

MESSAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE
WORLD DAY OF PEACE

1 JANUARY 2005

**DO NOT BE OVERCOME BY EVIL
BUT OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD**

1. At the beginning of the New Year, I once again address the leaders of nations and all men and women of good will, who recognize the need to build peace in the world. For the theme of this 2005 World Day of Peace I have chosen Saint Paul's words in the Letter to the Romans: "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*" (12:21). Evil is never defeated by evil; once that road is taken, *rather than defeating evil, one will instead be defeated by evil.*

The great Apostle brings out a fundamental truth: peace is the outcome of a long and demanding battle which is only won when evil is defeated by good. If we consider the tragic scenario of violent fratricidal conflicts in different parts of the world, and the untold sufferings and injustices to which they have given rise, the only truly constructive choice is, as Saint Paul proposes, to *flee what is evil and hold fast to what is good* (cf. *Rom 12:9*).

Peace is a good to be promoted with good: it is a good for individuals, for families, for nations and for all humanity; yet it is one which needs to be maintained and fostered by decisions and actions inspired by good. We can appreciate the profound truth of another saying of Saint Paul: "*Repay no one evil for evil*" (*Rom 12:17*). The one way out of the vicious circle of requiting evil for evil is to accept the Apostle's words: "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*" (*Rom 12:21*).

Evil, good and love

2. From the beginning, humanity has known the tragedy of evil and has struggled to grasp its roots and to explain its causes. Evil is not some impersonal, deterministic force at work in the world. It is the result of human freedom. Freedom, which distinguishes human beings from every other creature on earth, is ever present at the heart of the drama of evil. *Evil always has a name and a face*: the name and face of those men and women who freely choose it. Sacred Scripture teaches that at the dawn of history Adam and Eve rebelled against God, and Abel was killed by Cain, his brother (cf. *Gen 3-4*). These were the first wrong choices, which were succeeded by countless others down the centuries. Each of these choices has an *intrinsic moral dimension*, involving specific

individual responsibilities and the fundamental relationship of each person with God, with others and with all of creation.

At its deepest level, *evil is a tragic rejection of the demands of love*⁽¹⁾. Moral good, on the other hand, is born of love, shows itself as love and is directed towards love. All this is particularly evident to Christians, who know that their membership in the one mystical Body of Christ sets them in a particular relationship not only with the Lord but also with their brothers and sisters. The inner logic of Christian love, which in the Gospel is the living source of moral goodness, leads even to the love of one's enemies: "*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink*" (Rom 12:20).

The "grammar" of the universal moral law

3. If we look to the present state of the world, we cannot help but note the disturbing spread of *various social and political manifestations of evil*: from social disorders to anarchy and war, from injustice to acts of violence and killing. To steer a path between the conflicting claims of good and evil, the human family urgently needs to preserve and esteem that *common patrimony of moral values* bestowed by God himself. For this reason, Saint Paul encourages all those determined to overcome evil with good *to be noble and disinterested in fostering generosity and peace* (cf. Rom 12:17-21).

Ten years ago, in addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations about the need for common commitment to the service of peace, I made reference to the "*grammar*" of the universal moral law⁽²⁾, to which the Church appeals in her various pronouncements in this area. By inspiring common values and principles, this law unites human beings, despite their different cultures, and is itself unchanging: "it subsists under the flux of ideas and customs and supports their progress... Even when it is rejected in its very principles, it cannot be destroyed or removed from the heart of man. It always rises again in the life of individuals and societies"⁽³⁾.

4. This common *grammar of the moral law* requires ever greater commitment and responsibility in ensuring that the life of individuals and of peoples is respected and advanced. In this light, the evils of a social and political nature which afflict the world, particularly those provoked by *outbreaks of violence*, are to be vigorously condemned. I think immediately of the beloved continent of *Africa*, where conflicts which have already claimed millions of victims are still continuing. Or the dangerous *situation of Palestine*, the Land of Jesus, where the fabric of mutual understanding, torn by a conflict which is fed daily by acts of violence and reprisal, cannot yet be mended in justice and truth. And what of the troubling phenomenon of *terrorist violence*, which appears to be driving the whole world towards a future of fear and anguish? Finally, how can we not think with profound regret of the *drama unfolding in Iraq*, which has given rise to tragic situations of uncertainty and insecurity for all?

