



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 15 January 1977

Your Excellencies,

We accept with emotion and gratitude the warm good wishes that your distinguished spokesman has addressed to us in the name of you all. We are appreciative of this act of deference towards our person and also of the seriousness and hope with which the efforts of our pontificate, the commitment of the Holy See and the appeals of the Church are viewed.

To all of you, Your Excellencies, we express our own good wishes, for yourselves, for the joy of your families and for the fulfilment of your mission. Apart from your persons, we are thinking of all the peoples you represent here and whose peace, happiness and progress we have very much at heart.

Whatever vicissitudes the year 1977 may have in store for us, it is hope that inspires us, it is hope that we invite you first of all to share with us. Without hope we would not only be unhappy but we would not have the courage to undertake anything. Moreover, in the tenacity of hope there is a mystery of man's consciousness. In celebrating the beginning of each new year, individuals and peoples give voice to their hope. Stronger than repeated disappointments and weary scepticism, hope always returns to life. It draws nourishment from a source that our waste and our neglect are unable to dry up. For us, God is this source, he who created man's heart and his desire for the absolute. By himself entering into the adventure of mankind by the Incarnation of his Son, God has opened this adventure even more to a vision of eternal light, peace and love. By substantial tokens bestowed in advance. even in this present life he gives us an unchangeable taste for these precious blessings. That is the Good News of the Christian faith. The Good News contains within itself an attraction and persuasive force capable of regenerating and ratifying men's hope, even

among those who do not share our faith. It is a Good News of peace.

But the Good News does not prevent us from being realists. On the contrary, the world to which it is addressed – and this will be the main theme of our talk – is a prey to violence. Admittedly there are no open international wars. The year just past has seen the return of a certain calm in regions that yesterday were still bloodied with murderous struggles. We rejoice at this. But like an only partly extinguished fire, ready to flare up again at the first breath, violence is smouldering and meanwhile is continuing its ravages. As examples of this we may mention the criminality that stops short at nothing, the monstrous acts of sabotage, the series of terrorist actions and repression, the degrading tortures, the arbitrary condemnations, the oppression of whole peoples by inhuman powers that no longer respect basic freedoms and rights or even the attainments of preceding civilisations, the denials of justice, the connivance with or the protection unduly accorded to terrorists and the acts of private revenge. In another field we could mention the more subtle aggression against consciences by pornography or the partiality of certain organs of the mass media, and the still more radical violence aimed at eliminating in practice freedom of religion. Man's life in all its stages counts for little. His dignity is scoffed at. The everyday practice of violence and the efforts made to justify it erode consciences and undermine the cohesion of communities. It is a situation that is preparing, unless precautions are taken, new and more fearful explosions.

We do not forget that much individual and collective violence has at its source serious injustices or disorders which are in a way violence against human rights and in part provoke the chain reaction that we are deploring. Action directed at the symptoms – acts of violence – is no alibi for more decisive action directed at the causes – acts of injustice. It remains true that the symptoms too call for appropriate treatment: otherwise they will develop and in their turn become a specific source of poisoning of the social body, sometimes a more formidable source than the initial evil. To this threat of a destructive spread of violence we must pay particular attention.

How to halt the escalation of violence is the problem. Your experience of international relations, Your Excellencies, makes you spontaneously understand our preoccupation. You know that the most decisive action is that which is directed at the causes of disputes between peoples. You feel the need to do something new in a world grown old with its injustices and obliged, for the sake of survival, to take the path of profound changes. This is what our Encyclical on the Development of Peoples was meant to stimulate. By participating in many international conferences, the Holy See for its part contributes to advancing a New Order capable of facing mankind's present tasks while eliminating the injustices inherited from the past. Without having political or technical solutions to propose, we call on governments to examine the renewing guidelines that can be brought to all these discussions by the Christian teaching of the unity of the human family.

But the fulfilment of these great tasks would be compromised, and for a long time, if the inevitable tensions were to degenerate into open warfare. Diplomatic activity is likewise patiently applied to

containing these tensions and to maintaining room for dialogue, enabling rational solutions to be worked out. What is more, you dedicate yourselves unceasingly to creating again such room for dialogue where it has been momentarily submerged by recourse to arms. The Holy See's diplomacy also makes its contribution to this effort as far as it is able. It encounters the same lack of understanding, the same difficulties and the same failures as your own States, but with the same tenacious patience that refuses to give in. As an unflinching defender of peace, we knock at all doors and plead for reasonable agreements affording the possibility of fresh progress.

