



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE*

Monday, 8 January 1968

We thank you, gentlemen, for your visit and for the fine sentiments you have expressed. We, in turn, express the hope that God will bless you and your homelands, and that He will make the new year a happy one for you.

What would a happy new year be for diplomats? Can we use this expression with sincerity and without irony amid the conditions prevailing today? Look at the situation the world is in now, more than 20 years after World War II: Does it not seem to suggest that diplomacy has failed, at least partially; that its capacity to restore order and peace among nations is doubtful at best?

What, in fact, do we see in many, many countries after 20 years and countless efforts at diplomacy? International tensions, seeds of misunderstandings, a series of almost uninterrupted confrontations, hot and cold wars alternating with each other. So far, thank God, they have been limited in space; but there is always the danger that they will spread farther and take on more terrible dimensions. In short, we are faced with a roving brush fire, flaring up in one corner of the world when it is put out in another. It is almost as if some evil genie, some diabolical spirit, were standing in the wings and making sure that the fire of war not be completely extinguished among mankind.

We will not revert to what We said in Our message of January first. But here We stand exchanging greetings on the morrow of the festive season of joy and hope. How can We forget, in such circumstances, that a cherished nation of Southeast Asia continues in the grip of a frightful war with no end in sight ?

Must we resign ourselves to the inevitability of war? Must we admit the weakness, or perhaps the futility, of diplomacy? Must we regard it as a revered institution of the past, which has had its

moments in the sun, but which now is out-of-date in our world? Must it give way to new and unaccustomed forms of contact? Must it be shelved in the museum, like an out dated weapon of war?

The answer is "no." It is only too clear that if we abandon the path of diplomacy in trying to resolve the terrible problems of today's world, these problems will become altogether insoluble.

What other road would be open to us then, except recourse to force, which in our day has taken on such terrible proportions and assumed such terrifying potential for destruction that it threatens the survival of the human race as a whole ? It is a frightening dilemma, allowing no other alternatives. Relations between peoples will be based on reason or they will be based on force. The road leads to peaceful accords or to destruction; it is diplomacy or war. And the alternative to be put aside as outdated, as incapable of resolving our problems, is not diplomacy, gentlemen; it is war.

In saying this, We feel We are at one with the sentiments of men like you. You and others like you have dedicated your efforts and your lives to a magnificent ideal: the war against war, the struggle against human folly, the battle for reason and law, the quest for a future in which the world will be dominated by a just and lasting peace.

Diplomacy does not succeed always and everywhere; that is clear enough. It does not always manage to create or maintain peace. But that is what it strives for and that is what it struggles to bring about. It devotes ail its efforts to this end, instigating new initiatives over and over again. It works with patience, perseverance and tenacity, extracting admiration from all; in all events, it deserves the respect and acknowledgment of all men, today even as yesterday.

There is, to be sure, one type of diplomacy that can rightly be regarded as out-of-date and repudiated. That is what is called Machiavellian diplomacy, which might be summed up as "success at any price," even to the sacrifice of moral considerations. Its sole concern is personal interest, its sole method is expediency, its sole justification is success. It does not hesitate to use words to conceal its real thoughts; it does not hesitate to use actions as deceitful stratagems.

Does such an approach still merit to be called diplomacy? Is it not rather a corroded imitation of diplomacy, an unworthy caricature of it? Granted that these deplorable methods have sometimes passed for authentic diplomacy, like a fraudulent bill of goods in a handsome and seemingly honest package, does that mean we are dreamers in thinking that diplomacy has, by God's grace, been purged of many of its weaknesses and suffused with a higher moral ideal ?

Diplomacy has, to be sure, been divested of some of its formalities and its niceties of protocol. It has given up some of its external trappings. But wouldn't these things hinder its progress today more than help it? Moreover, it now bears more directly on the real, concrete problems of societal

life, particularly on the major question facing us all: the problem of peace. Today's diplomat, aware of the human condition, is not so much concerned to succeed at any price; he is concerned to establish and maintain international order, to create truly human and rational relations among nations. He has undertaken a far more difficult task.

