



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE*

Monday, 9 January 1989

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Your Dean, Ambassador Joseph Amichia, has just voiced the respectful greetings that you wished to convey to me, as well as the sentiments evoked in you by the most notable aspects of the Holy See's mission in the world. I thank you most cordially for this. At the same time, I wish to express my gratitude to all of you who have desired to associate yourselves with his remarks.

It is also my pleasure to welcome the Ambassadors who have been recently accredited, as well as their staff members who have begun their duties in the course of the year just ended. Their experience will be invaluable for us all. We likewise hope that their experience will in turn be enriched by the Apostolic See's views on international life.

For the Pope, the New Year meeting with the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See is a special moment for reflecting on some of the major matters at stake in the world, matters for which you and he share a common concern.

The Church's views on the challenges of our time are not always of course those of the nations. But the experience of centuries and the constant reference to the same values and ethical criteria make it possible for the views of the Holy See situated as they are above political, economic or strategic interests - to offer a point of reference to the impartial observer who seeks to broaden the basis of his judgments. For her part, the Catholic Church is convinced that she is serving humanity in accordance with the plan of her Founder when she endeavours to dispense freely the treasure of wisdom and doctrine which has been entrusted to her so that each generation can derive from it the light and strength needed to guide its choices.

2. The international community has a number of reasons to rejoice at the strengthening of detente between East and West, as well as the progress made in the area of disarmament, both on the bilateral level between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America with regard to strategic weapons, and on the multilateral level with regard to chemical weapons. On this subject, the Holy See hopes that the Conference being held in Paris on the banning of chemical weapons will bear lasting fruit.

The willingness to tackle with determination the question of reducing conventional weapons in Europe, shown by both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, allows us to think that soon the negotiators of the countries concerned will be duly mandated to define a common approach and to propose concrete measures and effective control mechanisms for the purpose of really freeing the peoples of Europe from the fear caused by the presence of offensive weapons and the possibility of surprise attacks.

In this context, the Holy See has followed with great interest the meeting of the Conference on European Security and Cooperation now taking place in Vienna, and it hopes that these efforts will be quickly concluded with a substantive and balanced final document which will take into account simultaneously the military, economic, social and humanitarian aspects of security, without which the "old" continent cannot know lasting peace. Human rights and religious freedom have been the subject of detailed discussions in Vienna,, and they should be given a prominent place in the future closing document of the meeting, which from this fact will be of special importance. The removal of obstacles which one has been able to note recently testifies to a growing awareness of the urgency which respect for these rights and this freedom and their effective exercise presents.

Let us hope then that the developments which have taken place recently in the Soviet Union and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe will help to create favourable conditions for a change of climate and for an evolution of national legislations, so as to move effectively from the stage of a proclamation of principles to one which guarantees the fundamental rights and freedoms of every person. Such a process in these countries should lead in particular to the emergence of a concept of religious freedom understood as a true civil and social right.

Looking beyond Europe, I would also like to mention a region racked by many years of endemic national and regional struggles, the peoples of which ardently desire a true and lasting peace. I refer to Central America. It is now more than a year since the Heads of State of five countries signed the "Esquipulas II" Accord, with a view to ending the sufferings of their peoples. The concepts of democratization, pacification and regional cooperation which are at the basis of this agreement ought to find an ever greater response among political leaders. We must hope then that all the interested parties will courageously resume the path of sincere and constructive dialogue, that the commitments provided for in the Accord - as for example the "national commissions of reconciliation" - will be effectively implemented, and that the reinsertion of all political forces in the public life of these countries will be promoted.

The past year also very happily witnessed the beginning of a negotiated settlement of several conflicts in other regions. I am thinking first of all of the long awaited cease fire signed between Iran and Iraq Their decision to begin talks under the aegis of the United Nations Organization is encouraging, to the extent that these discussions foster dialogue and strengthen the desire for peace of the two parties.

