



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE PAUL VI
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE
DAY OF PEACE

1 JANUARY 1978

NO TO VIOLENCE, YES TO PEACE To the world and to humanity we once more dare to address the meek and solemn word, Peace. This word oppresses us and exalts us. It is not ours; it comes down from the invisible kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. We perceive its prophetic transcendence, which is not extinguished by our humble repetition of it: "Peace on earth to those on whom God's favour rests" (*Lk 2: 14*). Yes, we repeat: Peace must be! Peace is possible! This is the proclamation; this is the new, the ever new and great announcement; this is the Gospel, which also at the dawn of the new cycle of time, the year of grace 1978, we must proclaim for all people: Peace is the gift offered to all people, which they can and must accept, and place at the summit of their lives, of their programmes, of their hopes and of their happiness.

Peace, let us repeat at once, is not a purely ideal dream, nor is it an attractive but fruitless and unattainable utopia. It is, and must be, a reality - a dynamic reality and one to be generated at every stage of civilization, like the bread on which we live, the fruit of the earth and of divine Providence but also the product of human work. In the same way Peace is not a state of public indifference in which those who enjoy it are dispensed from every care and defended from all disturbance and can permit themselves a stable and tranquil bliss savouring more of inertia and hedonism than of vigilant and diligent vigour. Peace is an equilibrium that is based on motion and continually gives forth energy of spirit and action; it is intelligent and living courage.

We therefore beseech, also on the threshold of this new year 1978, all men and women of good will: the leaders of the collective conduct of the life of society, politicians, thinkers, publishers, artists, those who mould public opinion, the teachers in the schools, the teachers of art, of prayer, the great planners and operators of the world arms market - we beseech all of them to begin once more to reflect with generous honesty on Peace in the world, today!

It seems to us that two main phenomena claim the attention of all of us in the evaluation of Peace itself.

The first phenomenon is magnificently positive; and is constituted by the developing progress of Peace. It is an idea that is gaining prestige in the conscience of humanity; it advances, and precedes and accompanies, the idea of progress, which is the idea of the unity of the human race. The history of our time - let it be said for its glory - is studded with the flowers of a splendid documentation in favour of Peace, one that has been carefully thought out, desired, organized, celebrated and defended: Helsinki teaches this. And these hopes are confirmed by the next Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, devoted to the problem of disarmament, and also by the numerous efforts of both great and humble workers for peace.

No one today dares to defend as principles of wellbeing and of glory deliberate programmes of murderous strife between men, that is, programmes of war. Even where the community expressions of legitimate national interest, supported by motives that seem to coincide with the prevailing reasons of law, do not succeed in affirming themselves through war as a means of solution, one still has confidence that there can be avoided the desperate recourse to the use of arms, which today as never before is insanely murderous and destructive. But now the conscience of the world is horrified by the hypothesis that our Peace is nothing but a truce, and that an uncontrollable conflagration can be suddenly unleashed.

We would like to be able to dispel this threatening and terrible nightmare by proclaiming at the top of our voice the absurdity of modern war and the absolute necessity of Peace - Peace not founded on the power of arms that today are endowed with an infernal destructive capacity (let us recall the tragedy of Japan), nor founded on the structural violence of some political regimes, but founded on the patient, rational and loyal method of justice and freedom, such as the great international institutions of today are promoting and defending. We trust that the magisterial teachings of our great Predecessors Pius XII and John XXIII will continue to inspire on this fundamental theme the wisdom of modern teachers and contemporary politicians.

But now we wish to make reference to a second phenomenon, this one negative and concomitant with the first: this is the phenomenon of passionate or premeditated violence. This phenomenon is spreading in modern civilized life; it takes advantage of the ease that the activity of a citizen enjoys to lay snares for and to strike, usually with calculated surprise, a fellow-citizen who is a legal obstacle to some personal interest. This violence, which we can still call private, even if astutely organized in clandestine and factious groups, is taking on alarming proportions, to the extent that it is becoming habitual. By reason of the antijudicial terms in which it is expressed it could be called criminal, but the manifestations which for some time and in some circumstances it has been employing require a proper analysis, and this is extremely involved and difficult. This violence derives from a decay of the moral conscience which is not trained and not helped, and which is usually permeated with a social pessimism that has extinguished in the spirit the taste for and the commitment to honesty professed for its own sake, as well as what is most beautiful and most happy in the human heart: love - true, noble and faithful love. Often the psychology of violence takes its origin from the depraved root of deliberate revenge, and hence of an unsatisfied justice steeped in bitter and selfish thoughts, potentially undirected and unrestrained towards any aim. What is possible takes the place of what is honest; the only restraint is the fear of incurring some public or private sanction. Hence the habitual attitude of this violence is one of hidden action and of cowardly and treacherous acts that repay the violence with successful impunity.