The diplomat has often succeeded in moving beyond the narrowness of ancient and sterile antagonisms. He, more than anyone else, has become the artisan of peace, the man of law and reason and sincere dialogue. Sincerity, we feel, is inextricably linked to genuine diplomacy. And if we are to catalogue the characteristics of diplomacy, we should add these: patience, of which there is more need today than ever before; prudent realism, which knows how to draw the line between the possible and the impossible in any given set of circumstances; magnanimity, the crowning piece, which must characterize the civilized man wherever he dwells, especially if he bears the name of Christian.

Let no one fear that the diplomacy of which we speak would lead to excessive idealism, that it would lose sight of the national interest. Everyone agrees that the national interest must remain at the center of the diplomat's horizon. It is just that this perspective would now be enlarged and integrated into an objective framework of justice and equity; it would somehow be universalized.

Public opinion today has the right perspective. The best diplomat, in the eyes of the public, is the man who fashions the formulas with the widest scope, the programs which go beyond narrow national or unilateral interests and encompass the interests of humanity as a whole.

Obviously not everyone measures up to this ideal. No one would claim that present-day diplomacy is beyond reproach. But the remedy for its failings is no less clear. Diplomacy will escape the defects to which it is inevitably disposed to the extent that its methods and aims are imbued with the loftier values of the moral and spiritual order.

If diplomacy does this, if its primary and disinterested aim is to establish law, justice and peace on earth, then it is in deep-rooted accord with the Catholic Church. This should not be surprising. After all, the Pope is not content to praise diplomacy here in your presence. In the highest international assemblies he has intervened personally to approve and support their efforts; and, on occasion, he has presented himself to them as an ambassador of peace.

Authentic diplomacy is inspired by moral considerations and seeks the real welfare of the international community. Such diplomacy already has, in the eyes of the Church, "a soul that is naturally Christian," to use the words of Tertullian. It has gone to the school of Him who came to bring "peace to men of good will." It burns with a concern for law, with a thirst for truth and justice, and these traits link it to the beatitudes of the Gospel; thus its dynamism is assured vitality, and its ultimate success is guaranteed.

So you see, gentlemen, We have confidence in diplomacy and its effectiveness. And We do not say this simply in deference to this present gathering, or because We were engaged in diplomatic work for a long time during the reign of Pius XII. We say this because We have confidence in human reason. If diplomacy is faithful to the moral ideal of which We spoke, is it not applying reason to the sphere of human relations? Is it not working out solutions which accord with law and justice, in short, which accord with that innate faculty that gives man his dignity and nobility ?

Let Us say it right out: to despair of sound diplomacy would be to despair of man himself. Reason must have the final word some day. The ail too real failures of diplomacy should not dim our confidence; they are, We think and hope, only temporary. Our prayers and best wishes, together with your own and those of ail sincere men, will hasten the day when reason triumphs over passion, when peace and brotherhood triumph over self-interest and egotism. The victory of diplomacy in our tormented world will represent the victory of wisdom and good sense.

All this should tell you how earnestly We pray God that the diplomatic efforts of your countries on behalf of peace this year will prove successful. As you can well understand, Our thoughts turn with special solicitude right now toward the Middle East, Southeast Asia and the trouble spots of Africa.

Your spokesman has spoken in very flattering terms of Our most recent initiative in this area: Our proposal to set aside January first as a Day of Peace each year. We want you to know how much We have been moved by the response of your chiefs of state to this proposal of Ours. We felt that the noble cause of peace called for such a proposal.

To be sure, as your spokesman pointed out, such a proposal will not "erase the specter of war in a day." External peace will be, in large measure, the fruit of interior peace. But does that mean that while warfare increases the list of its victims with each passing day, we must wait until the spirit of peace has penetrated the hearts of ail men before we can put an end to combat? Certainly not! We must seize the opportunities for negotiation as they present themselves. And, at the same time, we must engage in those other works of peace which your spokesman mentioned: ecumenism and development.

God grant that the efforts of men of good will may multiply in every sphere in this year 1968. May God bless these efforts. This is Our prayer, gentlemen. We bless you and your governments and your fellow countrymen. May God in His goodness grant us all a year of serenity, happiness and peace.

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