But our reflection must go beyond the remote causes of injustices or open conflicts. It must come down to the labyrinth of the concatenation of acts of violence that explains their iniquity, peril and proliferation. What do we very often find at least in the field of internal violence that is linked to political motives? To begin with, there is generally a deliberately partial view of reality: there is a wish to concentrate only on the injustice that divides, while the links of solidarity that history has woven between men and groups is ignored.

Next, the division is dug deep by a Manichaean and Pharisaic presentation of responsibilities: evil, always and on all points, means other people. Reality is abandoned and the elements of unity hidden in it are allowed to atrophy.

Totalitarian ideologies supervene to harden opposition still more by making a rigid division between individuals and groups, sometimes into «the exploited and the exploiters», sometimes into «friends and enemies». The mind which is made to know what is true and to invite people to meet in dialogue and in going beyond themselves is mobilized and perverted so as to cover up lying and to maintain hatred.

In many countries the national consensus forged over many centuries is crumbling. With it are crumbling moral values that are irreplaceable for overcoming the injustices that are deplored. Then comes doubt about lawfulness. In one case, public authority, which is responsible for the common good – an idea too much forgotten – sinks into helplessness and the field is quickly taken over by increasing criminality, personal revenge and selfish group interests. In another case, it simply collapses altogether and for a time violence reigns almost without limits. In yet other instances, public authority becomes inflexible and represses opposition even with torture when extreme and continuous brutality has failed for a time to discourage and stifle every spark of opposition.

This vicious circle of violence has to be broken. In the first place there must be a return to a franker approach to the truth of the facts and their analysis. The conviction needs to be confirmed that, even if both the individual and society suffer from deep divisions – the Christian doctrine of sin reveals the full extent of the abyss – they nonetheless remain characterized in their very constitution by solidarity and unity: the Creator has inscribed these characteristics in the human family and, for us Christians, the Son of God made man has given them new force by rooting them more deeply still in the mystery of his Mystical Body. Henceforth the true dynamism of the drive for

justice, whatever the difficulties through which it must at times trace its path, resides in respect and love for the other person, even for the enemy, and in readiness for mutual recognition and reconciliation

Yes, Gentlemen, let us envisage a new approach, in which the spirit, though remaining fully critical, creates cohesion and in which the heart initiates dialogue. Instead of stimulating the often aggressive instincts of possessiveness, power, narrow nationalism, race and sex, let us learn to win control over them and integrate them into higher personal and social purposes.

Let us give our societies a social fabric which is living and diversified, in which genuine solidarity is created and tensions can be eliminated in a common effort for improvement. It is then that political authority will find its true grounds for legitimacy, which consists in disposing «the energies of the whole citizenry towards the common good, not mechanically or despotically, but primarily as a moral force which depends on freedom and the conscientious discharge of the burdens of any office which has been undertaken» (Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 74) The constraint which political authority must at times exercise, and which normally pertains to it as an exclusive right, so as to prevent a concatenation of private revenge and the exploitation of the weak by the strong, is then based on the real demands of the common good, which prohibit any denial of justice or any arbitrary action. All the more must it take care not to allow other bodies in the nation to arrogate to themselves undue authority and to exercise such authority absolutely and unjustly.

Your Excellencies already know from experience the uselessness efforts for international peace when violence reigns within nations. At this level, obviously, diplomatic action can only be indirect and limited. More than once, however, certain ambassadors, our own Nuncios, with the necessary discretion and without undue pressure, have obtained gestures of humanitarian regard and of justice in favour of victims of troubled situations.

But the task exceeds the good will of those in power: there needs to be created a whole new climate. The recent Council wisely noted, referring to war, but violence calls for like treatment: «Government officials, who must simultaneously guarantee the good of their own people and promote the universal good, depend on public opinion and feeling to the greatest possible extent. It does them no good to work at building peace so long as feelings of hostility, contempt, and distrust, as well as racial hatred and unbending ideologies, continue to divide men and place them in opposing camps. Hence arises a surpassing need for renewed education of attitudes and for new inspiration in the area of public opinion» (*Gaudium et Spes*, 82).

