

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE  
DAY OF PEACE**

**1 JANUARY 1980**

**TRUTH, THE POWER OF PEACE**

*To all of you who want to strengthen peace on earth,  
To you, men and women of good will,  
To you, citizens and leaders of the peoples,  
To you, the young people of every land:*

To all of you I address my message and invite you to celebrate the thirteenth World Day of Peace with a resolute effort of mind and action so as to stabilize from within the tottering and ever threatened edifice of peace by putting its content of truth back into it. Truth, the power of peace! Let us join together to strengthen peace through the resources of peace itself. The foremost resource is truth, for it is preeminently truth that is the serene and powerful driving force of peace, radiating unimpededly by its own power.

**A diagnosis: non-truth serves the cause of war**

1. It is a fact, and no-one doubts it, that truth serves the cause of peace; it is also beyond discussion that non-truth in all its forms and at all levels (lies, partial or slanted information, sectarian propaganda, manipulation of the communications media, and so on) goes hand in hand with the cause of war.

Is there any need here to list all the different forms that non-truth takes? Let it suffice to give just a few examples. For, although there is justifiable disquiet at the increase of violence in national and international society and at open threats to peace, public opinion is often less sensitive to the various forms of non-truth that underlie violence and that create a fertile soil for it.

Violence flourishes in lies, and needs lies. It seeks to gain respectability in the eyes of the world by pretexts that have nothing to do with its reality and are often contradictory. What should one say of the practice of combatting or silencing those who do not share the same views by labelling them as enemies, attributing to them hostile intentions and using skilful and constant propaganda to brand them as aggressors?

Another form of non-truth consists in refusing to recognize and respect the objectively legitimate and inalienable rights of those who refuse to accept a particular ideology, or who appeal to freedom of thought. Non-truth is at work when oppressive intentions are attributed to those who clearly show that their one concern is to protect and defend themselves against real threats, threats which, alas, are still to be found both within a country and between countries.

Selective indignation, sly insinuations, the manipulation of information, the systematic discrediting of opponents - their persons, intentions and actions - blackmail and intimidation: these are forms of non-truth working to develop a climate of uncertainty aimed at forcing individuals, groups, governments, and even international organizations to keep silence in helplessness and complicity, to surrender their principles in part or to react in an

irrational way. All these attitudes are equally capable of favouring the murderous game of violence and of attacking the cause of peace.

2. Underlying all these forms of non-truth, and fostering and feeding upon them, is a mistaken ideal of man and of the driving forces within him. The first lie, the basic falsehood, is to refuse to believe in man, with all his capacity for greatness but at the same time with his need to be redeemed from the evil and sin within him.

Encouraged by differing and often contradictory ideologies, the idea is spreading that the individual and all humanity achieve progress principally through violent struggle. It has been thought that this could be demonstrated historically. Ingenious efforts have been made to build it into a theory. It has become more and more the custom to analyse everything in social and international life exclusively in terms of relationships of power and to organize accordingly in order to impose one's own interests. Of course, this widespread tendency to have recourse to trials of strength in order to make justice is often held in check by tactical or strategic pauses. But, as long as threats are permitted to remain, as long as selective support is given to certain forms of violence in line with interests or ideologies, as long as support is given to the claim that the advance of justice comes, in the final analysis, through violent struggle - as long as these things happen, then niceties, restraint and selectivity will periodically give way in the face of the simple and brutal logic of violence, a logic which can go as far as the suicidal exaltation of violence for its own sake.

### **Peace needs sincerity and truth**

3. With minds so confused, building up peace by works of peace is difficult. It demands that truth be restored, in order to keep individuals, groups and nations from losing confidence in peace and from consenting to new forms of violence.

Restoring peace means in the first place calling by their proper names acts of violence in all their forms. Murder must be called by its proper name: murder is murder; political or ideological motives do not change its nature, but are on the contrary degraded by it. The massacre of men and women, whatever their race, age or position, must be called by its proper name. Torture must be called by its proper name; and, with the appropriate qualifications, so must all forms of oppression and exploitation of man by man, of man by the State, of one people by another people. The purpose of doing so is not to give oneself a clear conscience by means of loud all-embracing denunciations - this would no longer be calling things by their proper names - nor to brand and condemn individuals and peoples, but to help to change people's behaviour and attitudes, and in order to give peace a chance again.

