



The Holy See

ANSPRACHE VON JOHANNES PAUL II.

AN DEN BOTSCHAFTER DER BUNDESREPUBLIK DEUTSCHLAND, HERRN PHILIPP JENNINGER, ANLÄSSLICH DER ÜBERGABE DES BEGLAUBIGUNGSSCHREIBENS*

Montag, 12. Juni 1995

Your Excellency,

1. It is a great joy for me to receive from your hands the Letters by which the President of the Federal Republic of Germany accredits you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. At the same time I would ask you kindly to convey my cordial greetings to the Federal President and the Federal Chancellor. As you begin your mission, I bid you a cordial welcome and pray for God's blessing for you in this honourable and responsible task.

2. In recent weeks we have commemorated the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe. This marked a decisive point not only in the history of Germany but especially in world history. The end of the war affected perpetrators and victims, the guilty and innocent in like manner. Many people were able to build a new life for themselves but others, east of the Elbe, found themselves trapped anew in the clutches of another totalitarian system from which their children have only now been able to gain liberation. «Sadly, the end of the War did not lead to the disappearance of the policies and ideologies which were its cause or contributed to its outbreak. Under another guise, totalitarian regimes have continued and indeed spread, especially in Eastern Europe» (Message on the 50th Anniversary of the End of the Second World War in Europe, n. 7)

For the majority of the people of your country, commemorating 8 May 1945 is but a glance in retrospect at an historical date which preceded the actual establishment of your State. Nonetheless, it was a day of mourning for the victims of war and tyranny. It was also a day to give thanks for the possibility of creating peace in freedom. It was also an opportunity to gain a renewed consciousness of the responsibility and obligation for vigilance concerning respect for

human dignity.

Since the experiences of the war and all the horrors related to it did not end in 1945, our century has continued to be marked by war and violence. Now, as the century of war is about to pass into history, we must struggle anew against the spirit of inhumanity. An open and unmistakable commitment to human rights is an obligation for us all.

Today the federal Republic of Germany enjoys worldwide respect and its partnership is sought. Its Government is playing a decisive role in the process of European unification. It is in a position to fulfil this role with conviction because your country's democratic institutions are stable and its citizens recognize their overwhelming diversity. Then too, because Germany is aware of its own history, it is sensitive to injustice and violations of human dignity.

In fact it seems there is a growing symptom in all modern democracies that the spontaneous inclination to use violence coincides with politically motivated and organized power, and this can pose a threat to inner freedom. It is certainly not sufficient merely to issue some general appeals and recommend that people learn from history. What is needed instead is a concrete effort of reconciliation which does not merely blame the past on oneself in relation to others, but helps break down mutual prejudice and contributes to a common European future.

4. This future, however, needs a spiritual and conceptual foundation, which many societies have experienced difficulty in re-establishing because, where most of the old standards have been overturned, almost everything is considered of equal importance, and many young people have the impression that in reality, in order to draw attention to themselves, they can, uninhibited, practice violence whenever they please. How can a society acquire a spiritual foundation if, in general, its members believe that inner freedom lies in material well-being?

The acceptance of a spontaneous propensity for violence in many societies shows that the socialization of many young people will only be achieved with difficulty. Individual demands are often directed towards doing everything possible immediately and wanting to have everything at once. Such a position is but a short step away from even using violence to take whatever one wants and laying aside seemingly troublesome obstacles, even when other human beings are affected.

Furthermore, it has been shown that conflicts in a given country will generally spread to other territories. Terrorist action in a foreign country often merely masks an attempt to achieve domestic goals.

Therefore it is the responsibility of all democrats to use every available legal means to support the free State under the rule of law and to work against every violation of basic values, doing everything to re-establish and consolidate them. Without the recognition and practice of these

basic values, freedom and human dignity will be lost. Christians have an important role to play in the construction and preservation of a fundamental order based on human dignity, freedom and justice.

5. One of the Christian's basic tasks is to build a culture of life and love. «In our present social context, marked by a dramatic struggle between the 'culture of life' and the 'culture of death', there is need to develop a deep critical sense, capable of discerning true values and authentic needs». Indeed, «all together we must build a new culture of life: new, because it will be able to confront and solve today's unprecedented problems affecting human life; new, because it will be adopted with deeper and more dynamic conviction by all Christians» (Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, n. 95). This last aspect of a life witness offered in common by all Christians to a world which is drawing near to the third Christian millennium is especially dear to my heart. «In the eyes of the world co-operation among Christians becomes a form of common Christian witness» (Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, n. 40).

This world must not be further deceived and deformed. The truth must always be kept in sight; it is ultimately revealed by God himself. Human life and the truth about life are all too strongly threatened by secularism, indifferentism, individualism, hedonistic consumerism and practical materialism.

It is true that life depends on the individual, on each one's search for meaning, but it is also the responsibility of culture as a whole to be watchful about the all embracing meaning of existence. The human person can never be perceived as some kind of enigmatic, imperfect construction, and ultimately no one can draw nourishment from what is meaningless. While the restrictions on meaning imposed by collectivism have broken down in the former communist countries, people in the West are in danger of becoming the victims of an individualism obsessed with freedom. In such a situation it is necessary to rediscover the values which are enlightened by an essential meaning, which do not turn us in upon ourselves or turn us into nothing, but rather lead us towards what is good and to goodness as an indestructible power, towards a sincere and upright life. This implies respect for human life in all its phases: childhood, old age, the wanted and those who may be unwanted.

It is ultimately the figure of the human person that characterizes the style of daily conduct and political behaviour.

6. One sign of an awareness of values in a society that I can think of, including in the Federal Republic, is real availability for solidarity and supportive behaviour towards people who are in need of help. Not only Church organizations give example of this, but your Government too, Mr. Ambassador, has given positive signs through its wide-reaching aid programmes in recent decades. Here I would like to make special mention of the involvement of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany in international and bilateral relations for solving the debt problems

of the poorest of the developing nations. Most of all it is thanks to your Government that a substantial improvement in the debt condition has been achieved.

Your Government's social preparedness and commitment, both foreign and domestic, is strongly sustained by the principle of subsidiarity, a central matter of concern in your country's European politics too, as can be seen from the express establishment of the principle in the Maastricht Treaty.

7. In conclusion, please allow me to express my conviction that the friendly relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Holy See, as you so rightly emphasized in your address, will continue to grow in harmony. This fruitful relationship between Church and State, which both parties accept as a serious responsibility, is a fundamental requirement. To you, Mr. Ambassador, to your esteemed co-workers in the diplomatic service and to your distinguished family I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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