



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION "IUSTITIA ET PAX"

Saturday, 11 November 1978

Dear Friends,

I am counting on you, I am counting on the Pontifical Commission "Iustitia et Pax", to help me and to help the whole Church to repeat to the men of this time, with pressing insistence, the appeal which I addressed to them on beginning my Roman and universal ministry, on Sunday 22 October:

"Do not be" afraid! Open, yes, fling the doors wide open to Christ! Open to his power of salvation the frontiers of States, economic and political regimes, the immense fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid! Christ knows what there is in man! And he is the only one who knows it."

We are living in times in which everything should urge us to break down partitions: the keener perception of the universal solidarity of men and peoples: the necessity of safeguarding the common environment and inheritance of mankind; the necessity of reducing the weight and the deadly threat of armaments; the duty of rescuing from want millions of men who would find again, with the means of leading a decent life, the possibility of bringing new energies to the common effort. Now, before the amplitude and the difficulties of the task, we can see nearly everywhere a reflex of hardening. At the source, there is fear; fear above all of man and his responsible freedom, fear which is often increased by the concatenation of violence and repression. And, finally, fear of Jesus Christ, either because people do not know him, or because, among Christians themselves, the experience—demanding, but life-bringing—of an existence inspired by his Gospel is no longer sufficiently lived.

The first service that the Church must render to the cause of justice and peace is to call upon men to open up to Jesus Christ. In him they will learn again their essential dignity as children of God,

made in God's image, endowed with unsuspected possibilities which make them capable of facing up to the tasks of the hour, bound to one another by a brotherhood which has its roots in God's fatherhood. In him they will become free for a responsible service. Let them not be afraid! Jesus Christ is not an alien or a competitor. He does not offend anything that is authentically human, either in persons, or in their different scientific and social achievements. Nor is the Church an alien or a competitor. "The Church", says the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, "by reason of her role and competence, is not identified with any political community nor bound by ties to any political system. It is at once the sign and the safeguard of the transcendental dimension of the human person." (*Gaudium et Spes*, 76). Opening man up to God, the Church prevents him from shutting himself up in any ideological system whatsoever; it opens him up to himself and to others and makes him available to create something new in the dimensions of the present requirements of the evolution of mankind.

With the central gift of Jesus Christ, the Church brings to the common work, not a prefabricated model, but a dynamic inheritance—doctrinal and practical—which developed in contact with the changing situations of this world, under the impulse of the Gospel as the source of renewal, with a disinterested will for service and attention for the poorest (cf. Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 42). The whole Christian community takes part in this service. But the Council opportunely desired, and Paul VI effected with the Pontifical Commission "Iustitia et Pax", the creation of an "organization of the universal Church whose task it would be to arouse the Catholic community to promote the progress of areas which are in want and foster social justice between nations" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 90).

It is to this universal service that you are called, beside the Pope and under his guidance. You exercise it in a spirit of service and in a dialogue—which it will be necessary to develop—with the episcopal Conferences and different organisms which, in communion with them, are pursuing the same task. You exercise it in an ecumenical spirit by tirelessly seeking and adapting the forms of cooperation calculated to further the Unity of Christians in thought and in action.

Without prejudice to the numerous questions to which the Commission gives its attention, you have dedicated this general Assembly to the subject of the development of peoples. The Church has been present from the outset at this immense effort and she has followed its hopes, difficulties and disappointments. A serene appreciation of the positive results, even when insufficient, must help to overcome the present hesitations. You have made a point of studying the whole range of problems which the necessary pursuit of the work begun raises at the level of the international community, in the internal life of each people, at the level also of elementary communities, in the way of conceiving and realizing new ways of life. In order that the Church may be able to say the word of hope which is expected of her and to strengthen the spiritual and moral values, without which there cannot be any development, she must listen, patiently and with sympathy, to the men and institutions that are working hard at the task at all levels, and measure the obstacles to be overcome. There can be no trickery with the reality which it is desired to change.

Priority attention for those who are suffering from radical poverty, for those who are suffering from injustice, certainly coincides with a fundamental concern of the Church; similarly the concern to conceive models of development which, in order to ask for sacrifices, are careful not to sacrifice essential personal and social freedoms and rights, without which, moreover, they would soon condemn themselves to a dead end. And Christians will want to be in the vanguard in order to bring forth convictions and ways of life which will break decisively with a frenzy for consumption, so exhausting and joyless.

Thank you, Lord Cardinal, for the words through which you expressed to me the filial and devoted sentiments of the whole Commission. Your presence at the head of this organism is a pledge that peoples that are poor, but rich in humanity, will be at the heart of its concerns. Thank you, brother bishops, thank you all, dear friends, who bring to the Commission and to myself your human and apostolic competence and experience. Thank you, all members of the Curia present here: due to you, the dimension of human and social advancement can better penetrate the activity of the other Congregations and Departments; in return, the activity of the Commission "Iustitia et Pax" will be able to be integrated better and better in the Church's overall mission.

You know, in fact, to what extent the Council and my Predecessors took it to heart to set the action of the Church in favour of justice, peace, development, and liberation, in the frame of reference of its evangelizing mission. Against confusion which is always springing up again, it is important not to reduce evangelization to its fruits for the earthly city: the Church owes it to men to give them access to the source, to Jesus Christ. So the dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* remains the "magna carta" of the Council: in its light all the other texts take on their full dimension. The pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* and everything it inspires are not minimised, but strengthened, by it.

In Christ's name, I bless you, yourself and your collaborators, those who are dear to you and your beloved countries, and especially those who are sorely tried. Turning again to the subject of the audience last Wednesday, may the Lord help us, may he help all our brothers to set out along the ways of justice and peace!

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