



## The Holy See

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*"But when the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared" (Ti 3:4).* For the sixth time since the opening of the dreadful war, the Christmas liturgy again hails with these words redolent of peaceful serenity, the coming into our midst of God, Our Saviour. The humble, mean cradle of Bethlehem, by its wonderful charm, focuses the attention of all believers.

Deep into the hearts of those in darkness, affliction and depression there sinks and pervades a great flood of light and joy. Heads that were bowed lift again serenely, for Christmas is the feast of human dignity, "the wonderful exchange by which the Creator of the human race, taking a living body, deigned to be born of a virgin, and by His coming bestowed on us His divinity" (*First Antiphon of first Vesper for the feast of the Circumcision*).

But our gaze turns quickly from the Babe of the Crib to the world around us, and the sorrowful sigh of John the Evangelist comes to our lips: *"and the light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (Jn 1:5).*

For alas, for the sixth time, the Christmas dawn breaks again on battlefields spreading ever wider, on graveyards where are gathered the remains of victims in ever-increasing numbers, on desert lands where a few tottering towers tell with silent pathos the story of cities once flourishing and prosperous, and where bells fallen or carried off no longer awaken the inhabitants with their jubilant Christmas chimes. They are so many silent witnesses to denounce this blot on the story of mankind which, deliberately blind to the brilliance of Him Who is the Splendor and Light of the Father, deliberately straying from Christ, has descended and fallen into chaos and into the denial of its own dignity. Even the little lamp is out in many majestic temples, in many modest chapels, where before the tabernacle it had shared the watches of the Divine Guest over a world asleep. What desolation! What contrast! Can there then be still hope for mankind?

### **Dawn of hope**

Blessed be the Lord! Out from the mournful groans of sorrow, from the very depths of the heart-rending anguish of oppressed individuals and countries there arises an aura of hope. To an ever-increasing number of noble souls there comes the thought, the will, ever cleared and stronger, to make of this world, this universal upheaval, a starting point for a new era of far-reaching

renovation, the complete reorganization of the world. Thus while the armed forces continue to engage in murderous battles with weapons ever more deadly, the statesmen, responsible leaders of nations, meet for talks, for conferences, to determine the fundamental rights and duties on which should be built a community of states, and to blaze the trail towards a better future, more secure and more worthy of mankind.

A strange paradox this, of a war whose bitterness bids fair to reach the limits of paroxysm, and of the notable progress made in aspirations and proposals for a solid and lasting peace: undoubtedly one may well discuss the worth, the feasibility, the efficacy of this or that proposal; judgment may well be suspended in their regard, but it remains nonetheless true that the process has begun.

### **The problem of Democracy**

Moreover—and this is perhaps the most important point—beneath the sinister lightning of the war that encompasses them, in the blazing heat of the furnace that imprisons them, the peoples have, as it were, awakened from a long torpor. They have assumed, in relation to the state and those who govern, a new attitude—one that questions, criticizes, distrusts. Taught by bitter experience, they are more aggressive in opposing the concentration of dictatorial power that cannot be censured or touched, and call for a system of government more in keeping with the dignity and liberty of the citizens.

These multitudes, uneasy, stirred by the war to their innermost depths, are today firmly convinced—at first, perhaps, in a vague and confused way, but already unyieldingly—that had there been the possibility of censuring and correcting the actions of public authority, the world would not have been dragged into the vortex of a disastrous war, and that to avoid for the future the repetition of such a catastrophe, we must vest efficient guarantees in the people itself.

In such a psychological atmosphere, is it to be wondered at if the tendency towards democracy is capturing the peoples and winning a large measure of consent and support from those who hope to play a more efficient part in the destinies of individuals and of society?

It is scarcely necessary to recall that, according to the teaching of the Church, "it is not forbidden to prefer temperate, popular forms of government, without prejudice, however, to Catholic teaching on the origin and use of authority," and that "the Church does not disapprove of any of the various forms of government, provided they be per se capable of securing the good of the citizens" (Leo XIII, *Encyclical "Libertas"*, June 20, 1888).

