however, that, rather than speaking of our contribution, it is necessary to speak of that of the Catholic Church which is the *raison d'être* and the actual strength of the Holy See, just as the latter is her centre and heart.

Our appeal on behalf of the Catholic Church, wherever she may be, corresponds, therefore, with the interest we take in the great causes of international peace and collaboration.

But of course it refers above all to the reasons of law and justice, respect for which is the foundation and condition of an orderly, tranquil collective life within the nations and among themselves.

We must recognize that these reasons are meeting with increasing support and recognition, at least theoretically, on the part of States and then organizations.

This means that the conscience of peoples is becoming more and more convinced that it is not exclusive and selfish interest – the convenience of the State – that can be the principle of their behaviour: that force cannot be the criterion of their mutual relations; that violence is not an admissible method in international life.

We rejoice at this all the more because we discern in it the fruit, as it were, of the principles that the Gospel message and the Catholic Church, on her side, have greatly contributed to inserting in the modern law of nations. And even if, in a number of cases, alas, certain States, relying more on their power than on respect of others' rights, are not faithful to these norms and to the commitments, solemnly underwritten, inspired by them, this is done with a «bad conscience» and also with the reprobation of the sound conscience – it can well be said – of the whole of humanity a reprobation which, in the long run, cannot remain without results.

The Holy See attributes such importance to the more and more widespread acceptance and the more and more exact and binding formulation of the juridical and moral principles that must regulate the relations among States, that it sees in the possibility of making a concrete contribution to this, beyond doctrinal declarations, one of the main reasons for its participation in the life and activities of the international Community.

A typical example of this participation was the presence of the Holy See at the Helsinki Conference. We are glad to recall it at this meeting. In fact, although it concerns Europe directly (including, however, the presence of the United States and Canada), the Helsinki Conference

must be recognized as having a far wider and more general interest, if only because of what the European Continent represents – whether it is at peace or at war – for the rest of the world and in the first place for the countries of the Mediterranean.

Why did the Holy See agree to become a member of the Conference? Not just, of course, to accept politely the kind invitation of the European countries, so different on the plane of government systems, but at last in agreement on considering the presence of the Holy See at these great meetings legitimate and even desirable. Nor because the Holy See felt able to make a specific contribution to examination of the political or military problems of European security, or of the problems of cooperation in the economic, industrial or commercial field, all problems which the Holy See considers with great respect, aware of their sometimes vital importance, but in which – as regards their technical aspects – it is and declares itself to be incompetent.

But beyond, and we could say far above the technical and concrete aspects of the problems of security and cooperation, there was precisely the whole sphere of the supreme principles – ethical and juridical – which must inform the action and relations of States and peoples. And in this field the Holy See felt that it must not reject the possibility offered to it of making its contribution, and which also permitted it to be, at the Conference, «the more direct interpreter and spokesman of the necessity of respect for religious conscience» – as we recently recalled in our reply to the Christmas greetings of the Sacred College.

The Conference laid down principles and indicated norms of behaviour, excellent in themselves, whose effectiveness for action will, however, have to be verified in deeds, in order that the judgment of history on this event may be a positive one. These principles and these norms, accepted by all the participants, are bound up with an ideal patrimony common to the peoples of Europe.

This heritage, we can add, based essentially on the evangelical message that Europe has received and welcomed, is, substantially, also common to the peoples of the other Continents, including those who do not belong to what is called «Christian civilization», since the Christian message interprets, there too, the deep requirements of man.

Among the conclusions of the Helsinki Conference, we are pleased to recall – as well as the principles more directly connected with just, orderly and peaceful relations among the States, and with their collaboration in many sectors – the recognition of the fact that respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms – we quote the document – «is an essential factor of the peace, justice and prosperity necessary to ensure the development of friendly relations and cooperation among men, as among all States». The participating States undertake not only to respect these rights and freedoms themselves but also to endeavour «jointly and separately, and also in cooperation with the United Nations, to promote universal and actual respect for them». Who does not see how the honest application of these norms in their integrity would greatly facilitate the progress of freedom

and justice among all the peoples concerned?

We are happy to recall this, for that recognition of which we have just spoken, has the effect of showing the insubstantiality of the pretext, often invoked, that it is a question here of the domestic affairs of each State, in which the others cannot interfere for any reason; and it aims at making it a question of legitimate common interest, for the purpose, among others, of ensuring good relations between States and peoples. That presupposes, indeed – in spite of the differences, even deep ones – a foundation of common human civilization, expressed concretely in rights and duties, and permitting everyone to live in tranquillity and work usefully together. Where this common foundation of civilization was in fact lacking – in spite of its formal acceptance – the noble intentions of the Conference would turn out to be vain; what is more, the latter might be exploited for purposes contrary to those it had set itself.

The question, therefore, remains; how do the States intend in actual fact to observe the commitments undertaken? No one knows better than statesmen and diplomats how difficult it is to make reality and law correspond, especially when the ideal comes up against opposition of interests or, worse still, selfishness or the desire of power.

In spite of everything, the Holy See continues to attribute great importance to the developments of international law, whether universal or regional. All progress in awareness, affirmation and commitment to an ethics projected on the future of peoples and their relations, represents a precious contribution to the formation – even though slow and laborious – of a real order of peace in the world.

The Holy See, on its side, will tirelessly recommend and promote, as far as it can, the authentic maturing of this awareness by collaborating with all those who share this conviction. Among the latter, we are sure we can include the States that you represent, to which, we are certain, you will not fail to convey our view and our encouragement.

May this year, which has begun, alas! under the sign of several painful conflicts and dangerous tensions, witness the generous and indefatigable encouragement of all those in posts of responsibility and of the international Community, for peace in justice! And may the Lord make their efforts effective!

This is our wish. This is our prayer.

*ORa n.4 p.3-4.

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