

# MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II

## FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE DAY OF PEACE

1 JANUARY 1982

PEACE:

A GIFT OF GOD ENTRUSTED TO US!

To the young who in the world of tomorrow will make the great decisions,  
to the men and women who today bear responsibility for life in society,  
to families and teachers,  
to individuals and communities,  
to Heads of State and Government leaders:

It is to all of you that I address this message at the dawn of the year 1982.

I invite you to reflect with me on the theme of the new World Day; peace is a gift of God entrusted to us.

1. This truth faces us when we come to decide our commitments and make our choices. It challenges the whole of humanity, all men and women who know that they are individually responsible for one another, and together responsible for the world.

At the end of the First World War, my predecessor, Pope Benedict XV, devoted an Encyclical to this theme. Rejoicing at the cessation of hostilities and insisting on the need to remove hatred and enmity through reconciliation inspired by mutual charity, he began his Encyclical with a reference to "peace, *that magnificent gift from God*: as Augustine says, 'even understood as one of the fleeting things of earth, no sweeter word is heard, no more desirable wish is longed for, and no better discovery can be made than this gift' (*De Civitate Dei*, lib. XIX, C. XI)" (Encyclical *Pacem Dei Munus*: AAS 12 [1920], p. 209).

### *Efforts for peace in a divided world*

2. Since then my predecessors have often had to recall this truth in their constant endeavours to educate for peace and to encourage work for a lasting peace. Today peace has become, throughout the world, a major preoccupation not only for those responsible for the destiny of nations but even more so for broad sections of the population and numberless individuals who generously and tenaciously dedicate themselves to creating an outlook of peace and to establishing genuine peace between peoples and nations. This is comforting. But there is no hiding the fact that, in spite of the efforts of all men and women of good will *there are still serious threats to peace in the world*. Some of these threats take the form of divisions within various nations; others stem from deep-rooted and acute tensions between opposing nations and blocs within the world community.

In reality, the confrontations that we witness today are distinguished from those of past history by certain new characteristics. In the first place, they are *worldwide*: even a local conflict is often an expression of tensions originating elsewhere in the world. In the same way, it often happens that a conflict has

profound effects far from where it broke out. Another characteristic is *totality*: present day tensions mobilize all the forces of the nations involved; moreover, selfish monopolization and even hostility are to be found today as much in the way economic life is run and in the technological application of science as in the way that the mass media or military resources are utilized. Thirdly, we must stress the *radical* character of modern conflicts: it is the survival of the whole human race that is at stake in them, given the destructive capacity of present-day military stockpiles.

In short, while many factors could contribute to uniting it, human society appears as a divided world: the forces for unity give way before the divisions between East and West, North and South, friend and enemy.

#### *An essential problem*

3. The causes of this situation are of course complex and of various orders. *Political reasons* are naturally the easiest to distinguish. Particular groups abuse their power in order to impose their yoke on whole societies. An excessive desire for expansion impels some nations to build their prosperity with a disregard for – indeed at the expense of – other's happiness. Unbridled nationalism thus fosters plans for domination, which leave other nations with the pitiless dilemma of having to make the choice: either accepting satellite status and dependence or adopting an attitude of competition and hostility. Deeper analysis shows that the cause of this situation is the application of certain concepts and *ideologies* that claim to offer the only foundation of the truth about man, society and history.

When we come up against the choice between peace and war, we find ourselves face to face with ourselves, with our nature, with our plans for our personal and community lives, with the use we are to make of our freedom. Are relationships between people to continue inexorably along lines of incomprehension and merciless confrontation, because of a relentless law of human life? Or are human beings – by comparison with the animal species which fight one another according to the "law" of the jungle – specifically called upon and given the fundamental capability to live in peace with their fellows and to share with them in the creation of culture, society and history? In the final analysis, when we consider the question of peace, we are led to consider the meaning and conditions of our own personal and community lives.

#### *Peace, a gift of God*

4. Peace is not so much a superficial balance between diverging material interests – a balance pertaining to the order of quantity, of things. Rather it is, in its inmost reality, something that belongs to the essentially human order, the order of human subjects; it is thus of a rational and moral nature, the fruit of truth and virtue. It springs from the dynamism of free wills guided by reason towards the common good that has to be attained in truth, justice and love. This *rational and moral order* is based on a decision by the consciences of human beings seeking harmony in their mutual relationships, with respect for justice for everybody, and therefore with respect for the fundamental human rights inherent in every person. One cannot see how this moral order could ignore God, the first source of being, the essential truth and the supreme good.