In this regard, however, there is one aspect which I cannot pass over in silence: the return of the prisoners of war to their homelands. At the beginning of this New Year, which is an occasion everywhere for family reunions, how can we forget all those who have spent these holidays far from their loved ones? How can we fail to express the hope that the Authorities of these two countries, assisted by the competent International Organizations, will come to an agreement concerning the methods of repatriation, and thus shorten the sufferings of these men and give many families the joy of reunions so impatiently awaited?

Still further East, the effective withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan should be the prelude to an honourable solution enabling each interested party to promote a fresh stage in the reconstruction and development of that country.

Initiatives and persevering efforts on the part of various countries - particularly the nations of South East Asia permit us to hope for a comprehensive settlement of the problem of Cambodia, the population of which has been sorely tried for so many years.

Still in that same region, certain recent gestures by the Vietnamese Authorities - also with reference to religious matters - holds forth the promise of a readiness on the part of that noble nation to resume an increasingly fruitful dialogue in the concert of nations.

We must also express the wish that the necessary dialogue and understanding will promote a solution to the very complex Korean problem. In this sense. the efforts of the Authorities involved deserve every encouragement.

It is also encouraging to think that the conflicts which have torn apart certain countries of Southern Africa will soon come to an end thanks to the Brazzaville Protocol and the New York Accord with a view to the process of independence for Namibia and the pacification of Angola. The inhabitants of these regions have suffered too cruelly for their fate to leave the international community indifferent.

Finally, as the latest sign of "good will", I would like to mention the immense movement of solidarity manifested on the occasion of the tragic earthquake which occurred last December in Soviet Armenia. It is to be hoped that this solidarity which people are capable of showing in such tragic circumstances a solidarity which transcends borders and political or ideological divisions - will increasingly become their common rule of action.

3. Unfortunately, however, causes for concern are certainly not lacking and somewhat dampen our confidence. In these last few days, tension in the Mediterranean has shown, yet again, how fragile the international equilibrium is.

I have repeatedly had occasion to express my dismay at the tragedy being experienced by Lebanon and to express the hope that the national unity of that country will be restored, in particular as a result of a reaffirmation of its sovereignty and at least through a resumption of the normal functioning of the institutions of the State. We cannot resign ourselves to seeing that country deprived of its unity, territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. It is a question here of rights which are fundamental and incontestable for every nation. Once more, with the same conviction, before this authoritative assembly, I invite all countries friendly to Lebanon and her people to join forces in helping the Lebanese to rebuild, in dignity and freedom, the peaceful and exemplary homeland to which they aspire.

In this tortured region of the Middle East, new elements have recently appeared on the horizon of the destiny of the Palestinian people. They appear to favour the solution long recommended by the United Nations Organization, namely the right of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples to a homeland. I also wish to express here my hope that the Holy City of Jerusalem, which is claimed by both these peoples as the symbol of their identity, can one day become a place of peace and a meeting place for each of them. This City, unique among all others, which evokes for the descendants of Abraham the salvation offered by the mighty and merciful God, should indeed become a source of inspiration for fraternal and persevering dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims, with respect for special characteristics and rights of each.

Nor can we forget certain of our brethren who in other parts of the world feel threatened in their existence or their identity. The difficulties which they find themselves facing are often complex and long-standing. The Holy See does not have the technical competence needed to resolve these serious questions, but it nevertheless considers it its duty to emphasize before his assembly that no principle, no tradition, no claim - however legitimate - gives authority to inflict upon peoples - all the more when they are made up of innocent and vulnerable civilians - repressive acts or inhuman treatment. It is a matter here of humanity's honour! In this context, I would recall the serious problem of minorities, which is the theme of my recent Message for the 1989 World Day of Peace: Not only do individuals have rights, but also peoples and human groups, there exists "a right to a collective identity" (No. 3).

4. How could we resign ourselves to so many situations of distress when last 10 December marked the fortieth anniversary of the proclamation by the United Nations General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

This text, presented as "the common ideal to be achieved by all peoples and nations" (Preamble) has certainly helped humanity to become aware of its shared destiny and patrimony of values

belonging to the whole human family. To the extent that it was meant to be "universal", this Declaration applies to all people in every place. Despite the hesitations, admitted or not, of certain States, the 1948 text highlighted a set of ideas - imbued with the Christian tradition (I am thinking in particular of the notion of the dignity of the person) - which has become accepted as a universal system of values.