To attain the good of peace there must be a clear and conscious acknowledgment that violence is an unacceptable evil and that it never solves problems. "Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings"⁽⁴⁾. What is needed is *a great effort to form consciences* and to educate the younger generation to goodness by upholding that *integral and fraternal humanism* which the Church proclaims and promotes. This is the foundation for a social, economic and political order respectful of the dignity, freedom and fundamental rights of each person.

The good of peace and the common good

5. Fostering peace by overcoming evil with good requires careful reflection *on the common good*⁽⁵⁾ and on its social and political implications. When the common good is promoted at every level, peace is promoted. Can an individual find complete fulfillment without taking account of his social nature, that is, his being "with" and "for" others? The common good closely concerns him. It closely concerns every expression of his social nature: the family, groups, associations, cities, regions, states, the community of peoples and nations. *Each person, in some way, is called to work for the common good*, constantly looking out for the good of others as if it were his own. This responsibility belongs in a particular way to political authorities at every level, since they are called to create that sum of social conditions which permit and foster in human beings the integral development of their person⁽⁶⁾.

The common good therefore demands respect for and the integral promotion of the person and his fundamental rights, as well as respect for and the promotion of the rights of nations on the universal plane. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council observed that "the increasingly close interdependence gradually encompassing the entire world is leading to an increasingly universal common good... and this involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups and the common good of the entire human family"⁽⁷⁾. The good of humanity as a whole, including future generations, calls for true international cooperation, to which every nation must offer its contribution⁽⁸⁾.

Certain reductive visions of humanity tend to present the common good as a purely *socio-economic state of well-being* lacking any transcendent purpose, thus emptying it of its deepest meaning. Yet the *common good* has a *transcendent dimension*, for God is the ultimate end of all his creatures⁽⁹⁾. Christians know that Jesus has shed full light on how the true common good of humanity is to be achieved. History journeys towards Christ and in him finds its culmination: because of Christ, through Christ and for Christ, every human reality can be led to complete fulfillment in God.

The good of peace and the use of the world's goods

6. Since the good of peace is closely linked to the development of all peoples, the *ethical requirements for the use of the earth's goods* must always be taken into account. The Second Vatican Council rightly recalled that "God intended the earth and all it contains for the use of everyone and of all peoples; so that the good things of creation should be available equally to all, with justice as guide and charity in attendance"⁽¹⁰⁾.

As a member of the human family, each person becomes as it were a *citizen of the world*, with consequent duties and rights, since all human beings are united by a *common origin and the same supreme destiny*. By the mere fact of being conceived, a child is entitled to rights and deserving of care and attention; and someone has the duty to provide these. The condemnation of racism, the protection of minors, the provision of aid to displaced persons and refugees, and the mobilization of international solidarity towards all the needy are nothing other than consistent applications of the principle of world citizenship.

7. The good of peace should be seen today as closely related to the *new goods* derived from progress in science and technology. These too, in application of the principle of the universal destination of the earth's goods, need to be *put at the service of humanity's basic needs*. Appropriate initiatives on the international level can give full practical implementation to the principle of the universal destination of goods by guaranteeing to all — individuals and nations — the basic conditions for sharing in development. This becomes possible once the barriers and monopolies that marginalize many peoples are removed⁽¹¹⁾.

The good of peace will be better ensured if the international community takes on greater responsibility for what are commonly called *public goods*. These are goods which all citizens automatically enjoy, without having consciously chosen them or contributed to them in any way. Such is the case, for example, at the national level, with such goods as the judiciary system, the defense system and the network of highways and railways. In our world the phenomenon of increased globalization means that more and more public goods are taking on a global character, and as a result *common interests* are daily increasing. We need but think of the fight against poverty, the promotion of peace and security, concern for climate change and disease control. The international community needs to respond to these interests with a broader network of juridical accords aimed at *regulating the use of public goods* and inspired by universal principles of fairness and solidarity.

