

**Message of Pope John Paul II
for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace,
1 January 2000
"Peace on Earth to Those Whom God Loves!"**

1. This is the proclamation of the Angels which greeted the birth of Jesus Christ two thousand years ago (cf. *Lk 2:14*), and which we will hear re-echoing joyfully on the holy night of Christmas, when the Great Jubilee will be solemnly inaugurated.

At the dawn of the new Millennium, we wish to propose once more the message of hope which comes from the stable of Bethlehem: God loves all men and women on earth and gives them the hope of a new era, an era of peace. His love, fully revealed in the Incarnate Son, is the foundation of universal peace. When welcomed in the depths of the human heart, this love reconciles people with God and with themselves, renews human relationships and stirs that desire for brotherhood capable of banishing the temptation of violence and war.

The Great Jubilee is inseparably linked to this message of love and reconciliation, a message which gives voice to the truest aspirations of humanity today.

2. Looking to a year so filled with meaning, I once more offer everyone my good wishes for peace. To everyone I affirm that peace is possible. It needs to be implored from God as his gift, but it also needs to be built day by day with his help, through works of justice and love.

To be sure, the problems which make the path to peace difficult and often discouraging are many and complex, but peace is a need deeply rooted in the heart of every man and woman. The will to seek peace must not therefore be allowed to weaken. This seeking must be based on the awareness that humanity, however much marred by sin, hatred and violence, is called by God to be a *single family*. This divine plan needs to be recognized and carried out through the search for harmonious relationships between individuals and peoples, in a culture where openness to the Transcendent, the promotion of the human person and respect for the world of nature are shared by all.

This is the message of Christmas, this is the message of the Jubilee, this is my hope at the beginning of a new Millennium.

War is a defeat for humanity

3. In the century we are leaving behind, humanity has been sorely tried by an endless and horrifying sequence of wars, conflicts, genocides and "ethnic cleansings" which have caused unspeakable suffering: millions and millions of victims, families and countries destroyed, an ocean of refugees, misery, hunger, disease, underdevelopment and the loss of immense resources. At the root of so much suffering there lies a logic of supremacy fuelled by the desire to dominate and exploit others, by ideologies of power or totalitarian utopias, by crazed nationalisms or ancient tribal hatreds. At times brutal and systematic violence, aimed at the very extermination or enslavement of entire peoples and regions, has had to be countered by armed resistance.

The twentieth century bequeaths to us above all else a warning: *wars are often the cause of further wars* because they fuel deep hatreds, create situations of injustice and trample upon people's dignity and rights. Wars generally do not resolve the problems for which they are fought and therefore, in addition to causing horrendous damage, they prove

ultimately futile. *War is a defeat for humanity*. Only in peace and through peace can respect for human dignity and its inalienable rights be guaranteed.⁽¹⁾

4. Against the backdrop of war in the twentieth century, *humanity's honour has been preserved by those who have spoken and worked on behalf of peace*.

We cannot fail to remember the countless men and women who have contributed to the affirmation and the solemn proclamation of human rights, and who have helped to defeat the various forms of totalitarianism, to put an end to colonialism, to develop democracy and to establish the great international organizations. Those who built their lives on the value of non-violence have given us a luminous and prophetic example. Their example of integrity and loyalty, often to the point of martyrdom, has provided us with rich and splendid lessons.

Among those who have acted in the name of peace we should not forget those men and women whose dedication has brought about great advances in every field of science and technology, making it possible to overcome dreadful diseases and to enhance and prolong human life.

Nor can I fail to mention my own venerable Predecessors who have guided the Church in the twentieth century. By their lofty teaching and their tireless efforts they have given direction to the Church in the promotion of a culture of peace. Emblematic of this many-sided effort was the timely and prophetic intuition of Pope Paul VI, who on 8 December 1967 instituted the World Day of Peace. With the passing of the years, the World Day of Peace has become more firmly established as a fruitful experience of reflection and shared vision for the future.

