



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO A SYMPOSIUM STUDYING  
20 YEARS OF DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY  
DURING HIS PONTIFICATE\***

*Friday, 13 November 1998*

*Dear Friends,*

1. I am pleased to welcome you at the end of your symposium on *20 Years of Papal Diplomacy under John Paul II*. I would like first of all to thank the organizers of this meeting, the *International Diplomatic Academy* and the *European Institute for Church-State Relations*, as well as the different speakers who have presented analyses of the entire diplomatic activity of the Holy See, or addressed specific issues concerning the precise and often delicate situations involved in negotiation. Such an initiative is the sign of your concern for the Holy See and its activity throughout the world. I hope that your fruitful meetings will be an opportunity for many people to discover and to gain a deeper understanding of the various aspects of the diplomatic mission of the Pope and the Holy See.

Your symposium is part of the celebrations to mark the 20th anniversary of the Pontificate of the Pope who welcomes you today. You have reflected on the important and fundamental dimension of his pastoral ministry which constitutes his active participation in diplomatic life. The Pope is the *Servant of the servants of God*, the servant of the God of history who created the world in order to place the human being there, not to abandon him to his own fate but to lead him to fulfilment; he is also the servant of man.

The Lord shared his passion for man with the Church. That is why, in accordance with a long tradition and international principles, the *Servant of the servants of God* exercises his diplomatic mission as a concrete service to humanity within the framework of his pastoral ministry. In this way, the Holy See intends to make a specific contribution to all individuals and all peoples, to help them ever better to fulfil their own destiny in peace and harmony, in view of the common good

and the integral development of individuals and peoples.

2. Your symposium has reviewed the last 20 years of this century and this millennium, in which we have witnessed numerous changes, a sign of the deep desire to live in freedom, sometimes acquired at the high cost of great suffering, but also a sign of deep restlessness and intense hope.

At times a precursor and agent, at others, limited to accompanying and approving changes which have occurred, diplomacy itself is in a period of transition. In our day it no longer faces enemies, but, on the basis of shared opportunities, it wishes to take up the challenges of globalization and to eliminate the threats that continually appear on a planetary scale. Indeed, today's diplomats no longer have to deal primarily with questions of territorial sovereignty, borders and territories, although in certain regions these issues have yet to be resolved. The new factors of destabilization are represented by extreme poverty, social imbalances, ethnic tensions, environmental damage, and the lack of democracy and respect for human rights, while the factors of integration can no longer be based simply on the balance of power, on nuclear or military deterrence or on agreement between governments.

3. We have a better understanding of why papal diplomacy has no other goal than to promote, to extend around the world and to defend human dignity and all forms of human social life, from the family, the workplace and the school, to the local community and to regional, national and international life. It takes an active part, in its own way, in giving juridical expression to the values and ideals without which society would be divided. But above all it works towards achieving in national and international life a consensus on fundamental principles. It works with the conviction that to guarantee the security and stability of individuals and peoples we must succeed in applying the various aspects of humanitarian law to all peoples without distinction — even in the area of security — according to the principle of distributive justice. Everywhere in the world it is the Church's duty to make her voice heard, so that the voice of the poor is perceived by all as a basic appeal for sharing and solidarity. The concern of Peter's Successor and of the local Churches throughout the world aims at the spiritual, moral and material good of everyone. Diplomatic life is based on ethical principles which put the human person at the centre of analyses and decisions, and recognize the dignity of every human being and of every people, each of whom has an inalienable right to a decent life in accordance with his true nature. I have already had occasion to recall that, "if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power" or special interests (Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, n. 46).

It is unacceptable for disparities between the continents to endure indefinitely for political and economic reasons, and it is the task of diplomats and national leaders to see that the ethical aspects are given priority in decision-making processes at every level. From this standpoint, diplomats, who are in contact with the daily lives of the peoples they come to know and whom they learn to love, must be mindful of the distress of individuals and peoples oppressed by situations that overwhelm them, for they are linked to international systems which are harder and harder on the developing countries.

The Apostolic See carries out its own diplomatic activity, as is normal, with the governments, international organizations and decision-making centres that are increasing in contemporary society, and, at the same time, it speaks to all who have a leading role in international life, be they individuals or groups, in order to foster consensus, goodwill and collaboration in the great causes of humanity.

In particular, papal diplomacy relies on the unity which exists within the Catholic Church, present in almost every country of the world. The communion which ensures relations between the various local Churches and the Bishop of Rome, in addition to being an inviolable ecclesiological principle, is also an international resource.

As I thank you for your contribution, through your research and the documentation you have offered, to reflection on the criteria that guide the Apostolic See's diplomacy, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all your loved ones.

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