Violence is not courage. It is the explosion of a blind energy that degrades the person who gives in to it, lowering him from the rational level to the level of passion. And even when violence preserves a certain mastery of itself, it looks for ignoble ways of expressing itself: insidious attacks, surprise, physical supremacy over a weaker and perhaps defenceless adversary. It takes advantage of his surprise and terror and of its own madness; and if this is the relationship between the two contenders, which is the more despicable?

As regards an aspect of violence that has been made into a system "for settling accounts": does not this violence have recourse to contemptible forms of hatred, rancour and enmity which imperil society and shame the community in which they decompose the very sentiments of humanity that form the primary and essential fabric of any society - family, tribe, community or whatever it may be?

Violence is antisocial by reason of the very methods that allow it to be organized into group complicity, in which a conspiracy of silence forms the binding cement and the protective shield. A dishonouring sense of honour gives it a palliative of conscience. And this is one of the distortions, widespread today, of the true social sense, a distortion which clothes with secrecy and with the threat of pitiless revenge certain associated forms of collective selfishness. Violence distrusts normal legal processes and is always clever at evading the observance of those processes, by devising, almost by force of circumstances, criminal undertakings that sometimes degenerate into acts of pitiless terrorism, the final result of a wrong choice of road and the cause of deplorable forms of repression. Violence leads to revolution, and revolution to the loss of freedom. The social axis around which violence conducts its own fateful development is wrong. Once having exploded as a reaction of force, at times not lacking in a logical impulse, violence concludes its cycle against itself and against the motives that provoked its intervention. Perhaps it is appropriate to recall Christ's lapidary phrase: " ... for all who take the sword will perish by the sword " (*Mt 26: 52*). Let us remember therefore: violence is not courage. Violence does not ennoble the man who has recourse to it.

In this Message of Peace we are speaking about violence as the antagonistic term of Peace, and we have not spoken about war. War still deserves our condemnation, even though today it is being rejected ever more widely; against it a praiseworthy and ever more authoritative effort is being made, both socially and politically. Another reason is that war is being kept in check by the terrible nature of its own arms, which it would immediately have at its disposal in the extremely tragic eventuality that it should break out. Fear, which is common to all Peoples, and to the strongest ones especially, holds in check the eventuality that war might turn into a cosmic conflagration. And fear, which is more an imagined restraint than a real one, is accompanied, as we have said, by a lofty and rational effort being made at the highest political levels - an effort which must tend not so much towards balancing the forces of the possible contenders as towards showing the supreme irrationality of war, and at the same time towards establishing relationships between Peoples, which are ever more interdependent, with ultimate solidarity, and ever more friendly and human. God grant that it be so.

But we cannot shut our eyes to the sad reality of partial war, both because it is still raging in certain regions, and because psychologically it is not at all excluded in the uncertain possibility of

contemporary history. Our war against war has not yet been won, and our "yes" to Peace is rather something wished for than something real; for in many geographical and political situations which have not yet been settled in just and peaceful solutions the possibility of future conflicts remains endemic. Our love for Peace must remain on guard; other prospects too, besides that of a new world war, oblige us to consider and exalt Peace even outside the trenches.

And in fact we must defend Peace today under what we could call its metaphysical aspect. This aspect is prior to and higher than the historical and contingent aspect of military ceasefires and of the external *tranquillitas ordinis*. We wish to consider the cause of Peace as it is reflected in that of human life. Our "yes" to Peace broadens out into a "yes" to Life. Peace must be brought not only to the battlefields but wherever human existence is carried on. There is indeed there must be also a Peace that not only protects this existence from the threats of the weapons of war but also protects life as such against every peril, every misfortune, every insidious attack.

