



# The Holy See

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

*Monday, 12 January 1970*

*Excellencies, Gentlemen:*

To all of you We offer Our cordial and respectful greetings, Our lively gratitude, and Our fervent good wishes for the year 1970. We are particularly grateful to your Dean who has kindly interpreted the thoughts and the sentiments of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, expressing them in such noble and respectful words to Our humble person.

Your very presence, which is renewed every year on this occasion and is particularly pleasing to Us, constitutes in its own way a highly qualified recognition of the mission of the Church in the world. As representatives of so many and divers nations, you are like a synthesis of the world, and you testify that the Church and the Apostolic See are not strangers to the multiple and grave problems concerning the world. For Us, this is a precious testimony which comforts Us in the fulfilment of our responsibilities; a testimony which invites Us to reflect with you on a question often discussed today: Is it right for the Holy See to make use of this form of activity called diplomacy? Is not diplomacy totally foreign to the nature and the purpose of the Church? Does it not run the risk of becoming assimilated to institutes and organisms of a temporal order with which it cannot nor should be confused?

When it is a question of States, such a question does not arise because – despite the new forms with which international relations are invested today – diplomatic activity remains for them a privileged instrument, sanctioned by centuries-old historical experience. But for the Church, whose essential role is a religious one, is recourse to diplomacy truly justified?

You, Gentlemen and Ambassadors, with full knowledge of the facts, can answer this question. You

can say that there are valid motives for the Holy See to receive you and to negotiate with you, to send its own representatives to perform similar functions with your Governments

In fact, the diplomatic activity of the Holy See responds, in a very appropriate manner, to the present developments of international life and to the present needs of the mission which the Church must fulfil in the contemporary world. The Vatican Council II has spoken of this mission by solemnly affirming that the Church is called upon to give – and she intends to do so with all her strength – a determinative aid to society, by fortifying and solidifying the unity of the human family. As the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* says in no. 42: «In virtue of her mission and nature, the Church is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic, or social system. Hence the Church by her very universality can be a very close bond between diverse human communities and nations, provided these trust her and truly acknowledge her right to true freedom in fulfilling her mission». Such is the activity the Holy See intends to exercise: help to render closer the bonds between nations, by mutual dialogue, careful to recognize the rights and the duties of each. The Roman Pontiffs, particularly in the modern and contemporary period, became more and more keenly aware of this responsibility which flows directly from their mission. And they replied to this imperative inherent in their office: that of becoming interested also in civil society, not to interfere unduly in a domain outside their scope, but to foster respect for the basic principles of civil and international life, justice towards all, mutual concord, collaboration among peoples; briefly, to co-operate in the Peaceful search for this common good, of which the temporal authority should be the guarantee in order to serve and to defend peace. Let us hearken again to the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 78: «Peace is not merely the absence of war. Nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies. Nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called ‘an enterprise of justice’ (Is 32.7). Peace results from that harmony built into human society by its divine Founder, and actualized by men as they thirst after ever greater justice... That earthly peace which arises from love of neighbour symbolizes and results from the peace of Christ who comes forth from God the Father».

Could the Pope be truly uninterested in such a task, one which emanates from the very heart of God? Could he forget that peace, announced in the manger of Jesus Christ on the holy night of Christmas, should be on earth the reflection of the peace of God?

If one wishes to approach the problems in a really objective way, it is clear that the activity of the Church in the world is at the service of peace.

1) First of all, peace within the various national communities, by helping them «to triumph over egoism, pride and rivalries, to overcome ambitions and injustice, to open to everyone the paths of a more human life where each one is loved and helped as a neighbour, as a brother» (*Populorum progressio*, 82)

To this daily activity of Christians, guided by the responsible pastors, the representatives of the

Holy See contribute, in the exercise of their mission, very effective assistance, while at the same time they help the local churches to strengthen their bonds with Us.

In this way, a precious contribution can be provided for human progress under its various aspects: spiritual, moral, cultural, social. Thus, the development of the country is promoted. This is how the society of tomorrow is constructed, in the dynamic balance of groups that compose it. In his own proper domain and with evangelical unselfishness, the representative of the Holy See supports the initiatives which lead to the education of communities, families and persons. To this mission corresponds also, Gentlemen and Ambassadors, your own activity which remains very different, as We have said, from the diplomatic activity in every other State, and which also seeks to establish peace by maintaining continually with the Holy See close contacts which, you may be sure, are highly appreciated.