8. The principle of the universal destination of goods can also make possible a more effective approach to *the challenge of poverty*, particularly when we consider the extreme poverty in which millions of people are still living. The international community, at the beginning of the new millennium, set the priority of halving their number by the year 2015. The Church supports and encourages

this commitment and invites all who believe in Christ to show, practically and in every sector, a *preferential love for the poor*⁽¹²⁾.

The tragedy of poverty remains closely linked to the issue of the *foreign debt of poor countries*. Despite significant progress in this area, the problem has not yet been adequately resolved. Fifteen years ago I called public attention to the fact that the foreign debt of poor countries "is closely related to a series of other problems such as foreign investment, the proper functioning of the major international organizations, the price of raw materials and so forth"⁽¹³⁾. Recent moves in favor of debt reduction, centered mainly on the needs of the poor, have certainly improved the quality of *economic growth*. Yet, because of a number of factors, this growth is still quantitatively insufficient, especially in relation to the millennium goals. Poor countries remain trapped in a *vicious circle*: low income and weak growth limit savings and, in turn, weak investments and an inefficient use of savings do not favor growth.

9. As Pope Paul VI stated and as I myself have reaffirmed, the only really effective means of enabling States to deal with the grave problem of poverty is to provide them with the necessary resources through *foreign financial aid* — public and private — granted under reasonable conditions, within the framework of international commercial relations regulated with fairness⁽¹⁴⁾. What is urgently needed is a *moral and economic mobilization*, one which respects agreements already made in favor of poor countries, and is at the same time prepared to review those agreements which have proved excessively burdensome for some countries. In this regard, new impulse should be given to *Public Aid for Development*, and new forms of financing for development should be explored, whatever the difficulties entailed⁽¹⁵⁾. Some governments are already looking carefully at promising mechanisms for this; these significant initiatives should be carried out in a spirit of authentic sharing, with respect for the *principle of subsidiarity*. The management of financial resources destined to the development of poor countries should also entail scrupulous adherence, on the part of both donors and recipients, to sound administrative practices. The Church encourages and contributes to these efforts. One need only mention the significant contribution made by the many Catholic agencies dedicated to aid and development.

10. At the end of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, I spoke of the urgent need for a new *creativity in charity*⁽¹⁶⁾, in order to spread the Gospel of hope in the world. This need is clearly seen when we consider *the many difficult problems standing in the way of development in Africa*: numerous armed conflicts, pandemic diseases aggravated by extreme poverty, and political instability leading to widespread insecurity. These are tragic situations which call for a *radically new direction for Africa*: there is a need to create *new forms of solidarity, at bilateral and multilateral levels*, through a more decisive commitment on the part of all, with complete conviction that the well-being of the peoples of Africa is an indispensable condition for the attainment of the universal common good.

May the peoples of Africa become the protagonists of their own future and their own cultural, civil, social and economic development! May Africa cease to be a mere recipient of aid, and become a responsible agent of convinced and productive sharing! Achieving this goal calls for a new political culture, especially in the area of international cooperation. Once again I wish to state that failure to honor the repeated promises of *Public Aid for Development*, the still unresolved question of the heavy foreign debt of African countries and the failure to give those countries special consideration in international commercial relations, represent grave obstacles to peace which urgently need to be addressed and resolved. Today more than ever, a decisive condition for bringing peace to the world is an acknowledgement of the interdependence between wealthy and poor countries, such that "development either becomes shared in common by every part of the world or it undergoes a process of regression even in zones marked by constant progress"⁽¹⁷⁾.

The universality of evil and Christian hope

11. Faced with the many tragic situations present in the world, Christians confess with humble trust that God alone can enable individuals and peoples to overcome evil and achieve good. By his death and resurrection, Christ has redeemed us and ransomed us "with a price" (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23), gaining salvation for all. With his help, *everyone can defeat evil with good*.