Called to be one family

5. "*Peace on earth to those whom God loves!*" The Gospel greeting prompts a heart-felt question: will the new century be one of peace and a renewed sense of brotherhood between individuals and peoples? We cannot of course foresee the future. But we can set forth one certain principle: *there will be peace only to the extent that humanity as a whole rediscovers its fundamental calling to be one family*, a family in which the dignity and rights of individuals - whatever their status, race or religion - are accepted as prior and superior to any kind of difference or distinction.

This recognition can give the world as it is today - marked by the process of globalization - a soul, a meaning and a direction. Globalization, for all its risks, also offers exceptional and promising opportunities, precisely with a view to enabling humanity to become a single family, built on the values of justice, equity and solidarity.

6. For this to happen, a complete change of perspective will be needed: it is no longer the well-being of any one political, racial or cultural community that must prevail, but rather the good of humanity as a whole. The pursuit of the common good of a single political community cannot be in conflict with *the common good of humanity*, expressed in the recognition of and respect for human rights sanctioned by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. It is necessary, then, to abandon ideas and practices - often determined by powerful economic interests - which subordinate every other value to the absolute claims of the nation and the State. In this new perspective, the political, cultural and institutional divisions and distinctions by which humanity is ordered and organized are

legitimate in so far as they are compatible with membership in the one human family, and with the ethical and legal requirements which stem from this.

Crimes against humanity

7. This principle has an immensely important consequence: *an offense against human rights is an offense against the conscience of humanity as such*, an offence against humanity itself. The duty of protecting these rights therefore extends beyond the geographical and political borders within which they are violated. *Crimes against humanity cannot be considered an internal affair of a nation*. Here an important step forward was taken with the establishment of an International Criminal Court to try such crimes, regardless of the place or circumstances in which they are committed. We must thank God that in the conscience of peoples and nations there is a growing conviction that human rights have no borders, because they are universal and indivisible.

8. In our time, the number of wars between States has diminished. This fact, albeit consoling, appears in a very different light if we consider the armed conflicts taking place *within States*. Sadly these are quite numerous on practically every continent, and often very violent. For the most part, they are rooted in long-standing historical motives of an ethnic, tribal or even religious character, to which must be added nowadays other ideological, social and economic causes.

These internal conflicts, usually waged through the large-scale use of small-calibre weapons and so-called "light" arms - arms which in fact extraordinarily lethal - often have grave consequences which spill over the borders of the country in question, involving outside interests and responsibilities. While it is true that the extreme complexity of these conflicts makes it very difficult to understand and evaluate the causes and interests at play, one fact cannot be disputed: it is the *civilian population* which suffers most tragically, since neither ordinary laws nor the laws of warfare are respected in practice. Far from being protected, civilians are often the prime target of the conflicting forces, when they themselves are not directly involved in armed activity as a result of a perverse spiral which makes them both victims and assassins of other civilians.

All too many and horrifying are the macabre scenarios in which innocent children, women, and unarmed older people have become intentional targets in the bloody conflicts of our time; too many, in fact, for us not to feel that the moment has come to change direction, decisively and with a great sense of responsibility.

The right to humanitarian assistance

9. In every case, in the face of such tragic and complex situations and contrary to all alleged "reasons" of war, there is a need to affirm the *preeminent value of humanitarian law and the consequent duty to guarantee the right to humanitarian aid* to suffering civilians and refugees.

The recognition of these rights and their effective implementation must not be allowed to depend on the interests of any of the parties in conflict. On the contrary, there is a duty to identify all the means, institutional or otherwise, which can best serve in a practical way to meet humanitarian objectives. The moral and political legitimacy of these rights is in fact based on the principle that the good of the human person comes before all else and stands above all human institutions.

10. Here I wish to restate my conviction that, in the face of modern armed conflicts, negotiation between parties, with *appropriate attempts at mediation and pacification by international and regional bodies*, is of the greatest importance. Negotiation is necessary in order to prevent such conflicts and to end them once they have broken out, restoring peace through an equitable settlement of the rights and interests involved.