If, then, on this feast day which commemorates both the benignity of the Incarnate Word and the dignity of man (both in its personal and social aspects), We direct our attention to the problem of democracy, examining the forms by which it should be directed if it is to be a true, healthy democracy answering the needs of the moment, our action shows clearly that the interest and

solicitude of the Church looks not so much to its external structure and organization—which depend on the special aspirations of each people—as to the individual himself, who, so far from being the object and, as it were, a merely passive element in the social order, is in fact, and must be and continue to be, its subject, its foundation and its end.

Given that democracy, taken in the broad sense, admits of various forms, and can be realized in monarchies as well as in republics, two questions come up for our consideration: first, what characteristics should distinguish the men who live under democracy and a democratic regime? Second, what characterization should distinguish the men who hold the reins of government in a democracy?

## **I: CHARACTERISTICS PROPER TO CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRATIC REGIME**

To express his own views of the duties and sacrifices that are imposed on him; not compelled to obey without being heard—these are two rights of the citizen which find in democracy, as its name implies, their expression. From the solidity, harmony and good results produced by this between the citizens and the Government, one may decide which democracy is really healthy and well balanced, and what is its life energy and power of expansion. If, then, we consider the extent and nature of the sacrifices demanded of all the citizens, especially in our day when the activity of the state is so vast and decisive, the democratic form of government appears to many as a postulate of nature imposed by reason itself. When, however, people call for "democracy and better democracy," such a demand cannot have any other meaning than to place the citizen ever more in the position to hold his own personal opinion, to express it and to make it prevail in a fashion conducive to common good.

### *People and "the Masses"*

Hence follows a first conclusion with its practical consequence, the state does not contain in itself and does not mechanically bring together in a given territory a shapeless mass of individuals. It is, and should in practice be, the organic and organizing unity of a real people.

The people, and a shapeless multitude (or, as it is called, "the masses") are two distinct concepts. The people lives and moves by its own life energy; the masses are inert of themselves and can only be moved from outside. The people lives by the fullness of life in the men that compose it, each of whom—at his proper place and in his own way—is a person conscious of his own responsibility and of his own views. The masses, on the contrary, wait for the impulse from outside, an easy plaything in the hands of anyone who exploits their instincts and impressions; ready to follow in turn, today this flag, tomorrow another. From the exuberant life of a true people, an abundant rich life is diffused in the state and all its organs, instilling into them, with a vigor that is always renewing itself, the consciousness of their own responsibility, the true instinct for the

common good. The elementary power of the masses, deftly managed and employed, the state also can utilize: in the ambitious hands of one or of several who have been artificially brought together for selfish aims, the state itself, with the support of the masses, reduced to the minimum status of a mere machine, can impose its whims on the better part of the real people: the common interest remains seriously, and for a long time, injured by this process, and the injury is very often hard to heal.

Hence follows clearly another conclusion: the masses—as we have just defined them—are the capital enemy of true democracy and of its ideal of liberty and equality.

In a people worthy of the name, the citizen feels within him the consciousness of his personality, of his duties and rights, of his own freedom joined to respect for the freedom and dignity of others. In a people worthy of the name all inequalities based not on whim but on the nature of things, inequalities of culture, possessions, social standing—without, of course, prejudice to justice and mutual charity—do not constitute any obstacle to the existence and the prevalence of a true spirit of union and brotherhood. On the contrary, so far from impairing civil equality in any way, they give it its true meaning; namely, that, before the state everyone has the right to live honorably his own personal life in the place and under the conditions in which the designs and dispositions of Providence have placed him.