In this very sense peace comes from God as its *foundation*: it is a gift of God. When claiming the wealth and resources of the universe worked on by the human mind — and it is often on their account that conflicts and wars have sprung up — “man comes up against the leading role of the gift made by ‘nature’, that is to say, in the final analysis, by the Creator” (Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, 12). And God does more than give *creation* to humanity to administer and develop jointly at the service of all human beings without any discrimination: he also *inscribes in the human conscience* the laws obliging us to respect in numerous ways the life and the whole person of our fellow human beings, created like us in the image and after the likeness of God. God is thus *the guarantor* of all these fundamental human rights. Yes indeed, God is the source of peace: he calls to peace, he safeguards it, and he grants it as the fruit of “justice”.

Moreover, God *helps* us interiorly to achieve peace or to recover it. In our limited life, which is subject to error and evil, we human beings go gropingly in search of peace, amid many difficulties. Our faculties are darkened by mere appearances of truth, attracted by false goods and led astray by irrational and selfish instincts. Hence we need to open ourselves to the transcendent light of God that illuminates our lives, purifies them from error and frees them from aggressive passion. God is not far from the heart of those who pray to him and try to fulfil his justice: when they are in continual dialogue with him, in freedom, God offers them peace as the fullness of the communion of life with God and with their brothers and sisters. In the Bible the word “peace” recurs again and again in association with the idea of happiness, harmony, well-being, security, concord, salvation and justice, as the outstanding blessing that God, “the Lord of peace” (2 Thess. 3:16), already gives and promises in abundance: “Now towards her I send flowing peace, like a river” (Is. 66:12).

#### *A gift of God, entrusted to us*

5. While peace is a gift, man is never dispensed from responsibility for seeking it and endeavouring to establish it by individual and community effort, throughout history. God's gift of peace is therefore also at all times a human conquest and achievement, since it is offered to us in order that we may accept it freely and put it progressively into operation by our creative will. Furthermore, in his love for man, God never abandons us, but even in the darkest moments of history drives us forward or leads us back mysteriously along the path of peace. Even the difficulties, failures and tragedies of the past and the present must be studied as providential lessons from which we may draw the wisdom we need in order to find new ways, more rational and courageous ways, for building peace. It is by drawing inspiration from the truth of God that we are given the ideal and the energy we require in order to overcome situations of injustice, to free ourselves from ideologies of power and domination, and to make our way towards true universal fraternity.

Christians, faithful to Christ who proclaimed “the Good News of peace” and established peace within hearts by reconciling them with God, have still more decisive reasons — as I shall stress at the end of this message — for looking on peace as a gift of God, and for courageously helping to establish it in this world, in accordance with this longing for its complete fulfilment in the Kingdom of God. They also know that they are called upon to join their efforts with those of be-

*lievers in other religions* who tirelessly condemn hatred and war and who devote themselves, using different approaches, to the advancement of justice and peace.

We should first consider in its natural basis this deeply hopeful view of humanity as directed towards peace, and stress moral responsibility in response to God's gift. This illuminates and stimulates man's activity on the level of information, study and commitment for peace, three sectors that I would now like to illustrate with some examples.

### *Information*

6. At a certain level, world peace depends on better self-knowledge on the part of both individuals and societies. This self-knowledge is naturally conditioned by information and by the quality of the information. Those who seek and proclaim the truth with respect for others and with charity are working for peace. Those who devote themselves to pointing out the values in the various cultures, the individuality of each society and the human riches of individual peoples, are working for peace. Those who by providing information remove the barrier of distance, so that we feel truly concerned at the fate of faraway men and women who are victims of war or injustice, are working for peace. Admittedly, the accumulation of such information, especially if it concerns catastrophes over which we have no control, can in the end produce indifference and surfeit in those who remain mere receivers of the information without ever doing whatever is within their power. But, in itself, the role of the mass media continues to be a positive one: each one of us is now called upon to be the neighbour of all his or her brothers and sisters of the human race (cf. *Luke 10: 29-37*).

High-quality information even has a direct influence upon education and political decisions. If the young are to be made aware of the problems of peace, and if they are to prepare to become workers for peace, educational programmes must necessarily give a special place to information about actual situations in which peace is under threat, and about the conditions needed for its advancement. Peace cannot be built by the power of rulers alone. Peace can be firmly constructed only if it corresponds to the resolute determination of all people of good will. Rulers must be supported and enlightened by a public opinion that encourages them or, where necessary, expresses disapproval. Consequently, it is also right that rulers should explain to the public those matters that concern the problems of peace.

