



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO PAKISTAN, PHILIPPINES I, GUAM (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II), JAPAN, ANCHORAGE (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II)  
(FEBRUARY 16-27, 1981)

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS\***

*Apostolic Nunciature of Tokyo  
Tuesday, 24 February 1981*

*Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. In the course of my pastoral visit to East Asia and to the Catholic communities of the Philippines, Guam and Japan, I am happy and honored to have the opportunity of meeting with the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Government of Japan in this city of Tokyo. My first words are of sincere thanks to your Doyen who has kindly welcomed me. The courteous sentiments which he has expressed in my regard are greatly appreciated.

My visit, as I have already had the occasion to emphasize during this journey, is of a religious nature. I come to bring to the Catholic communities the fraternal support of the Church in Rome and throughout the world. I likewise come to meet the people of a region that has the distinction of being the home of ancient cultures and religions. While being Successor of the Apostle Peter in the See of Rome, I am also heir to the tradition of another Apostle, Paul, who, having received faith in Jesus Christ, travelled tirelessly to the different parts of the then known world to bear witness to what he believed in, and to speak *a word of brotherhood, love and hope for all*.

2. Your presence here today shows that you understand my mission and also the activity of the Catholic Church and the Holy See, in the different parts of the world. Because of its mission, which is religious in nature and worldwide in dimension, the Holy See is always eager to promote and to maintain a climate of mutual trust and of dialogue with all the living forces of society, and,

therefore, with the authorities who have received from the people the mandate of fostering the common good.

The Catholic Church, in fidelity to her evangelical mission, wishes to be at the service of all humanity, of today's society, so often threatened or attacked. For this reason she strives to maintain friendly relations with all civil authorities and also, if they so desire, relations at the diplomatic level. Thus there is established, on the basis of mutual respect and understanding, *a partnership of service for the progress of humanity*.

Church and State—each in its own sphere, spiritual or temporal, each with its own proper means, without renouncing its own distinctive mission, without confusing its specific task—each one endeavors to carry out this service to humanity in order to promote that justice and that peace to which all humanity aspires.

I desire to pay homage here to the cordial relationship which the Government of Japan maintains with the Holy See, and which is exemplified by the presence of an Ambassador to the Holy See and of a Papal Representative in Tokyo. The latter has a special mission among the leaders of the Catholic community of this land but, like all of you, he also has the task of promoting a spirit of understanding and cooperation in the international domain.

**3.** Ladies and gentlemen, in the capital of this nation you are bearers of a mission that draws its meaning and inspiration from the ideals of peaceful and fraternal collaboration. You are all deeply conscious of your task. Without any doubt it is an important one ; in many circumstances it is difficult ; but it is always rewarding, since at the same time it is a school for mutual understanding and a testing ground for worldwide concerns.

The basis for any fruitful activity in promoting peaceful relations among nations is certainly *the capacity for correctly and sympathetically valuing each other's specific qualities*. Japan certainly offers a true school for understanding, for Japan is unique in its history, in its culture and in its spiritual values. Through the course of many centuries, Japanese society has constantly honored its own traditions by maintaining a true appreciation of the spiritual. It has expressed those traditions in its torii and temples, in the arts, in literature, in the theater and in music, at the same time preserving, even in the midst of increasing economic and industrial development, its distinctive Japanese characteristics.

As diplomats, you are witnesses to and sometimes sharers in the events that mark the history and the life of the Japanese people and especially of its culture, and so you are able to acquire a deeper understanding of the differences that shape the character and the spirit of each nation and people. Indeed, as I said last month in my address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See : "Culture is the life of the spirit ; it is the key which gives access to the deepest and most jealously guarded secrets of the life of peoples : it is the fundamental and unifying expression of

their existence"[1]. Just as it is necessary to be deeply rooted in one's own culture in order to understand the values and the spirit of one's own nation, so also it is necessary to view with impartiality the manifestations of the cultural life of other peoples, in order to understand the aspirations, needs and achievements of one's partner in dialogue and collaboration.