There you have some idea of the important contribution which the Church, the Holy See and Christians can make. With the freedom of the Gospel, they are ready to denounce every form of violence, both that which threatens international relations and that which undermines the internal life of a country. But note in what kind of spirit: not in order to accuse and condemn but to serve individuals and peoples, with the dynamism of love derived from Christ. They wish to assist the

political authorities themselves, without encroaching upon their proper area of competence, and they contribute to forming little by little a climate truly respectful of man, on which a society can be built. They are convinced that the rate of progress depends exactly on the measure of love, friendship and fraternity that we bring to bear, even in the midst of struggles necessary for securing justice. When thought and the practice of love go hand in hand, experience shows that they reinforce each other. When on the contrary practice obeys a logic of violence, when it neglects, even only provisionally, the demands of love for others, when it refuses on principle to make necessary and honourable agreements, it soon alters, weakens and quenches the initial desire for fraternity and the very will for justice. Only genuine love can create possibilities for peace

In order to illustrate better the ideal which inspires us, and which inspires or ought to inspire all Christians – even if the facts show, alas, that we are often weak and inconsistent in this area – we would like to recall the mystery of him whose coming among us we have just celebrated.

The hope of Christmas appeared in a world as harsh as our own: the massacre of the Innocents is close to the Crib of Bethlehem: Close also the violence of those who think they can eliminate Christ on Calvary. Yet in that harsh world Jesus, whom we Christians call our Peace, went about «doing good» (*Acts* 10, 38), stirring up in the hearts of many, especially the very poor, a feeling of profound peace, of liberation, of kindness and goodness. But Jesus had to reveal love also in the face of unrelenting hostility, and in the midst of harassing confrontations, from which he did not withdrew but which he sometimes even provoked, so as to stir up consciences dulled by injustice and call them to conversion. In all this, however, it was one and the same love that was at work, always ready to serve, to help, to forgive, a love which found its final expression in making a free gift of its own life and in a supreme act of forgiveness. Some speak of a utopia! But is it not a fact that Christ is, after all, a living source of peace and of reconciliation for innumerable individuals and peoples?

As you know, this is the example that inspires true Christians, whether they act as citizens, in accordance with the purposes and the means proper to political life, or share in the evangelizing mission of the Church. This is what in various countries leads Bishops and laity to follow their Lord to the extent of sacrificing their freedom and sometimes even their lives, showing thereby what spirit of service and of peace they are inspired by when they plead for justice and denounce violence. A spirit of love and of faith, concerned primarily to remain with the suffering, to show them in the very midst of their distress that they are loved by God, and to give them, together with hope, new energy to work for justice, brotherhood and reconciliation. They know that they are assured of our respect, encouragement and affection. To Your Excellencies and to those who have accredited you to the Holy See we wish to recall the meaning of their witness.

And to yourselves, Your Excellencies, we address an earnest appeal which you will be able to transmit to the leaders of your countries: halt the escalation of violence! Your training, your

mission and your skill make you better able than other people to grasp the complexity of the problems and of the injustices that they conceal, to listen to opposing points of view, and to seek negotiated solutions, reasonable and acceptable agreements. Your role as diplomats places you precisely at the opposite pole to violent solutions. Thus you can contribute to defusing the escalation of injustice and violence. Be firm in rejecting injustice! Be strong in conceiving and accomplishing gestures of equity, humanity and peace, gestures which will unravel the tangled skein of violence! Humanity expects this service from you: it is your honour and your duty to collaborate in it! Yes, halt the escalation of violence!

But for this task, as we have strongly emphasized, love is needed, love for people, all people, beyond fear, calculation and self-interest. And so, on the threshold of a new year, we ask Almighty God to pour out abundantly his Spirit of Love into all hearts.

Such are the wishes we confide to you. They are serious indeed, but full of hope. May the Lord grant that they find a wide acceptance, in the course of this year 1977!. And may they bring to you and to those who are dear to you Joy and Peace!

**ORa* n.4 p.2-3.