### *Studies that help to build peace*

7. Building peace also depends upon the progress of research about it. Scientific studies on war, its nature, causes, means, objectives and risks have much to teach us on the conditions for peace. Since they throw light on the relationships between war and politics, such studies show that there is a greater future in negotiation than in arms for settling conflicts.

It follows that the role of law in preserving peace is called upon to expand. It is well known that within individual States the work of *jurists* contributes greatly to the advancement of justice and respect for human rights. But their role is just as great for the pursuit of the same objectives on the international level and for refining the juridical instruments for building and preserving peace.

However, since concern for peace is inscribed in the inmost depths of our being, progress along the path of peace also benefits from the researches of *psy-*

chologists and philosophers. Admittedly, the science of war has already been enriched by studies on human aggressiveness, death-impulses and the herd instinct that can suddenly take possession of whole societies. But much remains to be said about the fear we human beings have of taking possession of our freedom, and about our insecurity before ourselves and others. Better knowledge of life-impulses, of instinctive sympathy with other people, of readiness to love and share undoubtedly helps us to grasp better the psychological mechanisms that favour peace.

By these researches psychology is thus called upon to throw light on and to complement the studies of the philosophers. Philosophers have always pondered the questions of war and peace. They have never been without responsibility in this matter. The memory is all too much alive of those famous philosophers who saw man as "a wolf for his fellow man" and war as a historical necessity. However, it is also true that many of them wished to lay the foundation for a lasting or even everlasting peace by, for instance, setting forth a solid theoretical basis for international law.

All these efforts deserve to be resumed and intensified. The thinkers who devote themselves to such endeavours can benefit from the copious contribution of a present-day philosophical current that gives unique prominence to the theme of the person and devotes itself in a singular manner to an examination of the themes of freedom and responsibility. This can provide light for reflection on human rights, justice and peace.

#### *Indirect action*

8. While the advancement of peace in a sense depends on information and research, it rests above all on the action that people take in its favour. Some forms of action envisaged here have only an indirect relationship with peace. However, it would be wrong to think of them as unimportant: as we shall briefly indicate through some examples, almost every section of human activity offers unexpected occasions for advancing peace.

Such is the case of *cultural exchanges*, in the broadest sense. Anything that enables people to get to know each other better through artistic activity breaks down barriers. Where speech is unavailing and diplomacy is an uncertain aid, music, painting, drama and sport can bring people close together. The same holds for *scientific research*: science, like art, creates and brings together a universal society which gathers all who love truth and beauty, without division. Thus science and art are, each at its own level, an anticipation of the emergence of a universal peaceful society.

Even *economic life* should bring people closer together, by making them aware of the extent to which they are interdependent and complementary. Undoubtedly, economic relationships often create a field of pitiless confrontation, merciless competition and even sometimes shameless exploitation. But could not these relationships become instead relationships of service and solidarity, and thereby defuse one of the most frequent causes of discord?

#### *Justice and peace within nations*

9. While peace should be everyone's concern, the building of peace is a task that falls directly and principally to *political leaders*. From this point of view the chief setting for the building up of peace is always the nation as a politically organized society. Since the purpose for which a political society is formed is the

establishment of justice, the advancement of the common good and participation by all, that society will enjoy peace only to the extent that these three demands are respected. Peace can develop only where the elementary requirements of justice are safeguarded.

Unconditional and effective respect for each one's imprescriptible and inalienable rights is the necessary condition in order that peace may reign in a society. Vis-à-vis these basic rights all others are in a way derogatory and secondary. In a society in which these rights are not protected, the very idea of universality is dead, as soon as a small group of individuals set up for their own exclusive advantage a principle of discrimination whereby the rights and even the lives of others are made dependent on the whim of the stronger. Such a society cannot be at peace with itself: it has within it a principle leading to division. For the same reason, a political society can really collaborate in building international peace only if it is itself peaceful, that is to say if it takes seriously the advancement of human rights at home. To the extent that the rulers of a particular country apply themselves to building a fully just society, they are already contributing decisively to building an authentic, firmly based and lasting peace (cf. *Encyclical Pacem in Terris*, 11).

#### *Justice and peace between nations*

10. While peace within individual nations is a necessary condition for the development of true peace, it is not enough in itself. The building of peace on a world scale cannot be the result of the separate desires of nations, for they are often ambiguous and sometimes contradictory. It was to make up for this lack that States provided themselves with appropriate international organizations, one of the chief aims of which is to harmonize the desires of different nations and cause them to converge for the safeguarding of peace and for an increase of justice between nations.