At the end of the excesses which had oppressed the human person at the hands of totalitarian regimes, the Paris Declaration sought to "protect" man, whoever and wherever he may be. In order to avoid a repetition of the horrors which all of us can remember, it seemed essential that the inviolable sphere of the freedoms and faculties proper to the human person should in the future be protected from possible physical or psychological constraints which the political power might be tempted to impose on it. From man's very nature there flows respect for the life, physical integrity, conscience, thought, religious freedom, and personal freedom of every citizen. These elements essential for each person's existence do not represent a "concession" by the State, which in fact only "recognizes" these realities, which preexist its own juridical system, and the State has a duty to guarantee their enjoyment.

These rights are those of the person, who is necessarily a part of a community, since man is social by nature. The inviolable sphere of freedoms must therefore include those which are indispensable for the life of the family and communities of believers, which are society's basic units. It is within them that this social dimension of man is expressed. It falls to the State to ensure that they receive adequate juridical recognition.

5. On the basis of these fundamental freedoms and rights there develop, like concentric circles, the rights of man as a citizen, as a member of society, and more broadly as an integral part of an environment to be humanized. In the first place, civil rights guarantee a person his or her individual freedoms and oblige the State not to interfere in the sphere of the individual conscience in any way. Then there are political rights, which enable the citizen to play an active part in the public affairs of his own country.

Undoubtedly there is interaction and mutual conditioning between fundamental rights and civil and political rights. When the rights of the citizen are not respected, it is almost always to the detriment of fundamental human rights. The separation of powers within the State and democratic control are essential conditions for the effective respect of these rights. The fruitfulness of the notion of human rights is also manifested in the development and progressively more precise formulation of social and cultural rights. And the guaranteeing of these latter depends upon the extent to which their application is subjected to impartial verification. A State cannot deprive its citizens of their civil and political rights, even under the pretext of wishing to ensure their economic or social progress.

A right to development and to the environment are also beginning to be spoken of today. In this

"third generation" of human rights, it is often a question of demands which are still difficult to translate into binding juridic terms so long as no authority is capable of ensuring their application. But, in the end, all of this shows humanity's growing awareness of interdependence with nature, whose resources - created for all, but limited - must be protected, especially through close international cooperation.

Thus, despite regrettable shortcomings, an evolution has taken place in favour of the elimination of arbitrariness in the relations between the individual and the State. And in this regard, the 1948 Declaration represents a reference which cannot be disregarded, for it unequivocally calls upon all nations to organize the relationship of the person and of society to the State on the basis of fundamental human rights.

The idea of "government by law" is thus seen to be implicitly required by the Universal declaration of Human Rights, and is in harmony with Catholic doctrine, for which the function of the State is to enable and help people to achieve the transcendent ends for which they have been destined.

6. Among the fundamental freedoms which the Church must defend, first place naturally goes to religious freedom. The right to freedom of religion is so closely linked to the other fundamental rights that it can rightly be argued that respect for religious freedom is, as it were, a touchstone for the observance of the other fundamental rights.

The religious aspect, in fact, has two specific dimensions which show its originality in relation to the other activities of the spirit, notably those of conscience, thought or conviction. On the one hand, faith recognizes the reality of the Transcendence which gives meaning to the whole of existence and which is the basis of the values which behaviour takes as its guidelines. On the other hand, religious commitment implies membership of a community of persons. Religious freedom goes hand in hand with the freedom of the community of believers to live according to the teachings of its Founder.

It is not for the State to pronounce on matters of religious faith, nor can it substitute for the various Confessions in matters of organizing religious life. 'The State's respect for the right to freedom of religion is a sign of respect for the other fundamental human rights, in that it is an implicit recognition of the existence of an order which transcends the political dimension of existence, an order which belongs to the sphere of voluntary membership of a community of salvation preceding the State. Even if for historical reasons a State accords special protection to one particular religion, it also has the obligation to guarantee religious minorities the personal and communal freedoms which flow from the common right to religious freedom in civil society.