As against this picture of the democratic ideal of liberty and equality in a people's government by honest and far-seeing men, what a spectacle is that of a democratic state left to the whims of the masses: Liberty, from being a moral duty of the individual becomes a tyrannous claim to give free rein to a man's impulses and appetites to the detriment of others. Equality degenerates to a mechanical level, a colorless uniformity the sense of true honor, of personal activity, or respect for tradition, of dignity—in a word all that gives life its worth— gradually fades away and disappears. And the only survivors are, on the one hand, the victims deluded by the specious mirage of democracy, naively taken for the genuine spirit of democracy, with its liberty and equality; and on the other, the more or less numerous exploiters, who have known how to use the power of money and of organization, in order to secure a privileged position above the others, and have gained power.

## **II: CHARACTERISTICS OF MEN HOLDING POWER IN A DEMOCRATIC STATE**

The democratic state, whether it be monarchical or republican, should, like any other form of government, be entrusted with the power to command with real and effective authority. The absolute order itself of beings and purposes, which shows that man is an independent person, namely the subject of inviolable duties and rights, who is the source and end of his own social life, comprises the state also as a necessary society endowed with authority, without which it could neither exist nor live. And if men, using their personal liberty, were to deny all dependence on a

superior Authority possessing coercive power, they could by this very fact cut the ground from under their own dignity and liberty—by violating, that is, the absolute order of beings and purposes.

As they are established on this same foundation, the person, the state, the government, with their respective rights, are so bound together that they stand or fall together.

And since that absolute order, in the light of right reason, and in particular of the Christian Faith, cannot have any other origin than in a personal God, our Creator, it follows that the dignity of man is the dignity of the moral community willed by God, the dignity of political authority is the dignity deriving from its sharing in the authority of God.

No form of state can avoid taking cognizance of this intimate and indissoluble connection—least of all a democracy. Accordingly, if those in power do not see it, or more or less discount it. Their own authority is shaken, as is social morality, and that specious appearance of a purely formal democracy may often serve as a mark for all that is in reality least democratic.

Only a clear appreciation of the purposes assigned by God to every human society, joined to a deep sense of the exalted duties of social activity, can put those in power in a position to fulfill their own obligations in the legislative, judicial and executive order with that objectivity, impartiality, loyalty, generosity, and integrity without which a democratic government would find it hard to command the respect and the support of the better section of the people.

The deep sense of the principles underlying a political and social order that is sound and conforms to the norms of right and justice is of special importance in those who in any kind of democratic regime have, as the people's delegates, in whole or part, the power to legislate. And since the center of gravity of a democracy normally set up resides in this popular assembly from which political currents radiate into every field of public life—for good or ill—the question of the high moral standards, practical ability and intellectual capacity of parliamentary deputies is for every people living under a democratic regime a question of life and death of prosperity and decadence, of soundness or perpetual unrest.

To secure effective action, to win esteem and trust, every legislative body should—as experience shows beyond doubt—gather within it a group of select men, spiritually eminent and of strong character, who shall look upon themselves as the representatives of the entire people and not the mandatories of a mob, whose interests are often unfortunately made to prevail over the true needs of the common good—a select group of men not restricted to any profession or social standing but reflecting every phase of the people's life; men chosen for their solid Christian convictions, straight and steady judgment, with a sense of the practical and equitable, true to themselves in all circumstances; men of clear and sound principles, with sound and clear-cut proposals to make; men above all capable, in virtue of the authority that emanates from their untarnished consciences

and radiates widely from them, to be leaders and heads especially in times when the pressing needs of the moment excite the people's impressionability unduly, and render it more liable to be led astray and get lost: men who—in periods of transition, generally stormy and disturbed by passion, by divergent opinions and opposing programs—feel themselves doubly under the obligation to send circulating through the veins of the people and of the state, burning with a thousand fevers, the spiritual antidote of clear views, kindly interest, a justice equally sympathetic to all, and a bias towards national unity and concord in a sincere spirit of brotherhood.

Peoples whose spiritual and moral temperament is sufficiently sound and fecund, find it themselves and can produce the heralds and implements of democracy, who live in such dispositions and know how effectively to put them into practice. But where such men are lacking, others come to take their places in order to make politics serve their ambition, and be a quick road to profit for themselves, their caste and their class, while the race after private interests makes them lose sight of completely and jeopardize the true common good.

