



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
TO NORWAY, ICELAND, FINLAND,
DENMARK AND SWEDEN

MEETING WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE PAASIKIVI ASSOCIATION

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*

Finlandia Hall, Helsinki
Monday, 5 June 1989

Mr President,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I would like to thank you, Mr President, for your kind words of welcome. I am happy to greet all of you, the members of this prestigious *Paasikivi Association*, as well as the diplomats and distinguished personalities who honour this meeting with their presence. My coming to this *Finlandia Hall*, in acceptance of your cordial invitation, is intended to manifest once again the Holy See's strong support for the *process* which was set in motion in this very place on 1 August 1975 at the *Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe*.

The Helsinki Final Act, signed by the nations of Europe, together with Canada and the United States, must be considered as one of the most significant of the instruments of international dialogue. On that occasion all of the thirty-five signatory countries came to an agreement on one basic fact, namely, that peace is not ensured when arms fall silent; rather, peace is the result of cooperation between both individuals on the one hand and societies themselves, and the result of respect for certain ethical imperatives.

The famous "ten principles" which preface *the Helsinki Final Act* constitute the basis upon which the peoples of Europe, having been the victims of so many wars and divisions, now wish to

consolidate and preserve peace, so that future generations may be able to live in harmony and security.

2. The authors of the Final Act clearly realized that peace would be very precarious without cooperation between nations and between individuals, without a better quality of life, and without the promotion of the values which Europeans hold in common. This is why, among the ten principles, the seventh speaks of “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief”. In addition, in the third paragraph adopted at the initiative of the Holy See, one reads that the participating States, and I quote: “recognize and respect the freedom of the individual to profess and practise, alone or in community with others, religion or belief, acting in accordance with the dictates of one’s own conscience”.

By thus placing respect for *religious freedom* among the foundations of peace in Europe, the Final Act not only remained faithful to the European spiritual heritage, impregnated from its origins with the Christian message, but reflected a conviction of the Catholic Church – and of many other believers – that the right of individuals and communities to social and civil freedom in matters of religion is one of the pillars which support the edifice of human rights.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: at the Helsinki Conference, the negotiators upheld the principle that believers who feel discriminated against because of their faith, or who fear adverse reactions when they practise that faith, cannot share fully in the construction of the society in which they live. When basic human rights and freedoms are repressed, the social harmony of an entire nation is in some way disturbed. As a result, the work of peace is hindered.

But the authors of the Final Act also grasped another dimension of religious freedom, one on which the Holy See’s Delegation did not fail to insist when the occasion demanded: the “*social*” *dimension of religious practice*. Over and above freedom of “worship”, membership in a community of faith presupposes contacts and meetings between people professing the same belief. It is in the light of this thought that one should read the following paragraph of the third “basket”, devoted to human contacts: the signatories “confirm that religious faiths, institutions and organizations, practising within the constitutional framework of the participating States, and their representatives can, in the field of their activities, have contacts and meetings among themselves and exchange information”.

3. I wish to note that in pleading for an ever more effective freedom of religious practice of this kind, the Holy See always took account of the opinion of other Christian and non-Christian denominations. There was no lack of consultation, and many spiritual families apart from the Catholic Church expressed their support for this way of approaching the question. They also actively ensured that the ideas developed during the consultations in Helsinki and Geneva would find a favourable reaction among the leaders of their countries.

During the many follow-up meetings in the wake of the Helsinki Accord, the Holy See has always taken care to demonstrate to all Delegates how much the free and effective exercise of religion contributes to the strengthening of security and cooperation between peoples, and to identify regrettable cases of the total denial of religious freedom to communities of Eastern Rite Catholics, who have lost even the right to exist within the new post-War political and juridical structures.