Based on the certainty that evil will not prevail, Christians *nourish an invincible hope* which sustains their efforts to promote justice and peace. Despite the personal and social sins which mark all human activity, hope constantly gives new impulse to the commitment to justice and peace, as well as firm confidence in the possibility of *building a better world*.

Although the "mystery of iniquity" (2 Th 2:7) is present and active in the world, we must not forget that redeemed humanity is capable of resisting it. Each believer, created in the image of God and redeemed by Christ, "who in a certain way has united himself to each human being"⁽¹⁸⁾, can cooperate in the triumph of good. The work of "the Spirit of the Lord fills the earth" (cf. Wis 1:7). Christians, especially the lay faithful, "should not, then, hide their hope in the depth of their hearts, but rather express it through the structures of their secular lives in continual conversion and in wrestling 'against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of iniquity' (Eph 6:12)"⁽¹⁹⁾.

12. No man or woman of good will can renounce the struggle to overcome evil with good. This fight can be fought effectively only with the weapons of love. *When good overcomes evil, love prevails and where love prevails, there peace prevails*. This is the teaching of the Gospel, restated by the Second Vatican Council: "the fundamental law of human perfection, and consequently of the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love"⁽²⁰⁾.

The same is true in the social and political spheres. In this regard, Pope Leo XIII wrote that those charged with preserving peace in relations between peoples should foster in themselves and kindle in others "charity, the mistress and queen of all the virtues"⁽²¹⁾. Christians must be convinced witnesses of this truth. They should show by their lives that love is the only force capable of bringing fulfillment to persons and societies, the only force capable of directing the course of history in the way of goodness and peace.

During this year dedicated to the *Eucharist*, may the sons and daughters of the Church find in the *supreme sacrament of love* the wellspring of all communion: communion with Jesus the Redeemer and, in him, with every human being. By Christ's death and resurrection, made sacramentally present in each Eucharistic celebration, we are saved from evil and enabled to do good. Through the new life which Christ has bestowed on us, we can recognize one another as brothers and sisters, despite every difference of language, nationality and culture. In a word, by sharing in the one bread and the one cup, we come to realize that we are "God's family" and that together we can make our own effective contribution to building a world based on the values of justice, freedom and peace.

From the Vatican, 8 December 2004

JOHN PAUL II

ENDNOTES

(1) In this regard, Saint Augustine observed that "two loves have established two cities: love of self, carried to contempt for God, has given rise to the earthly city; love of God, carried to contempt for self, has given rise to the heavenly city" (*De Civitate Dei*, XIV:28).

(2) Cf. *Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations for its Fiftieth Anniversary* (5 October 1995), 3: *Insegnamenti* XVIII/2 (1995), 732.

(3) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1958.

(4) John Paul II, *Homily at Drogheda*, Ireland (29 September 1979), 9: AAS 71 (1979), 1081.

(5) The *common good* is widely understood to be "the sum of those conditions of social life which enable groups and individuals to achieve their fulfilment more completely and readily". Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.

(6) Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 417.

(7) Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.

(8) Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 421.

(9) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 41: AAS 83 (1991), 844.

(10) Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 69.

(11) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 35: AAS 83 (1991), 837.

(12) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42: AAS 80 (1988), 572.

(13) *Address to Participants in the Study Week of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences* (27 October 1989), 6: *Insegnamenti* XII/2 (1989), 1050.

(14) Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 56-61: AAS 59 (1967), 285-287; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 33-34: AAS 80 (1988), 557-560.

(15) Cf. John Paul II, *Message to the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 July 2004, p. 5.

(16) Cf. No. 50: AAS 93 (2001), 303.

(17) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 17: AAS 80 (1988) 532.

(18) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

(19) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 35.

(20) Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 38.

(21) Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum: Acta Leonis XIII* 11 (1892), 143; cf. Benedict XV, Encyclical Letter *Pacem Dei*: AAS 12 (1920), 215.