This conviction concerning the positive role played by mediation and pacification agencies should be extended to the non-governmental humanitarian organizations and religious bodies which, discreetly and without ulterior motives, promote peace between opposed groups and help to overcome age-old rivalries, reconcile enemies, and open the way to a new and shared future. While honouring their noble dedication to the cause of peace, I wish to remember with profound esteem all who have given their lives so that others might live: I lift up my prayers to God for them and I invite other believers to do the same.

"Humanitarian intervention"

11. Clearly, when a civilian population risks being overcome by the attacks of an unjust aggressor and political efforts and non-violent defence prove to be of no avail, it is legitimate and even obligatory to take concrete measures to disarm the aggressor. These measures however must be limited in time and precise in their aims. They must be carried out in full respect for international law, guaranteed by an authority that is internationally recognized and, in any event, never left to the outcome of armed intervention alone.

The fullest and the best use must therefore be made of all the provisions of the United Nations Charter, further defining effective instruments and modes of intervention within the framework of international law. In this regard, the United Nations Organization itself must offer all its Member States an equal opportunity to be part of the decision-making process, eliminating privileges and discriminations which weaken its role and its credibility.

12. This opens a new field of reflection and discussion both for politics and for law, a field which we all hope will be earnestly and wisely cultivated. What is needed without delay is a *renewal of international law and international institutions*, a renewal whose starting-point and basic organizing principle should be the primacy of the good of humanity and of the human person over every other consideration. Such a renewal is all the more urgent if we consider the paradox of contemporary warfare in which, as recent conflicts have shown, armies enjoy maximum security while the civilian population lives in frightening situations of danger. In no kind of conflict is it permissible to ignore the right of civilians to safety.

Beyond legal and institutional considerations, there remains a fundamental duty for all men and women of good will, called to commit themselves personally to the cause of peace: that of educating for peace, setting in place structures of peace and methods of non-violence, and making every possible effort to bring parties in conflict to the negotiating table.

Peace in solidarity

13. *"Peace on earth to those whom God loves!"* From the problem of war, our gaze naturally turns to another closely related issue: *the question of solidarity*. The lofty and demanding task of peace, deeply rooted in humanity's vocation to be one family and to recognize itself as such, has one of its foundations in the principle of the universal destination of the earth's resources. This principle does not delegitimize private property; instead it broadens the understanding and management of private property to embrace its

indispensable social function, to the advantage of the common good and in particular the good of society's weakest members.⁽²⁾ Unfortunately, this basic principle is widely disregarded, as shown by the persistent and growing gulf in the world between a North filled with abundant commodities and resources and increasingly made up of older people, and a South where the great majority of younger people now live, still deprived of credible prospects for social, cultural and economic development.

No one should be deceived into thinking that the simple absence of war, as desirable as it is, is equivalent to lasting peace. There is no true peace without fairness, truth, justice and solidarity. Failure awaits every plan which would separate *two indivisible and interdependent rights: the right to peace and the right to an integral development born of solidarity*. "Injustice, excessive economic or social inequalities, envy, distrust and pride raging among men and nations constantly threaten peace and cause wars. Everything done to overcome these disorders contributes to building up peace and avoiding war".⁽³⁾

14. At the beginning of a new century, the one issue which most challenges our human and Christian consciences is *the poverty of countless millions of men and women*. This situation becomes all the more tragic when we realize that the major economic problems of our time do not depend on a lack of resources but on the fact that present economic, social and cultural structures are ill-equipped to meet the demands of genuine development.

Rightly then the poor, both in developing countries and in the prosperous and wealthy countries, "ask for the right to share in enjoying material goods and to make good use of their capacity to work, thus creating a world that is more just and prosperous for all. The advancement of the poor constitutes a great opportunity for the moral, cultural and even economic growth of all humanity".⁽⁴⁾ Let us look at the poor not as a problem, but as people who can become the principal builders of a new and more human future for everyone.

