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Paul VI
~~1964 Christmas~~
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1964 CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Pope Paul VI



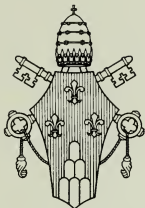
National Catholic Welfare Conference



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CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

December 22, 1964



Unfailingly tender and moving, touchingly human and at the same time sacred and mysterious, the feast of Christmas, followed by the beginning of the new year, brings to our heart even more than to our lips an overwhelming abundance of best wishes to all of you who are so kind as to listen to our voice.

We extend these best wishes to you, our dearest children and brethren, whom the same faith and the same charity bind to us in united joy, enabling us to sense the tidal wave of emotion and of contemplation with which the heart is flooded as it reflects on the mystery of Christmas. We express our best wishes also to all men of all ages, of all countries, of all beliefs, toward whom today more than ever we feel we owe our esteem, our affection, and our united efforts.

In a genuine sense Christmas makes us experience the very essence of our universal responsibility of announcing the Good News to all men, the Good News which reveals to men their potential for happiness, for peace, and for salvation. For this reason, on this day more than on any other, we feel ourselves not merely anxious but even obliged to communicate to the world our message of good wishes.

This year the message that we address to all our hearers is one of brotherhood, a brotherhood which is more meaningful, more effective, more universal than the type which now unites men.

Vividly impressed on our heart is the recollection of our recent trip to Bombay, a trip directed by a religious purpose, as is obvious, but at the same time a trip which has become for us something of inestimable human value. We went forth as a foreigner and a pilgrim into a distant land unknown to us. We could have remained as an isolated foreigner, surrounded only by our brothers in the faith. Instead we met people, a festive, overflowing throng which seemed to us to represent not only the countless peoples of vast India, but also all the other Asian peoples. To be sure, they were not Catholic, but they were courteous, receptive, eager for a glance and a word from the strange visitor from Rome. It was indeed a moment of understanding and blending of many hearts.

What it is that these rejoicing crowds saw in us, we do not know. In them we saw a most worthy segment of humanity, one faithful to its millenary cultural traditions, not all Christian, to be sure, but profoundly spiritual and in many respects humane and good, at once most ancient and youthful, today alive to and turned toward something which even the marvels of modern progress cannot provide, if they are not perhaps actually an obstacle.

Then a feeling of profound understanding brought us a confirmation of what Christianity has been saying for centuries, and which the evolution of civilization has been slowly and gradually discovering and proclaiming: All men are brothers.

Contacts among men are becoming so numerous and so convenient that they should lead to love. Distances are so reduced and almost abolished that love should become universal. The idea of neighbor, which the parable of the Good Samaritan extends beyond conventional limits, embraces the whole of humanity: Every man is our neighbor.

On the one side, the evidence of men's needs becomes so manifest and deplorable, and on the other, the possibility of relieving them increases daily so abundantly, that it becomes clear toward which goal today the progress of civilization should tend: the mobilization of these forces for solidarity among men, so that

no one will lack for bread and dignity, so that all men will make of the common good their major preoccupation.

Human progress has been discovering the importance and the value of that which Christ, having become man like us and our teacher, had already taught us in these words of His Gospel, which have never been fully comprehended and not yet universally put into practice: "You are all brethren";¹ that is, equals, united among yourselves, having an obligation to acknowledge the image of the same Heavenly Father reflected in each of you, and to work together to achieve the same destinies: full human perfection and divine sonship through grace in this life, and eternal happiness in the next.

Today brotherhood must be given recognition; friendship is the principle of all of today's living in common. Instead of seeing in the other the outsider, the rival, the undesired, the adversary, the enemy, we should accustom ourselves to seeing the man, which is to say, a being like ourselves, worthy of respect, of esteem, of assistance, of love, as we ourselves are. May these marvelous words of the holy African doctor echo in our hearts: "*Dilatentur spatia caritatis*" [May the boundaries of love grow wider].²

The barriers raised by the spirit of selfishness must come down; the promotion of legitimate private interests must never prove detrimental to others or run counter to the reasonable claims of public welfare.

Democracy, to which all mankind today appeals, must take on a more universal aspect, which will transcend all the obstacles that stand in the way of the effective brotherhood of all men.