We could talk for a long time on this subject, but at the present moment our points of reference are few and well determined. In the fabric of our civilization there exists a class of learned, valiant and good-hearted persons who have made the science and art of medicine their vocation and profession. They are the Doctors, and those who study and work with them and under their direction for the sake of the existence and welfare of humanity. Honour and gratitude to these wise and generous guardians of human life.

As ministers of Religion, we look on this very elect category of persons, devoted to the physical and mental health of mankind, with great admiration, with great gratitude and with great trust. In many ways physical health, the healing of sicknesses, the easing of pain, the energy of development and work, the duration of temporal existence, and even a great part of moral life depend on the wisdom and care of these protectors, defenders and friends of humanity. We are close to them and, as far as we can, uphold their toil, their honour and their spirit. We hope to have them in solidarity with us in affirming and in defending human life in those exceptional contingencies in which life itself can be jeopardized by deliberate and evil designs of the human will. In our "yes" to Peace there rings out a "yes" to life. Human life is sacred from the moment it comes into existence. The law "Thou shalt not kill" protects this inexpressible miracle of human life with transcendent sovereignty. This is the principle that governs our religious ministry with regard to the human being. We are confident that we have as an ally the ministry of medicine.

We have no less trust in the ministry that has given rise to human life, the ministry of parenthood, in the first place that of motherhood. How delicate, how tender, how affectionate and how strong our words become! Over this field of nascent life Peace spreads its first protecting shield. It is a shield endowed with the softest protection, but a shield of defence and love.

Accordingly we cannot fail to disapprove of each and every offence against nascent life, and we must appeal to every Authority, and to everyone who has due competence, to work for the

prohibition of procured abortion and for its remedy. The mother's womb and the child's cradle are the first barriers that not only protect Peace as well as Life but also build Peace (cf . *Ps* 127:3 ff). The one who chooses Peace in opposition to war and to violence automatically chooses Life and chooses humanity in its profound essential demands; and this is the meaning of this Message that we are again sending with humble yet ardent conviction to those accountable for Peace on earth, and to all our Brethren in the world.

But we must add a word for all the children. With regard to violence they are the most vulnerable sector of society, but they are likewise the hope of a better tomorrow. Through some kind and thoughtful intermediary may our Message reach them too.

Let us explain why. First, because in the Message of Peace of previous years we have pointed out that we do not speak in our own name only but in the name of Christ, who is "the Prince of Peace" in the world (*Is* 9: 6) and who said "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (*Mt* 5: 9). We believe that, without the direction and assistance of Christ, true, permanent and worldwide Peace is not possible. We also consider that the Peace of Christ does not weaken people, does not make them timid and victims of others' arrogance, but rather renders them capable of struggling for justice and of settling very many questions with the generosity, indeed the genius, of love.

The second reason. You children are often led to quarrel. Remember: it is a harmful vanity to want to appear stronger than your brothers and sisters and friends by quarrelling, fighting, and giving way to anger and revenge. Everybody does it, you answer. No, it is wrong, we say to you. If you want to be strong, be so in spirit and in behaviour. Learn to control yourselves; learn how to forgive and quickly make friends again with those who have offended you. In this way you will really be Christians.

Do not hate anybody. Do not be proud, comparing yourself with others of your own age, with people from different social backgrounds or with people of different nations. Do not act out of selfish motives, out of contempt or - we repeat - out of revenge.

The third reason. We think that when you grow up you must make a change in the way today's world thinks and acts, a world in which everybody is always ready to be different, to separate himself or herself from others and to fight them. Are we not all brothers and sisters? Are we not all members of the same human family? And are not all the nations obliged to get on well together and to create Peace?

You children of the new age must get used to loving everybody, to giving to our society the appearance of a community which is more noble, more honest, more unified. Do you really want to be human beings and not wolves? Do you really want to have the merit and the joy of doing what is right, of helping those in need, and of being able to do good works with the sole reward of a

good conscience? Well then, remember the words which Jesus spoke at the Last Supper, the night before his Passion. He said: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another ... By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13 : 34-35).

Dear children, we greet you and we bless you. The password is: No to violence, Yes to Peace.

From the Vatican, 8 December 1977.

PAULUS PP. VI

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