### *State absolutism*

A sound democracy, based on the immutable principles of the natural law and revealed truth, will resolutely turn its back on such corruption as gives to the state legislature in unchecked and unlimited power, and moreover, makes of the democratic regime, notwithstanding an outward show to the contrary, purely and simply a form of absolutism.

State absolutism (not to be confused, as such, with absolute monarchy, of which we are not treating here) consists in fact in the false principle that the authority of the state is unlimited and that in face of it—even when it gives free rein to its despotic aims, going beyond the confines between good and evil—to appeal to a higher law obliging in conscience is not admitted.

A man penetrated with right ideas about the state and authority and the power that he wields as guardian of social order, will never think of derogating the majesty of the positive law within the ambit of its natural competence. But this majesty of positive law is only inviolable when it conforms—or at least is not opposed—to the absolute order set up by the Creator and placed in a new light by the revelation of the Gospel. It cannot subsist except in so far as it respects the foundation on which human personality rests, no less than the State and the Government. This is the fundamental criterion of every healthy form of government, including democracy. It is the criterion by which the moral value of every particular law should be judged.

## **III: NATURE AND CONDITIONS OF AN EFFECTIVE PEACE SETTLEMENT**

### *Unity of mankind and Society of Peoples*

We were anxious, Beloved Sons and Daughters, to take the occasion of Christmastide to point out along what lines a democracy befitting human dignity can, in harmony with the law of nature and the designs of God as manifested in Revelation, secure happy results. Indeed, We are deeply convinced of the supreme importance of this problem for the peaceful progress of mankind. But We also realize the exalted claims that this form of government makes on the moral maturity of the individual citizen; a moral maturity to which he could never hope to attain fully and securely if the light from the Cave of Bethlehem did not illumine the dark path along which the peoples are going forward through the stormy present towards a future which they hope will be more serene.

But how far will the representatives and pioneers of democracy be inspired in their deliberations by the conviction that the absolute order of beings and purposes, of which We have repeatedly spoken, comprises also, as a moral necessity and the crowning of social development, the unity of mankind and of the family of peoples? On the recognition of this principle hangs the future of the peace. No world reform, no peace guarantee can abstract from it without being weakened and without being untrue to itself. If, on the other hand, this same moral necessity were to find its realization in a society of peoples which succeeded in eliminating the structural defects and shortcomings of former systems, then the majesty of that order would regulate and inspire equally the deliberations of that society and the use of its instruments of sanction.

For this reason, too, one understands why the authority of such a society must be real and effective over the member states, in suchwise, however, that each of them retain an equal right of its own sovereignty. Only thus will the spirit of sane democracy be able to pervade the vast and thorny ground of foreign relations.

*Against wars of aggression as solution of international disputes*

There is a duty, besides, imposed on all, a duty which brooks no delay, no procrastination, no hesitation, no subterfuge: It is the duty to do everything to ban once and for all wars of aggression as legitimate solution of international disputes and as a means towards realizing national aspirations. Many attempts in this direction have been seen in the past. They all failed. And they will all fail always, until the saner section of mankind has the firm determination, the holy obstinacy, like an obligation in conscience, to fulfill the mission which past ages have not undertaken with sufficient gravity and resolution.

If ever a generation has had to appreciate in the depths of its conscience the call: "war on war," it is certainly the present generation. Having passed, as it has, through an ocean of blood and tears in a form perhaps never experienced in past ages, it has lived through the indescribable atrocities with an intensity such that the recollection of so many horrors must remain stamped in its memory, and even in the deepest recesses of its soul, like a picture of a hell against which anyone who cherishes a sense of humanity desires more than anything else to close the door forever.