4. There is a second aspect to the function of the diplomat. You are called to be instruments—even to be on the frontline—in *building a new order of relations in the world*. Precisely because each people is distinguished from others by its cultural inheritance and its achievements, it can offer a unique and irreplaceable contribution to all the others. Without surrendering their own values, nations can work together and build a true international community characterized by shared responsibility for the universal common good.

More than ever, the world situation today demands that this common responsibility be taken up in a true universal spirit. Every diplomatic community thus becomes a testing ground for worldwide concerns. In your daily personal contacts with your colleagues, in your official dealings with the host government and its agencies, in endeavoring to know and to understand the local culture, in taking an active part in the We of the community that offers you its hospitality, you will develop those attitudes of respect and appreciation that are so needed in order to build fraternal relations between the nations of the world.

5. Many of you have already accumulated a rich experience in intercultural relations and exchange, gained through years of service to your own country in different parts of the world. It is my hope that your mission here in Japan will help you to discover and understand more profoundly, beyond the Japanese context, *the rich reality of all Asia* and of all the Asian peoples.

Asia has a special role to play in building up and strengthening the community of nations. So many problems of worldwide dimension remain to be solved, and Asia must participate in undertakings begun for this purpose. I wish to convey to you my conviction that world problems will not be solved unless each continent and nation plays its rightful role and makes its own specific contribution.

The nations of Asia must assume the role that is theirs by reason of their centuries-old cultures, their religious experience, their dynamism and enduring industriousness. The mainland and the archipelagos of Asia are certainly not devoid of problems (and which nation anywhere in the world can claim that it has solved all its people's problems?) but there is no greater challenge for a people than to share of its substance with others while at the same time trying to find the full solutions to its own problems.

6. Today, we are at a point in history where it has become economically and technically feasible to relieve the worst aspects of the extreme poverty that afflicts so many of our fellow human beings. The kinds of poverty are many : malnutrition and hunger, illiteracy and lack of basic education,

chronic disease and high infant mortality, lack of meaningful employment and lack of proper housing. The obstacles to overcoming these problems are no longer primarily economic or technical, as they were in the past, but are now to be found in the spheres of convictions and institutions.

Is it not in fact a lack of *political determination*—at both national and international levels—that is the main obstacle to the successful elimination of the gravest forms of suffering and need? Is it not an absence of strong personal and collective convictions that prevents the poor from sharing more fully and equitably in their own development? The present economic difficulties which in varying ways and degrees are affecting all nations must not become a pretext for giving in to the temptation to make the poor pay for the solution to the problems of the rich, by permitting a standard of living lower than what a rational definition of human decency would allow.

Although there are many compelling reasons for eliminating abject poverty, particularly in the developing world, I do not hesitate to state that *the fundamental case against poverty is a moral one*. It is the sign of a healthy community—whether it be the family, the nation or the international community itself—to recognize the moral imperative of mutual solidarity, justice and love. The generosity and the sense of fairness already at work in many international undertakings and programs must be further reinforced by an increased awareness of the ethical dimension. The public and governments must become ever more conscious of the fact that nobody may stand idly by as long as human beings are suffering and in need. The Holy See will never cease to raise its voice and to commit the full weight of its moral authority to increasing public awareness in this regard.

7. The opportunity will be given to me later in the course of my short stay in Japan to speak about the overriding concern for international peace, and to encourage the international community to increase its efforts in favor of peaceful relations between nations. On the present occasion just let me emphasize that endeavors for peace cannot be separated from the quest for a just society and for the effective development of all nations and peoples. *Justice and development go hand in hand with peace*. They are essential parts of a new world order still to be built. They are a path leading to a future of happiness and human dignity.

Ladies and gentlemen, yours is a splendid mission : to be the heralds of universality, the builders of peace among nations, the promoters of a new and just world. May each one of you, with your own governments, as well as in international meetings and institutions, be the advocate of less privileged people and nations. The ideal of international brotherhood in which we all so profoundly believe demands this. And by acting in this way you will indeed serve your own country and all humanity well.

May the peace and justice of Almighty God dwell in your hearts always. May his blessing come down upon you, upon your families, upon your nations and upon all your untiring efforts in the service of humanity.

[1] AAS 73 (1981), p.188.

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\*AAS 73 (1981), p. 410-414.

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