By the authority that they have gained and by their achievements, the great International Organizations have done remarkable work for peace. They have of course had failures; they have not been able to prevent all conflicts or put a speedy end to them. But they have helped to show the world that war, bloodshed and tears are not the way to end tensions. They have provided, so to speak, experimental proof that even on the world level people are able to combine their efforts and seek peace together.

#### *The peace dynamism of Christianity*

11. At this point in my message I wish to address more especially my brothers and sisters in the Church. The Church supports and encourages all serious efforts for peace. She unhesitatingly proclaims that the activity of all those who devote the best of their energies to peace forms part of God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. But she reminds Christians that they have still greater reasons for being active witnesses of God's gift of peace.

In the first place, Christ's word and example have given rise to new attitudes in favour of peace. Christ has taken the ethics of peace far beyond the ordinary attitudes of justice and understanding. At the beginning of his ministry he proclaimed: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Mt. 5:9). He sent his disciples to bring peace from house to house, from town to town (Mt. 10:11-13). He exhorted them to prefer peace to vengeance of any

kind and even to certain legitimate claims on others - so great was his desire to tear from the human heart the roots of aggressiveness (*Mt. 5:38-42*). He asked them to love those whom barriers of any sort have turned into enemies (*Mt. 5:43-48*). He set up as examples people who were habitually despised (*Luke 10:33; 17:16*). He exhorted people to be always humble and to forgive without any limit (cf. *Mt. 18:21-22*). The attitude of sharing with those in utter want - on which he made the last judgment hinge (cf. *Mt. 25:31-46*) - was to make a radical contribution to the establishment of relations of fraternity.

These appeals of Jesus and his example have had a widespread influence on the attitude of his disciples, as two millennia of history testify. But Christ's work belongs to a very deep level, of the order of a mysterious transformation of hearts. He really brought "peace among men with whom God is pleased" in the words of the proclamation made at his birth (cf. *Luke 2:14*), and this not only by revealing to them the Father's love but above all by reconciling them with God through his sacrifice. For it was sin and hatred that were an obstacle to peace with God and with others: he destroyed them by the offering of his life on the Cross; he reconciled in one body those who were hostile (cf. *Eph. 2:16; Rom. 12:5*). His first words to his Apostles after he rose were: "Peace be with you" (*John 20:19*). Those who accept the faith form in the Church a prophetic community; with the Holy Spirit communicated by Christ, after the Baptism that makes them part of the Body of Christ, they experience the peace given by God in the sacrament of Reconciliation and in Eucharistic communion; they proclaim "the gospel of peace" (*Eph. 6:15*); they try to live it from day to day, in actual practice; and they long for the time of total reconciliation when, by a new intervention of the living God who raises the dead, we shall be wholly open to God and our brothers and sisters. Such is the vision of faith which supports the activity of Christians on behalf of peace.

Thus, by her very existence, the Church exists within the world as a society of people who are reconciled and at peace through the grace of Christ, in a communion of love and life with God and with all their brothers and sisters, beyond human barriers of every sort; in herself she is already, and she seeks to become ever more so in practice, a gift and haven of peace offered by God to the whole of the human race. Certainly, the members of the Church are well aware that they are often still sinners, in this sphere too; at least they feel the grave responsibility of putting into practice this gift of peace. For this they must first overcome their own divisions, in order to set out without delay towards the fullness of unity in Christ; thus they collaborate with God in order to offer his peace to the world. They must also of course combine their efforts with the efforts of all men and women of good will working for peace in the different spheres of society and international life. The Church wishes her children to join, through their witness and their initiatives, the first rank of those preparing peace and causing it to reign. At the same time, she is very aware that, on the spot, it is a difficult task, one that calls for much generosity, discernment and hope, as a real challenge.

#### *Peace as a constant challenge for Christians*

12. Christian optimism, based on the glorious Cross of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, is no excuse for self-deception. For Christians, peace on earth is always a challenge, because of the presence of sin in man's heart. Motivated by their faith and hope, Christians therefore apply themselves to pro

moting a more just society; they fight hunger, deprivation and disease; they are concerned about what happens to migrants, prisoners and outcasts (cf. *Mt. 25: 35-36*). But they know that, while all these undertakings express something of the mercy and perfection of God (cf. *Luke 6:36; Mt. 4:48*), they are always limited in their range, precarious in their results and ambiguous in their inspiration. Only God, the giver of life, when he unites all things in Christ (cf. *Eph. 1:10*), will fulfil our ardent hope by himself bringing to accomplishment everything that he has undertaken in history according to his Spirit in the matter of justice and peace.