In the light of the gap between the stated principles and the grave hindrances faced by some communities of believers in Europe, I thought it appropriate, a few months before the beginning of the *Second Follow-up Meeting in Madrid*, to write to the Heads of State of all the signatory countries of the Final Act. It was a question of helping the negotiators to define religious freedom more accurately, to consider it in all its dimensions, and especially to highlight the contribution which religious freedom can make to maintaining peace and cooperation between peoples. Ladies and Gentlemen, I am pleased to say that some of these distinguished Heads of State not only were kind enough to reply but also expressed their agreement with the tenor of my message. That message was in harmony with the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, which clearly states that a proper application of the principle of religious freedom also helps to educate citizens to recognize the demands of the moral order and consequently "govern their activities with a sense of responsibility, and strive after what is true and right, willing always to join with others in cooperative effort" (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 8).

As you will recall, in Madrid it proved possible to include in the closing Document the following paragraph: "The participating States reaffirm that they will recognize, respect and furthermore agree to take the action necessary to ensure the freedom of the individual to profess and practise, alone or in community with others, religion or belief acting in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience. In this context, they will consult, whenever necessary, the religious faiths, institutions and organizations, which act within the constitutional framework of their respective countries". Such consultations are always beneficial, and I considered it appropriate to propose them, as some will remember, when I visited the Headquarters of the United Nations on 2 October 1979.

The Madrid Document also discusses the granting of appropriate legal status to religious faiths, institutions and organizations which request it and which are prepared to practise their faith within the relevant constitutional framework. It affirms that the States are determined to facilitate activity and contacts between communities and their representatives in the sphere of their spiritual activity. This subject was dealt with more specifically at a *Meeting of Experts on Contacts between People*, held in Berne in 1983.

It is comforting to be able to state that certain ideas have made headway, in spite of the serious difficulties which still exist in some countries. I am thinking especially of those Catholic communities forced to live an underground existence; of young people discriminated against in their studies or careers because of their religious beliefs; and of dioceses deprived of their

bishops. Fortunately, at least at the level of principles, progress was made at the Ottawa Meeting in 1985, devoted to the subject of human rights, and at the debates within the *Cultural Forum* that same year in Budapest.

4. When, in November 1986, the third great Follow-up Meeting of the Conference opened in Vienna, it was clear that most of the Delegations would not be satisfied with a rewriting of the Final Act of the Madrid Document. They were looking for a qualitative leap forward: an exact text, with concrete commitments. Public opinion had come to accept that the Helsinki process was not meant merely to consolidate principles but to remedy situations which could not be justified.

In the sphere of *freedom of conscience and religion*, the negotiators started out from *two premises*. The first was that the Constitutions of all the countries represented did guarantee their citizens religious freedom. The second was that in practice this is the fundamental freedom most frequently violated.

As you know, this was the beginning of what was surely the most fruitful debate on religious freedom within the Conference. For months, the Delegations were able to explain how their Governments were putting into practice the undertakings assumed in Helsinki and Madrid. For its part, *the Holy See's Delegation* was able to provide explanations and occasionally correct certain overoptimistic evaluations of the facts. It is striking to note the interest aroused by the subject. Four "propositions" were put forward by different groups of countries – including the Holy See – in view of drawing up the concluding document.

You are already familiar with the text which was adopted in Vienna last January. From many points of view, and specifically in the area which is our concern here, it represents significant progress. The perseverance of the negotiators and certain positive developments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe had made this satisfying result possible.

We find in the *Vienna Document* a series of measures aimed at ensuring a freer exercise of religious freedom. I will merely give a brief indication of the most important provisions;

- free access to places of worship;
- the right of communities to organize themselves in accordance with their own hierarchical structure;
- a readiness to enter into consultations with religious faiths and organizations in order to gain a better understanding of their requirements;
- the right to give and receive religious education;
- the right to obtain, possess and use religious materials needed for the practice of religion;
- access of believers to the communications media;
- the possibility for believers and communities to maintain direct contacts with one another, both at home and abroad.

These are the concrete measures adopted by the leaders of thirty-five nations and for which they will have to answer to their citizens. In fact, herein lies the originality of the *Final Act* and of the *Madrid* and *Vienna Documents*: those who approve them assume a certain number of obligations not only with respect to other States but also vis-à-vis their own citizens, whom these documents recognize as having well-defined rights.

