



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE HEADS OF STATE AND  
MEMBERS OF THE SPECIAL MISSIONS**

*23 October 1978*

*Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Just a few weeks ago, my predecessor John Paul I welcomed the members of similar Missions with the smile and the simplicity which won all hearts over to him. In his unforgettable memory, I express to you in my turn my warm gratitude for your participation in the opening ceremony of my pontificate. My gratitude goes in the first place to you who preside over the destiny of your nations: I am very touched that you have come in person. I also thank those designated by their Government, who often assume an important part in the conduct of public affairs. I thank the peoples and International Organizations which you represent. Yes, your presence was a deeply felt joy and honour for me. And above all, it seemed to me significant of the homage rendered to the Catholic Church and to the Holy See for their action in the service of the Gospel and humanity.

Certainly, statesmen and their specialized collaborators have first the responsibility for their own nation and for the good of their fellow citizens. But it is being recognized more and more, and you are the first to be convinced, that there can be no true human progress or lasting peace without the courageous, loyal and disinterested pursuit of growing cooperation and unity among peoples. For this reason, the Church encourages all initiatives that can be carried out, all steps that can be taken, on the bilateral or multilateral plane. Is it not often the only means to begin to unravel problems that are apparently insoluble? Then, too, the International Organizations, whose representatives are here beside those of the States, have an extremely important role, which I hope will become more and more effective. I am happy to emphasize their contribution, just on the eve of the "World Day of the United Nations".

Yes, in circumstances that are often difficult, you have enormous responsibilities which call for a

great deal of clear-sightedness, tenacity and openness on your part, in respect of man's fundamental requirements. How could one fail to appreciate these efforts, in mankind's groping journey towards its progress and unity? They deserve esteem and encouragement.

Christians are all the more sensitive to this vocation of men to cooperation and unity since, on the plane of salvation, the Gospel message reveals to them that Jesus of Nazareth died "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52). This text had certainly impressed the famous Bishop of Hippo, St Augustine, who presents mankind, created in the image of God, broken as it were by sin and filling the whole universe with its remains: "But divine mercy gathered the fragments from everywhere, it melted them in the fire of its charity, and reconstituted their broken unity" (St Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*, 95, 15: PL 37, 1236).

The Church, on her side, pursuing her specific purpose of leading men along the way to salvation, is convinced that she can also contribute effectively, thanks to evangelical love, to this work of reconstituting unity, to the ever deeper humanization of the human family and its history (*Gaudium et Spes*, 40). It is also for this reason that the Holy See establishes relations with each of your Governments and takes part in the activities of International Organizations. I am happy to see the esteem and trust with which the International Community understands and welcomes an action which has no other purpose than that of serving it.

Is there any need to add, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, that the principles that guided my Predecessors, and particularly the lamented Pope Paul VI, will continue to inspire the action of the Holy See? Elected Bishop of Rome and heir to the Apostle Peter in the exercise of his office, my efforts will be guided inseparably by concern for the good of the whole Church and care for the whole human family. Here and now, I thank the countries and Institutions which you represent for the greater and greater understanding which, I venture to hope, they will effectively show with regard to the specifically spiritual needs of man, and for the way in which they will welcome the commitment of the Holy See in this connection.

Beyond you personally, I cordially greet each of the peoples and nations to which you belong, and each of the International Organizations to which you dedicate yourselves. May the Lord bless them, may he inspire their action! And may he grant you, and your families, the gifts of his grace and his peace!

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