The urgent need to rethink the economy

15. In this context we also need to examine the growing concern felt by many economists and financial professionals when, in considering new issues involving poverty, peace, ecology and the future of the younger generation, they reflect on the role of the market, on the pervasive influence of monetary and financial interests, on the widening gap between the economy and society, and on other similar issues related to economic activity.

Perhaps the time has come for *a new and deeper reflection on the nature of the economy and its purposes*. What seems to be urgently needed is a reconsideration of the concept of "prosperity" itself, to prevent it from being enclosed in a narrow utilitarian perspective which leaves very little space for values such as solidarity and altruism.

16. Here I would like to invite economists and financial professionals, as well as political leaders, to recognize the urgency of the need to ensure that economic practices and related political policies have as their aim the good of every person and of the whole person. This is not only a demand of ethics but also of a sound economy. Experience seems to confirm that economic success is increasingly dependent on a more genuine appreciation of individuals and their abilities, on their fuller participation, on their increased and improved knowledge and information, on a stronger solidarity.

These are values which, far from being foreign to economics and business, help to make them a fully "human" science and activity. An economy which takes no account of the ethical dimension and does not seek to serve the good of the person - of every person and the whole person - cannot really call itself an "economy" , understood in the sense of a rational and constructive use of material wealth.

Which models of development?

17. The very fact that humanity, called to form a single family, is still tragically split in two by poverty - at the beginning of the twenty-first century, more than a billion four hundred million people are living in a situation of dire poverty - means that there is urgent need to *reconsider the models which inspire development policies.*

In this regard, the legitimate requirements of economic efficiency must be better aligned with the requirements of political participation and social justice, without falling back into the ideological mistakes made during the twentieth century. In practice, this means making solidarity an integral part of the network of economic, political and social interdependence which the current process of globalization is tending to consolidate.

These processes call for *rethinking international cooperation in terms of a new culture of solidarity.* When seen as a sowing of peace, cooperation cannot be reduced to aid or assistance, especially if given with an eye to the benefits to be received in return for the resources made available. Rather, it must express a concrete and tangible commitment to solidarity which makes the poor the agents of their own development and enables the greatest number of people, in their specific economic and political circumstances, to exercise the creativity which is characteristic of the human person and on which the wealth of nations too is dependent.⁽⁵⁾

In particular it is necessary to find definitive solutions to the long - standing problem of the international debt of poor countries, while at the same time making available the financial resources necessary for the fight against hunger, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy and the destruction of the environment.

18. Today more than in the past there is an urgent need to *foster a consciousness of universal moral values* in order to face the problems of the present, all of which are assuming an increasingly global dimension. The promotion of peace and human rights, the settling of armed conflicts both within States and across borders, the protection of ethnic minorities and immigrants, the safeguarding of the environment, the battle against terrible diseases, the fight against drug and arms traffickers, and against political and economic corruption: these are issues which nowadays no nation is in a position to face alone. They concern the entire human community, and thus they must be faced and resolved through common efforts.

A way must be found to discuss the problems posed by the future of humanity in a comprehensible and common language. The basis of such a dialogue is *the universal moral law* written upon the human heart. By following this "grammar" of the spirit, the human community can confront the problems of coexistence and move forward to the future with respect for God's plan.⁽⁶⁾

The encounter between faith and reason, between religion and morality, can provide a decisive impulse towards dialogue and cooperation between peoples, cultures and religions.