It can thus be said that *the way in which these commitments are applied and put into practice will constitute a "test" of development or of stagnation*. Some countries will even have to modify their legislation on religious freedom in order to bring it into line with these texts. In fact, the Vienna Document specifies that participating States must take steps to ensure that their laws and policies actually correspond to the measures adopted within the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Cfr, *Principles*, n. 3). Verification procedures in the sphere of human rights were adopted in Vienna, which will make it possible to exercise even greater vigilance in the future. A contribution to this question is expected from the Meeting on the human dimension of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, now taking place in Paris.

5. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: I have outlined the major development of the last fourteen years within the framework of the Conference regarding the subject of religious freedom. In a sense one can say that the ever open "channel" constituted by the Helsinki process has enabled the "forces of the spirit" to anticipate to a certain extent the political détente which we have been witnessing in recent months. The ideas patiently sown here have matured. We must thank all those who have helped this slow process from which we dare to expect much more abundant fruit!

Religious freedom has become a common theme within the context of international affairs. The subject has become part of the culture of our times, for our contemporaries have learned from the excesses of the recent past, and have come to realize that believing in God, practising a religion and joining with others in expressing one's faith is the special expression of that freedom of thought and expression which takes its source not from a concession granted by the State but from the very dignity of the human person.

Certainly more complete formulas could be found and less legal restrictions might be hoped for. At least for the present, though, the rule of consensus within the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as ideological differences, make it impossible to obtain totally satisfying results.

In any event, the developments of these recent years, and the progress made in drawing up the various texts issued by the Conference, show ever more clearly that *religious freedom can exist in various social systems*. What the Churches ask for is that religious life should not be denied the freedom it needs. What the State owes itself to guarantee, as the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom clearly indicated, is the protection of this freedom for all its

citizens, by means of just laws and by ensuring favourable conditions for the development of their religious life (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 6). The idea that religion is a form of alienation is no longer fashionable, because, fortunately, the leaders of the nations and people themselves have come to realize that *believers constitute a powerful factor in favour of the common good*. Hatred and fanaticism can find no justification among those who call God “our Father”. Who in fact could deny that the commandment of charity, forgiveness of offences, a sense of duty, concern for the neglected – all of which is at the heart of the message of many spiritual families – constitute a priceless asset for society? At any rate, these are among the values which Christians have to offer, as their specific contribution to public and international life. Moreover, from the very fact that they come from all social classes, cultures and nations, the members of religious denominations constitute an effective force for union and cooperation between people.

6. *Let us help Europe to discover its roots, to become more closely identified with its past*. For religious life is not threatened merely by vexing restrictions; it can also be threatened by the spread of false values – such as hedonism, power seeking, greed – which are making headway in various countries and which in practice stifle the spiritual aspirations of large numbers of people. This is why it is *vital for believers to be able to share freely in public debate, and thus put forward another view of the world – the one inspired by their faith*. In this way they contribute to the moral uplift of the society in which they live. European nations have become more and more aware that the honest confrontation of ideas and convictions has been an indispensable condition for their over-all development. For this reason, Europe and the world can rightly expect from religions an effective contribution to the search for peace.

In Helsinki, a city geographically situated at the crossroads of so many human currents, the parties to the Final Act decided to ensure that the peoples of Europe should learn the lessons of their past and commit themselves to greater unity as the year two thousand approaches. The world is looking to this continent, which still has such great potential and which will be, I am sure, as ready in the future as in the past to share with the rest of the world the values that have shaped it.

Mr President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: it is with this ardent hope, expressed also in prayer, that I leave you. But before I conclude, permit me to say that in the noble task of carrying on the Helsinki process, the Catholic Church will not fail to go forward with you, side by side, in that discreet manner which befits her religious mission. She is convinced of the validity of the ideal embodied here fourteen years ago in a document which for millions of Europeans is *more than a Final Act: it is an “act of hope”!*

*AAS 81 (1989), p. 1345-1352.

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