We know that these ideas find today a ready response in the hearts of men. We feel that the young are particularly conscious that these are the fruits of the future, because rooted in the irreversible progress of civilization. These ideals are lofty without, however, being utopian; though arduous, they deserve study and call for action. They have our support; just as the young have our support who yearn to create a world which will be a home for all men and not a system of trenches at the service of undying hatred and never-ending struggle.

But we are also aware how transient these lofty ideas can too easily be. At different moments of history they appear as if rising brightly in the heavens, only to be suddenly obscured by opposing clouds. The path toward genuine progress can never be free from toil and uncertainty. Mankind, by its stubborn resistance, knows how to divert the continuing quest for good. Men are inconstant. The pursuit of hatred comes more easily than love.

Because of this, we desire to place at the service of the world the inexhaustible and ever timely patrimony of divine and human truth and of spiritual energy inherent in Catholicism, thereby to sustain the efforts of men of good will to promote the common good, to bring about universal peace and the brotherhood of all men. Ours is a sincere offer. In the Ecumenical Council the Church is engaged in meditating on these riches; she is drawing them out of a heart filled with a new love, a love which Christ has enkindled in the world. In a humble, friendly gesture, she offers these riches for the free acceptance of the modern world, which cannot, however, refuse them if it is really concerned about its own salvation.

We are not unaware of the obstacles which continue to stand in the way of human brotherhood, and it is with sorrow that we observe that at the present moment we are passing through a period in which they appear more clearly in evidence, and prove themselves at times to be dangerously effective. In the presence of the charming sweetness of Christmas it is not possible to enter into a detailed discussion of these obstacles which show the dramatic and frightful aspect of the contemporary world situation. In a message, however, of essential sincerity like the present one, it would not be proper to pass over in complete silence this threatening reality.

Let us then briefly point out some concrete forms from among so many existing and possible ones, in which the opposition to human brotherhood manifests itself. We just mention them by way of example, as it were.

First of all there is nationalism, which divides peoples, putting them in opposition to one another, raising up among them barriers of conflicting ideologies that produce closed outlooks, exclusive interests and self-sufficient ambitions, if not greedy and overbearing forms of imperialism. This enemy of human brotherhood is today gaining strength. It had appeared to have been at least

virtually overcome after the tragic experience of the last World War. It is rising anew.

We appeal to governments and peoples to be watchful and to moderate this facile instinct of prestige and rivalry, or it can once again prove fatal. We make it our wish that the functions of the organizations set up for uniting the nations may be sustained and respected by all in the spirit of loyal and reciprocal collaboration. Patient negotiations and opportune pacts are needed to avoid war and to prevent clashes, to facilitate the growth of the awareness and expression of international law and, briefly, to give to peace its lasting security and dynamic equilibrium.

Another obstacle that raises its head again is racism, which separates and opposes the different branches constituting the great human family, resulting in pride, mistrust, exclusivism, discrimination and sometimes even oppression, thus ruining the mutual respect and due esteem which ought to turn the diverse ethnical groups into a peaceful concert of brotherly peoples.

And so, we cannot help being alarmed at a militarism no longer focused on the legitimate defense of the countries concerned or on the maintenance of world peace, but tending rather to build up stockpiles of weapons ever more powerful and destructive—a process which consumes enormous quantities of money and manpower, feeds the public mind on the thought of power and war, and induces men to make mutual fear the treacherous and inhuman basis of world peace.

In this context, we have no hesitation in expressing our hopes that the rulers of nations will find a way to promote, prudently and magnanimously, the process of disarmament. We would like to see a generous-minded investigation of how—at least in part and by stages—military expenditure could be diverted to humanitarian ends; and this, not only to the advantage of the particular countries concerned, but also of others in the course of development or in a state of need.

Hunger and misery, sickness and ignorance still cry out for remedy in this age of plenty and of brotherhood. We do not hesitate to make our own once more the pleas of the innumerable poor and suffering today in need of genuine and substantial relief. You,

good and generous men who are in a position to help the hungry and the suffering, those in misery and in a state of abandonment, hear in our voice the divine and human voice of Christ our Brother in every human need.