Jesus, gift of peace

19. "*Peace on earth to those whom God loves!*" Looking to the Great Jubilee, Christians throughout the world are committed to the solemn commemoration of the Incarnation. Listening again to the proclamation of the Angels in the heavens above Bethlehem (cf. *Lk 2:14*), they commemorate the Incarnation in the knowledge that Jesus "is our peace" (*Eph 2:14*), the gift of peace for all people. His first words to the disciples after the Resurrection were: "Peace be with you" (*Jn 20:19, 21, 26*). Christ came to unite what was divided, to destroy sin and hatred, and to reawaken in humanity the vocation to unity and brotherhood. Therefore, he is "the source and model of that renewed humanity, imbued with brotherly love, sincerity, and a peaceful spirit, to which all aspire".⁽⁷⁾

20. During this Jubilee Year, the Church vividly remembers her Lord and intends to confirm her vocation and mission to be in Christ a "sacrament" or *sign and instrument of peace in the world and for the world*. For the Church, to carry out her evangelizing mission means to work for peace. "The Church, then, God's only flock, like a standard lifted high for the nations to see, ministers the Gospel of peace to all mankind as she makes her pilgrim way in hope towards her goal, the fatherland above".⁽⁸⁾

For the Catholic faithful, the commitment to build peace and justice is not secondary but essential. It is to be undertaken in openness towards their brothers and sisters of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, towards the followers of other religions, and towards all men and women of good will, with whom they share the same concern for peace and brotherhood.

Working generously for peace

21. It is a sign of hope that, despite many serious obstacles, initiatives for peace continue to spring up day by day, with the generous cooperation of many people. Peace is a building constantly under construction. The building up of peace involves:

- parents who are examples and witnesses of peace in their families, and who educate their children for peace;
- teachers who are able to pass on the genuine values present in every field of knowledge and in the historical and cultural heritage of humanity;
- working men and women, who are committed to extending their age-old struggle for the dignity of work to those present-day situations which, at the international level, cry out for justice and solidarity;
- political leaders who put at the heart of their own political activity and of that of their countries a firm and unwavering determination to promote peace and justice;
- those in International Organizations who, often with scarce resources, work in the front line where being "peace-makers" can involve risking their own personal safety;
- the members of Non-Governmental Organizations who, in different parts of the world and in the most varied situations, are dedicated to preventing and resolving conflicts through research and activity;

- believers who, convinced that authentic faith is never a source of war or violence, spread convictions of peace and love through ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

22. I am thinking particularly of you, dear young people, who experience in a special way the blessing of life and have a duty not to waste it. In your schools and universities, in the work-place, in leisure and sports, in all that you do, let yourselves be guided by this constant thought: peace within you and peace around you, peace always, peace with everyone, peace for everyone.

To the young people who, unfortunately, have known the tragic experience of war and who harbour sentiments of hatred and resentment I address this plea: make every effort to rediscover the path of reconciliation and forgiveness. It is a difficult path, but it is the only one which will enable you to look to the future with hope for yourselves, your children, your countries and all humanity.

I will have an opportunity to return to this dialogue with you, dear young people, when we meet in Rome next August for the Jubilee celebration of World Youth Day.

Pope John XXIII in one of his last public addresses spoke once more to "men of good will", asking them to commit themselves to a programme of peace *based on "the Gospel of obedience to God, mercy and forgiveness"*. He went on to say: "without a doubt the bright torch of peace will run its course, igniting joy and pouring light and grace into the hearts of people throughout the world, helping them to discover beyond all frontiers the faces of brothers and sisters, the faces of friends".⁽⁹⁾ May you, young people of the Year 2000, see in others, and help them to see, the faces of brothers and sisters, the faces of friends!

In this Jubilee Year, when the Church will commit herself to prayer for peace through solemn intercessions, we turn with filial devotion to the Mother of Jesus. Invoking her as the Queen of Peace, we ask that she generously bestow on us the gifts of her maternal goodness and help the human race to become one family, in solidarity and peace.

From the Vatican, 8 December 1999

(1) Cf. John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1999*, 1.

(2) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 30-43: AAS 83 (1991), 830-848.

(3) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2317.

(4) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 28: AAS 83 (1991), 827-828.

(5) Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization (5 October 1995), 13: *Insegnamenti XVIII*, 2 (1995), 739-740.

(6) Cf. *ibid.*, 3: *loc. cit.* 732.

(7) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 8.

(8) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 2.

(9) Address on the occasion of the award of the Balzan Prize (10 May 1963): *AAS* 55 (1963), 455.