4. To promote truth as the power of peace means that we ourselves must make a constant effort not to use the weapons of falsehood, even for a good purpose. Falsehood can cunningly creep in anywhere. If sincerity - truth with ourselves - is to be securely maintained, we must make a patient and courageous effort to seek and find the higher and universal truth about man, in the light of which we shall be able to evaluate different situations, and in the light of which we will first judge ourselves and our own sincerity. It is impossible to take up an attitude of doubt, suspicion and sceptical relativism without very quickly slipping into insincerity and falsehood. Peace, as I said earlier, is threatened when uncertainty, doubt and suspicion reign, and violence makes good use of this. Do we really want peace? Then we must dig deep within ourselves and, going beyond the divisions we find within us and between us, we must find the areas in which we can strengthen our

conviction that man's basic driving forces and the recognition of his real nature carry him towards openness to others, mutual respect, brotherhood and peace. The course of this laborious search for the objective and universal truth about man and the result of the search will develop men and women of peace and dialogue, people who draw both strength and humility from a truth that they realize they must serve, and not make use of for partisan interests.

### **Truth illumines the ways of peace**

5. One of violence's lies is to try to justify itself by systematically and radically discrediting opponents, their actions, and the social and ideological structures within which they act and think. But the man of peace is able to detect the portion of truth existing in every human undertaking, and moreover to discern the capacity for truth to be found within every human being.

The desire for peace does not cause the man of peace to shut his eyes to the tension, injustice and strife that are part of our world. He looks at them squarely. He calls them by their proper name, out of respect for truth. And since he is closely attuned to the things of peace, he is necessarily all the more sensitive to whatever is inconsistent with peace. This impels him to push courageously ahead and investigate the real causes of evil and in justice, in order to look for appropriate remedies. Truth is a force for peace because it sees the factors of truth that the other has - factors that share the nature of truth - and tries to link up with them.

6. Truth does not allow us to despair of our opponents. The man of peace inspired by truth does not equate his opponent with the error into which he sees him fall. Instead he reduces the error to its real proportions and appeals from it to man's reason, heart and conscience, in order to help him to recognize and accept truth. This gives the denunciation of injustice a specific tone: such denunciation cannot always prevent those responsible for injustice from stubbornly disregarding the obvious truth, but at least it does not set out to provoke such stubbornness, the cost of which is often paid by the victims of the injustice. One of the big lies that poison relations between individuals and groups consists in ignoring all aspects of an opponent's action, even the good and just ones, for the sake of condemning him more completely. Truth follows a different path; that is why truth does not throw away any of the chances for peace.

7. Above all, truth gives us all the more reason not to despair of the victims of injustice. It does not allow us to drive them to the despair of resignation or violence.

It encourages us to count on the forces for peace that suffering individuals or peoples have deep within them. It believes that by confirming them in awareness of their dignity and inalienable rights it gives them the strength to exercise upon the forces of oppression effective pressure for transformation, pressure more effective than acts of violence, which generally lack any future prospect - except one of greater suffering. It is because I am convinced of this that I keep proclaiming the dignity and the rights of the person. Moreover, as I wrote in my Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, the logic behind the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the very establishment of the United Nations Organization was aimed at creating "the basis for continual revision of programmes, systems and regimes precisely from this single fundamental point of view, namely the welfare of man - or, let us say, of the person in the community" (no. 17, ¶ 4). Since the man of peace draws from the light of truth and sincerity, he has clear ideas about existing injustices, tensions and conflicts. But instead of exacerbating frustration and strife he places his trust in man's

higher faculties, his reason and his heart, in order to devise peaceful ways to a truly human and lasting result.

### **Truth strengthens the means of peace**

8. The path from a less human to a more human situation, both in national and in international life, is a long one, and it has to be travelled in stages. The man of peace knows this, he says so and he finds in the efforts for truth that I have just described the light he needs to keep his course set correctly. The man of violence knows it also, but he does not say so, and he deceives public opinion by holding up the glittering prospect of a radical and speedy solution, and then settles into his lie and explains away the constantly repeated delays in the arrival of the freedom that had been promised and the abundance that had been assured.