*Formation of a common means to maintain peace*

The decisions already published by international commissions permit one to conclude that an essential point in any future international arrangement would be the formation of an organ for the maintenance of peace, of an organ invested by common consent with supreme power to whose office it would also pertain to smother in its germinal state any threat of isolated or collective aggression. No one could hail this development with greater joy than he who has long upheld the principle that the idea of war as an apt and proportionate means of solving international conflicts is now out of date. No one could wish success to this common effort, to be undertaken with a seriousness of purpose never before known, with greater enthusiasm, than he who has conscientiously striven to make the Christian and religious mentality reject modern war with its monstrous means of conducting hostilities.

Monstrous means of conducting hostilities! Unquestionably the progress of man's inventions, which should have heralded the realization of greater well-being for all mankind, has instead been employed to destroy all that had been built up through the ages. But by that very fact the immorality of the war of aggression has been made ever more evident. And if now, to the recognition of this immorality there is to be added the threat of a judicial intervention by the nations and of chastisement inflicted on the aggressor by the society of states, so that war will always be subject to the stigma of proscription, always under surveillance and liable to preventive measures, then mankind, as it emerges from the dark night in which it has been so long submerged, will be able to hail the dawn of a new and better era of its history.

*Its constitution excluding unjust imposition*

But only on one condition: namely that the peace settlement which should be strengthened and made more stable by mutual guarantees and, where necessary, economic sanctions and even armed intervention, should not give definite countenance to any injustice, does not imply any derogation of any right to the detriment of any nation (whether it be on the side of the victors, the vanquished, or the neutrals), and does not impose any perpetual burden, which can only be allowed for a time as reparation for war damages.

That any peoples, to whose Government—or perhaps even partially to themselves—the responsibility for the war is attributed, should have for a time to undergo the rigors of security measures until the bonds of mutual trust, violently broken, should be gradually welded together again, is quite understandable from a human point of view, and in practice will in all probability be inevitable. Nevertheless, even these peoples must have a well-founded hope—commensurate to their effective collaboration in the work of reconstruction—of being able, together with the other states with equal consideration and with the same rights, to be associated with the great community of nations. To deny them that hope would be the reverse of far-seeing wisdom, it would be to assume the grave responsibility of barring the way of a general liberation from all the



disastrous consequences, material, moral and political, of the gigantic cataclysm which has shaken the poor family to its very foundations, but which, at the same time, has shown it the road to new goals.

*The stern lessons of suffering*

We will not renounce Our confidence that the peoples, who have all passed through the school of suffering, will be able to retain the stern lessons learned. And in this hope we are strengthened by the words of men who have had a greater share in the sufferings of the war and who have found generous words to express, together with the insistence on their own need of security against any future aggression, their respect for the vital rights of other peoples and their aversion to any usurping of those rights. It would be vain to expect that this sage judgment, dictated by the experience of history and a high political sense should be—while men's spirits are still burning white-hot—generally accepted by public opinion, or even by the majority. Hatred and the impossibility of mutual understanding have given rise in peoples that have fought against each other, to a mist too dense to hope that the hour has already come when a ray of light may shine out to clear the tragic panorama on either side of its dark wall. But one thin We know: that the moment will come, perhaps sooner than the people think, when both sides realize that, all things considered, there is only one way of getting out of the meshes in which war and hate have wrapped the world, namely a return to the solidarity, too long forgotten, a solidarity not restricted to these or those peoples, but universal, founded on the intimate connection of their destiny and rights which belong equally to both.

*The punishment of crimes*

No one certainly thinks of disarming justice in its relations to those who have exploited the war situation in order to commit real and proven crimes against the common law, and for whom supposed military necessity could at most have offered a pretext, but never a justification. But if justice presumed to judge and punish not merely individuals but even whole communities together, who could not see in such a procedure a violation of the norms which guide every human trial?