Unfortunately this is not always the case. From more than one country there continue to arrive appeals from believers notably Catholic believers who feel oppressed in their religious aspirations and in the practice of their faith. Indeed it is not rare to find systems of legislation or administrative

norms which obscure the right to religious freedom or which lay down such drastic restrictions as to have the effect of reducing to nothing the reassuring declarations of principle.

On the present occasion, I appeal once more to the consciences of the leaders of the nations: there is no peace without freedom! There is no peace unless one finds in God the harmony of man with himself and with his fellowmen ! Do not fear believers in any way! This is what I said last year, on the occasion of the World Day of Peace: "Faith brings people together and unites them, makes them see others as their brothers and sisters; it makes them more attentive, more responsible, more generous in their commitment to the common good" (Message for the Celebration of the 1988 World Day of Peace, No. 3).

7. It has been rightly pointed out that the 1948 Declaration does not present the anthropological and ethical foundations of the human rights which it proclaims. It is clear today that at that time such an undertaking would have been premature. It is thus the task of the various schools of thought - in particular the communities of believers - to provide the moral bases for the juridic edifice of human rights.

In this domain, the Catholic Church - and perhaps other spiritual families has an irreplaceable contribution to make, for she proclaims that it is within the transcendent dimension of the person that the source of the person's dignity and inviolable rights is to be found, and nowhere else. By educating consciences, the Church forms citizens who are devoted to the promotion of the most noble values. Although the idea of "human rights", with its twofold claim to the autonomy of the person and of the rule of law, is in some way inherent in Western civilization marked by Christianity, the value upon which this idea rests, namely, the dignity of the person, is a universal truth destined to be accepted more and more explicitly in every cultural climate.

For her own part, the Church is convinced that she serves the cause of human rights when, with fidelity to her faith and mission, she proclaims that the dignity of the person has its foundation in the person's quality as a creature made in the image and likeness of God. When our contemporaries seek a basis upon which to establish human rights, they should find in the faith of believers and in their moral sense the indispensable transcendent foundations for ensuring that those rights are protected from all efforts at manipulation on the part of human powers.

One can see that human rights are not just juridical norms but first and foremost values. These values must be maintained and fostered in society, otherwise they also risk disappearing from the texts of the law. And so the dignity of the person must be protected in society before being protected by law. I cannot fail to mention here the disquiet caused by the poor use which certain societies make of this freedom so ardently desired by others.

When freedom of expression and of creation is no longer directed towards the search for the beautiful, the true and the good, but takes pleasure, for example. in the production of plays and

films containing scenes of violence, cruelty or horror, such abuses, when frequently repeated, threaten the prohibitions of inhuman or degrading treatment sanctioned by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and bode ill for a future secure from a return to the excesses which that solemn document opportunely condemned.

The same is true when the faith and religious sensibilities of believers can be held up to ridicule in the name of freedom of expression or for propaganda purposes. Intolerance threatens to reappear in other forms. Respect for religious freedom is a criterion not only of the consistency of a juridical system but also of the maturity of a free society.

8. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, in closing I can only invite you to unite your daily efforts to those of the Holy See in order to meet the great challenge of the end of this century: to give back to man reasons for living!

As for the Church, she does not cease to be optimistic, for she is sure that she possesses a message which is ever new, received from her Founder, Jesus Christ, who is Life itself and who came among us, as the celebration of Christmas recently reminded us, so that people "may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). She never tires of inviting all those who are willing to do so to meet this God who made himself "the neighbour" of each of us and who suggests that we work, where we are and with our talents, in building a better world: a world in which people will live in friendship with the God who sets free and who brings happiness.

It is to him that I entrust in prayer the fervent good wishes which I formulate for all of you, as I invoke upon you, your families, your noble mission and your countries an abundance of blessings from on high.

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