2) This activity in the service of peace extends also to international external peace whose aim is to eliminate differences of all sorts among peoples. On this point, the activity of the Holy See would like to contribute all that it possibly can. It permits the Pope not to limit himself to declarations of principles, to launch out with solemn and purely theoretical statements, but to intervene on the concrete plane of action for peace, and even between parties in disagreement. This is what Our Predecessor Pius XII did during the tragic world war which upset the world; and the documents about to be published are its most convincing proof. This is what John XXIII of beloved memory did during the moments of grave international tension, by offering his very noble mediation. This is what We are modestly striving to do in the wars which, alas, continue to work havoc. All this was possible and is possible, thanks to the means offered by diplomatic activity. Here again, what a precious help the Pope finds, Gentlemen and Ambassadors, in your collaboration which, at times, is the irreplaceable way to achieve such noble and such urgent aims!

Diplomatic activity, therefore, permits the Holy See to intervene on the international level, by helping the efforts made for the happy consolidation of the community of diverse nations, by contributing to assure to such efforts this ethical and spiritual content without which they would be doomed to failure, by remaining equally distant from all partiality, from all excess.

To fulfil her mission, the Church also uses means which are invested with new expressions today, particularly in relations with international Organisms. And always pursuing her proper aim, the spiritual salvation of men, she also works to promote the dignity of the person and the progress of nations in justice and in peace. Her qualified contacts in the international domain permit the Holy See to make its voice better heard, to give greater value to its own suggestions, and to negotiate with those who control the fate of nations, in a spirit of mutual respect.

The complete unselfishness of such activity for everything which could have a distinct temporal and territorial end and the Holy See's total dedication to problems of human life are enhanced, even visibly, by the nature and the universal, Catholic and supernatural physiognomy of the

Church and of the Apostolic See. In this domain, We would like to manifest ever more clearly this evangelical poverty which for us is a law of our divine Master. And We would also wish that you, Excellencies and Ambassadors, should understand this well: that when the Apostolic See acts in behalf of ends which We have indicated, it is actuated not by calculated and hidden considerations for personal advantage and power, but for the service of justice, peace and the international community.

And even when the Holy See has a loyal dialogue with States in order to have the rights and the freedom of the Church recognized, it aspires in no way whatever to privileges or to selfish interests. Rather, it acts for the service and for the good of man, the common subject of civil society and of the Church, and for the moral advantage of States, in which the religious community founded by Christ the Lord is at work.

As an expert in human nature, knowing well, therefore, what lies in the human heart, promoting an authentic humanism and one open to transcendence, the Church establishes appropriate and fruitful contacts with your diplomacy in order to help the modern world solve its contradictions and effect a dynamic and constructive peace, centered on the recognition and the promotion of human, personal and social values.

At the close of this interview, allow Us to tell you how much We appreciate your noble work, as well as the intelligent and generous collaboration which you give to your activity, for the benefit, first of all, of your respective Nations, and also on behalf of world peace. Such common efforts that are so profitable, certainly make this meeting, which inaugurates the new year, a highly significant symbol. We gladly reap its wholesome value: it is an encouragement for Us and a happy omen for you. With these sentiments, We invoke upon you, your families and the noble Nations you represent, the continuous help of Almighty God who never fails to assist us,

And now, allow Us to add a further word to all We have just said on this special occasion. The painful events of recent days, which have taken place in those African lands so dear to Us, compel all men of good will to do everything possible to ensure that the Nigerian conflict – which seems to be moving toward an end – should not become a frightening tragedy and end with an epilogue even more cruel than the horror that every war entails.

We Ourselves, during Our recent trip to Africa, as on every other occasion, have done all in Our power to save human lives and to bring about a peaceful settlement. We have never failed to assist and to help the needy and the hungry with all the means at Our disposal. You can understand with how much emotion We direct this appeal to you, Excellencies and Ambassadors, and through you to all your governments, so that the swift action of all men of good will may succeed in preventing further bloodshed, and in saving innocent lives, in respect for international law.

We know that the Nigerian Authorities have again expressed their intention to safeguard the human and civil rights of all, including their opponents, as they had already requested for some time past the presence of certain Observers from various nations and international Organizations. This represents already a good omen and a happy promise. May history in the future be able to testify to the magnanimity of all those engaged in these decisive events. On its part, the Holy See is ready to do all it can to render human this painful situation, and to that end it is ready to make use of all the means available to it. May this armed conflict cease, and may the voices of solidarity and charity be loudly heard. May the efforts of generous Nations and Our prayer to the God of peace bring these precious gifts to the land of Africa.

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\**ORa* n.4 p.2, 3.

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