**IV: THE CHURCH AS GUARDIAN OF MAN'S TRUE DIGNITY  
AND LIBERTY**

At a time when the peoples find themselves with duties such as perhaps they have never met before in the course of their history, they feel deeply in their tortured hearts the desire, impatient and almost instinctive, to take the reins of their destiny in their own hands with more independence than heretofore, hoping that thus they will find it easier to defend themselves from the periodic invasions of violence which, like a boiling lava torrent, spares nothing of all that they hold sacred and dear.

Thank God, one may believe the time has passed when the call to moral and Gospel principles to guide the life of states and peoples was disdainfully thrust aside as unreal. The events of these war years have given ample evidence to confute, in a harder way than one could ever have imagined, those who spread such doctrine. The disdain that they affected towards this supposed unreality has been changed into stark reality: brutality, iniquity, destruction, annihilation.

If the future is to belong to democracy, an essential part in its achievement will have to belong to the religion of Christ and to the Church, the messenger of our Redeemer's word which is to continue His mission of saving men. For she teaches and defends supernatural truths and communicates the supernatural helps of grace in order to actuate the divinely-established order of beings and ends which is the ultimate foundation and directive norm of every democracy.

By her very existence, the Church rises before the world as a shining beacon to remind it constantly of that Divine order. Her history reflects clearly her providential mission. The struggles, which coerced by the abuse of power, she has had to sustain in defense of the liberty given her by God, were at the same time struggles for man's true liberty.

The Church has the mission to announce to the world, which is looking for better and more perfect forms of democracy, the highest and most needed message that there can be: the dignity of man, the call to be sons of God. It is the powerful cry, which from the Manger of Bethlehem to the furthest confines of the earth resounds in the ears of men at a time when that dignity is tragically low.

The holy story of Christmas proclaims this inviolable dignity of man with a vigor and authority that cannot be gainsaid—an authority and vigor that infinitely transcends that which all possible declarations of the rights of man could achieve. Christmas, the Great Feast of the Son of God Who appeared in human flesh, the feast in which heaven stoops down to earth with ineffable grace and benevolence, is also the day on which Christianity and mankind, before the Crib, contemplating the "*goodness and kindness of God our Saviour*" become more deeply conscious of the intimate unity that God has established between them. The Birth of the Saviour of the World, of the Restorer of human dignity in all its fullness, is the moment characterized by the alliance of all men of goodwill. There to the poor world, torn by discord, divided by selfishness, poisoned by hate, love will be restored, and it will be allowed to march forward in cordial harmony, towards the common goal, to find at last the cure for its wounds in the peace of Christ.

## **V: CRUSADE FOR CHARITY**

We do not want to close this Christmas message without addressing a word of heartfelt gratitude to all those —states, governments, Bishops and peoples— who at this time of untold misfortunes have lent Us valiant aid as We hearken to the cry of suffering which reaches Us from so many parts of the world and give a helping hand to so many of Our beloved sons and daughters whom

the misfortunes of war have reduced to extreme poverty and misery.

And in the first place it is but just to record the immense work of assistance achieved in spite of the extraordinary difficulties of transport, by the United States of America and, with regard to Italy in particular, by His Excellency the personal Representative of the President of the Union.

It is a pleasure for us to express equal praise and gratitude for the generosity of the head of the State, the Government and people of Spain, and the Governments of Ireland, Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Italy, Lithuania, Peru, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary and Uruguay, who have vied with one another in noble rivalry of brotherly love and charity, the echo of which will not resound in vain through the world.

While men of goodwill are endeavoring to bridge the gulf and bring the peoples together, this purely disinterested act of charity assumes an aspect and a value of unique importance.

When—as we all wish—the dissonance of hate and discord that dominates the present moment will be but a tragic memory, the good effects of this victory of active and magnanimous charity over the poison of selfishness and enmity will ripen into even a larger harvest of good.

May all who have had a share in this crusade of charity receive as an incentive and a token of gratitude our apostolic benediction and the thought that on the feast of love from numberless hearts in anguish, but not forgetful in their anguish, there rises to heaven the grateful prayer for them: *Deign to reward, O Lord, all those who do good to us for Your Name's sake with eternal life!*