Can we, in this tragic list of obstacles to human brotherhood, ignore the barrier of class, still a very real source of bitterness in modern society? Can we ignore the spirit of division and strife over ideas, methods, interests, organizations within the structures of the various communities? On the one hand, such complex and widespread social phenomena bring together men who share common interests. But on the other hand, they create great rifts between the various groups, making strife itself the center of life, and stamping our society—so highly developed technologically and economically—with the tragic and bitter mark of division and hatred. Men are not happy because they do not live as brothers.

We know well enough the enormous and seemingly insoluble difficulties which lie across the path of freedom and friendship in social life. But, for our part, we will never grow tired of urging love for one's neighbor as the basic principle of any truly human society; and we shall go on hoping that sincere reflection and the experience of life will help men to see where our many social divisions come from, and to search for a pattern of social living that is ever more authentic and humane.

Also, for this reconstruction of modern society according to the unsuppressible demands of peaceful living together, for the restoration of mutual collaboration among various social classes and various nations, and for the restoration of happiness resulting from living together, our ancient Gospel, open today to the page of peace on earth to men of good will, has new living words to offer to the brotherhood of man.

Listening to our message, some may ask: Is not religion a motive for the division among men, and especially the Catholic religion, so dogmatic, so demanding, so discriminating? Does it not impede an easy conversation and a spontaneous understanding among people? Oh yes, religion, Catholic no less than any other, is an element of distinction among men, even as is language, culture, art and the professions, but it is not of its very nature a divisive element.

It is true that Christianity, by the newness of the life which it brings into the world, can be a motive of division and of contrast because of that which brings good to humanity; it is a light shining in darkness, differentiating the various areas. But it is not of the nature of religion to oppose itself to people. It is in behalf of people, it stands in defense of all that is sacred and unsuppressible in them, of their fundamental aspiration to God, and their right to manifest this externally in a worthy form of worship.

The Church must, however, express publicly her sorrow when so incoercible a propensity is impeded, hindered, forbidden and even punished by force of public power, which in this case presumes to enter a field beyond its competence. Apropos of this topic, which demands a more full and reasoned reply, we can at least repeat what the Church today goes on proclaiming: justice and well-understood religious liberty, which forbids one to shake the foundation of others' beliefs when they are not contrary to the common good, which forbids one to impose a faith not freely accepted, or to proceed by odious discrimination or undeserved vexations, promoting respect for whatever is true and good in every religion and in every human opinion, with the special intention of promoting civil concord and collaboration in every sort of good activity. Truth stands fast and charity sheds light on its beneficent splendor.

This today more than ever is our program, convinced as we are that the world needs love, needs to break the bonds of selfishness within itself, needs to open out to a sincere, ever increasing, universal brotherhood.

And it is our wish for you, sincere, good people listening to us. We make it with joy and hope in the name of Him who is the "first born among many brethren",³ Christ the Lord.

In this wish of ours, our heart opens in a father's loving embrace for mankind the world over, for whose redemption the Divine Saviour came down to earth. And, in particular, we turn to our venerable brothers and dear children, those especially who by reason of the sad restrictions still imposed upon them cannot add outward signs of happiness and serenity to the feast of Christmas. Next we turn to priests, to men and women Religious, especially

our beloved missionaries whose anxieties and difficulties we well know.

Again, we turn to all Christian families, to the generosity and promise of youth, the innocence of the little ones, the enthusiasm of young people. In our embrace we include all who work, with their tiring and at times monotonous daily tasks; the sick and suffering with their burden of pain known to God alone who understands and rewards all; and we have a very special thought for the poor of the whole world—their fears and hardships echo deeply in sorrow in our heart. May the newly born Child bring to them the comfort of His love and the sweetness of a renewed confidence; and may He likewise spur all who have the power and the means—those most of all who are responsible for the common good—to unite in a constructive effort, in an effective solidarity, to bring new means, speedy remedies and suitable plans to bear on the immense needs of the world's poor and on their hopes which cannot continue to be disappointed.

Filled with these thoughts we renew our good wish to you and with an open heart we give to all of you who are listening and to the entire family of mankind the comfort of our apostolic blessing as a pledge and reflection of the goodness of the Divine Child of Bethlehem.

¹ *Mt.* 23, 8.

² Sermon X, "On the Words of the Lord".

³ *Rom.* 8, 29.

(Translation courtesy of NCWC News Service)

(Cover: The Adoration of the Magi by Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection).