There is no peace without readiness for sincere and continual dialogue. Truth too requires dialogue, and therefore reinforces this indispensable means for attaining peace. Truth has no fear, either, of honourable agreements, because truth brings with it the light that enables it to enter into such an agreement without sacrificing essential convictions and values. Truth causes minds to come together; it shows what already unites the parties that were previously opposed; it causes the mistrust of yesterday to decrease, and prepares the ground for fresh advances in justice and brotherhood and in the peaceful co-existence of all human beings.

In this context I cannot fail to say a word about the arms race. The situation in which humanity is living today seems to include a tragic contradiction between the many fervent declarations in favour of peace and the no less real vertiginous escalation in weaponry. The very existence of the arms race can even cast a suspicion of falsehood and hypocrisy on certain declarations of the desire for peaceful coexistence. What is worse, it can often even justify the impression that such declarations serve only as a cloak for opposite intentions.

9. We cannot sincerely condemn recourse to violence unless we engage in a corresponding effort to replace it by courageous political initiatives which aim at eliminating threats to peace by attacking the roots of injustice.

The profound truth of politics is contradicted just as much when it settles into passivity as when it hardens and degenerates into violence. Promoting the truth that gives strength to peace in politics means having the courage to detect in good time latent conflicts and to reexamine at suitable moments problems that have been temporarily defused by laws or agreements that have prevented them from getting worse. Promoting truth also means having the courage to foresee the future: to take into account the new aspirations, compatible with what is good, that individuals and peoples begin to experience as culture progresses, in order to adjust national and international institutions to the reality of humanity on the march.

Statesmen and international institutions therefore have an immense field for building a new and more just world order, based on the truth about man and established upon a just distribution not only of wealth but also of power and responsibility.

Yes, I am convinced of this: truth gives strength to peace within, and an atmosphere of greater sincerity makes it possible to mobilize human energies for the one cause that is

worthy of them: full respect for the truth about man's nature and destiny, the source of true peace in justice and friendship.

### **For Christians: the truth of the Gospel**

10. To work for peace is the concern of all individuals and of all peoples. And because everyone is endowed with a heart and with reason and has been made in the image of God, he or she is capable of the effort of truth and sincerity which strengthens peace. I invite all Christians to bring to the common task the specific contribution of the Gospel which leads to the ultimate source of truth, to the Incarnate Word of God.

The Gospel places in striking relief the bond between falsehood and murderous violence, in the words of Christ: "As it is, you want to kill me when I tell you the truth as I have learnt it from God ... What you are doing is what your father does ... The devil is your father, and you prefer to do what your father wants. He was a murderer from the start; he was never grounded in the truth; there is no truth in him at all; when he lies he is drawing on his own store, because he is a liar, and the father of lies" (*Jn* 8: 40, 41, 44 ). This is why I was able to say with such conviction at Drogheda in Ireland and why I now repeat: "Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity ... do not believe in violence; do not support violence. It is not the Christian way. It is not the way of the Catholic Church. Believe in peace and forgiveness and love; for they are of Christ" (nos. 9-10).

Yes, the Gospel of Christ is a Gospel of peace: "Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called children of God" (*Mt* 5: 9). And the driving force of evangelical peace is truth. Jesus revealed to man the full truth about man; he restores man in the truth about himself by reconciling him with God, by reconciling him with himself and by reconciling him with others. Truth is the driving power of peace because it reveals and brings about the unity of man with God, with himself and with others. Forgiveness and reconciliation are constitutive elements of the truth which strengthens peace and which builds up peace. To refuse forgiveness and reconciliation is for us to lie and to enter into the murderous logic of falsehood.

### **Final appeal**

11. I know that all men and women of good will can understand all this from personal experience, when they listen to the profound voice of their hearts. For this reason I invite you all, all of you who wish to strengthen peace by putting back into it its content of truth which dispels all falsehoods: join in the effort of reflection and of action which I propose to you for this thirteenth World Day of Peace by examining your own readiness to forgive and be reconciled, and by making gestures of forgiveness and reconciliation in the domain of your own family, social and political responsibilities. You will be doing the truth and the truth will make you free.

The truth will release unsuspected light and energy and give a new opportunity for peace in the world.

*From the Vatican, 8 December 1979.*

**JOANNES PAULUS P.P. II**