Although Christians put all their best energies into preventing war or stopping it, they do not deceive themselves about their ability to cause peace to triumph, nor about the effect of their efforts to this end. They therefore concern themselves with all human initiatives in favour of peace and very often take part in them; but they regard them with realism and humanity. One could almost say that they "relativize" them in two senses: they relate them both to the sinful condition of humanity and to God's saving plan. In the first place, Christians are aware that plans based on aggression, domination and the manipulation of others lurk in human hearts, and sometimes even secretly nourish human intentions, in spite of certain declarations or manifestations of a pacifist nature. For Christians know that in this world a totally and permanently peaceful human society is unfortunately a utopia, and that ideologies that hold up that prospect as easily attainable are based on hopes that cannot be realized, whatever the reason behind them. It is a question of a mistaken view of the human condition, a lack of application in considering the question as a whole; or it may be a case of evasion in order to calm fear, or in still other cases a matter of calculated self-interest. Christians are convinced, if only because they have learned from personal experience, that these deceptive hopes lead straight to the false peace of totalitarian regimes. But this realistic view in no way prevents Christians from working for peace; instead, it stirs up their ardour, for they also know that Christ's victory over deception, hate and death gives those in love with peace a more decisive motive for action than what the most generous theories about man have to offer. Christ's victory likewise gives a hope more surely based than any hope held out by the most audacious dreams.

This is why Christians, even as they strive to resist and prevent every form of warfare, have no hesitation in recalling that, in the name of an elementary requirement of justice, peoples have a right and even a duty to protect their existence and freedom by proportionate means against an unjust aggressor (cf. *Constitution Gaudium et Spes*, 79). However, in view of the difference between classical warfare and nuclear or bacteriological war — a difference so to speak of nature — and in view of the scandal of the arms race seen against the background of the needs of the Third World, this right, which is very real in principle, only underlines the urgency for world society to equip itself with effective means of negotiation. In this way the nuclear terror that haunts our time can encourage us to enrich our common heritage with a very simple discovery that is within our reach, namely that war is the most barbarous and least effective way of resolving conflicts. More than ever before, human society is forced to provide itself with the means of consultation and dialogue which it needs in order to survive, and with the institutions necessary for building up justice and peace.

May it also realize that this work is something beyond human powers!



*Prayer for Peace*

13. Throughout this message, I have appealed to the responsibility of people of good will, especially Christians, because *God has indeed entrusted peace to men and women*. With the realism and hope that faith makes possible, I have tried to draw the attention of citizens and leaders to a certain number of achievements or attitudes that are already feasible and capable of giving a solid foundation to peace. But, over and above or even in the midst of this necessary activity, which might seem to depend primarily on people, *peace is above all a gift of God* - something that must never be forgotten - and must always be implored from his mercy.

This conviction is certainly seen to have animated people of all civilizations who have given peace the first place in their prayers. Its expression is found in all religions. How many men, having experienced murderous conflicts and concentration camps, how many women and children, distressed by wars, have in times past turned to the God of peace! Today, when the perils have taken on a seriousness all their own by reason of their extent and radical nature, and when the difficulties of building peace have taken on a new nature and seem often insoluble, many individuals may spontaneously find themselves resorting to prayer, even though prayer may be something unfamiliar.

Yes, our future is in the hands of God, who alone gives true peace. And when human hearts sincerely think of work for peace, it is still God's grace that inspires and strengthens those thoughts. All people are in this sense invited to echo the sentiments of Saint Francis of Assisi, the eighth centenary of whose birth we are celebrating: Lord, make us instruments of your peace: where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; when discord rages, let us build peace.

Christians love to pray for peace, as they make their own the prayer of so many psalms punctuated by supplications for peace and repeated with the universal love of Jesus. We have here a shared and very profound element for all ecumenical activities. Other believers all over the world are also awaiting from Almighty God the gift of peace, and, more or less consciously, many other people of good will are ready to make the same prayer in the secret of their hearts. May fervent supplications thus rise to God from the four corners of the earth! This will already create a fine unanimity on the road to peace. And who could doubt that God will hear and grant this cry of his children; Lord, grant us peace! Grant us your peace!

From the Vatican, 8 December 1981.

JOANNES PAULUS PP. II