11 december, 2007

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE - 1 JANUARY 2008

THE HUMAN FAMILY, A COMMUNITY OF PEACE 1. At the beginning of a New Year, I wish to send my fervent good wishes for peace, together with a heartfelt message of hope to men and women throughout the world. I do so by offering for our common reflection the theme which I have placed at the beginning of this message. It is one which I consider particularly important: *the human family, a community of peace*. The first form of communion between persons is that born of the love of a man and a woman who decide to enter a stable union in order to build together *a new family*. But the peoples of the earth, too, are called to build relationships of solidarity and cooperation among themselves, as befits members of the one *human family*: "All peoples"—as the Second Vatican Council declared—"are one community and have one origin, because God caused the whole human race to dwell on the face of the earth (cf. *Acts* 17:26); they also have one final end, God"(1). *The family, society and peace* 2. The natural family, as an intimate communion of life and love, based on marriage between a man and a woman(2), constitutes "the *primary place of 'humanization'* for the person and society"(3), and a "*cradle of life and love*"(4). The family is therefore rightly defined as the first natural society, "*a divine institution that stands at the foundation of life of the human person as the prototype of every social order*"(5). 3. Indeed, in a healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them. For this reason, the family is *the first and indispensable teacher of peace*. It is no wonder, therefore, that violence, if perpetrated in the family, is seen as particularly intolerable. Consequently, when it is said that the family is "the primary living cell of society"(6), something essential is being stated. The family is the foundation of society for this reason too: *because it enables its members in decisive ways to experience peace*. It follows that the human community cannot do without the service provided by the family. Where can young people gradually learn to savour the genuine "taste" of peace better than in the original "nest" which nature prepares for them? *The language of the family is a language of peace*; we must always draw from it, lest we lose the "vocabulary" of peace. In the inflation of its speech, society cannot cease to refer to that "grammar" which all children learn from the looks and the actions of their mothers and fathers, even before they learn from their words. 4. The family, since it has the duty of educating its members, *is the subject of specific rights*. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which represents a landmark of *juridic civilization of truly universal value*, states that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is

entitled to protection by society and the State"(7). For its part, the Holy See sought to acknowledge a special *juridic dignity* proper to the family by publishing the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*. In its Preamble we read: "the rights of the person, even if they are expressed as rights of the individual, have a fundamental social dimension which finds an innate and vital expression in the family"(8). The rights set forth in the *Charter* are an expression and explicitation of the natural law written on the heart of the human being and made known to him by reason. The denial or even the restriction of the rights of the family, by obscuring the truth about man, *threatens the very foundations of peace*. 5. Consequently, whoever, even unknowingly, circumvents the institution of the family undermines peace in the entire community, national and international, since he weakens what is in effect *the primary agency of peace*. This point merits special reflection: everything that serves to weaken the family based on the marriage of a man and a woman, everything that directly or indirectly stands in the way of its openness to the responsible acceptance of a new life, everything that obstructs its right to be primarily responsible for the education of its children, constitutes an objective obstacle on the road to peace. The family needs to have a home, employment and a just recognition of the domestic activity of parents, the possibility of schooling for children, and basic health care for all. When society and public policy are not committed to assisting the family in these areas, they deprive themselves of an essential resource in the service of peace. The social communications media, in particular, because of their educational potential, have a special responsibility for promoting respect for the family, making clear its expectations and rights, and presenting all its beauty. *Humanity is one great family* 6. The social community, if it is to live in peace, is also called to draw inspiration from the values on which the family community is based. This is as true for local communities as it is for national communities; it is also true for the international community itself, for the human family which dwells *in that common house which is the earth*. Here, however, we cannot forget that the family comes into being from the responsible and definitive "yes" of a man and a women, and it continues to live from the conscious "yes" of the children who gradually join it. The family community, in order to prosper, needs the generous consent of all its members. This realization also needs to become a shared conviction on the part of all those called to form the *common human family*. We need to say our own "yes" to this vocation which God has inscribed in our very nature. We do not live alongside one another purely by chance; all of us are progressing along *a common path as men and women, and thus as brothers and sisters*. Consequently, it is essential that we should all be committed to living our lives in an attitude of responsibility before God, acknowledging him as the deepest source of our own existence and that of others. By going back to this supreme principle we are able to perceive the unconditional worth of each human being, and thus to lay the premises for building a humanity at peace. Without this transcendent foundation society is a mere aggregation of neighbours, not a community of brothers and sisters called to form one great family. *The family, the human community and the environment* 7. The family needs a home, a fit environment in which to develop its proper relationships. *For the human family, this home is the earth*, the environment that God the Creator has given us to inhabit with creativity and responsibility. We need to care for the environment: it has been entrusted to men and women to be protected and cultivated with responsible

freedom, with the good of all as a constant guiding criterion. Human beings, obviously, are of supreme worth vis-à-vis creation as a whole. Respecting the environment does not mean considering material or animal nature more important than man. Rather, it means not selfishly considering nature to be at the complete disposal of our own interests, for future generations also have the right to reap its benefits and to exhibit towards nature the same responsible freedom that we claim for ourselves. Nor must we overlook the poor, who are excluded in many cases from the goods of creation destined for all. Humanity today is rightly concerned about the ecological balance of tomorrow. It is important for assessments in this regard to be carried out prudently, in dialogue with experts and people of wisdom, uninhibited by ideological pressure to draw hasty conclusions, and above all with the aim of reaching agreement on a model of sustainable development capable of ensuring the well-being of all while respecting environmental balances. If the protection of the environment involves costs, they should be justly distributed, taking due account of the different levels of development of various countries and the need for solidarity with future generations. Prudence does not mean failing to accept responsibilities and postponing decisions; it means being committed to making joint decisions after pondering responsibly the road to be taken, decisions aimed at strengthening that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying. 8. In this regard, it is essential to “sense” that the earth is “our common home” and, in our stewardship and service to all, to choose the path of dialogue rather than the path of unilateral decisions. Further international agencies may need to be established in order to confront together the stewardship of this “home” of ours; more important, however, is the need for ever greater conviction about the need for responsible cooperation. The problems looming on the horizon are complex and time is short. In order to face this situation effectively, there is a need to act in harmony. One area where there is a particular need to intensify dialogue between nations is that of the *stewardship of the earth´s energy resources*. The technologically advanced countries are facing two pressing needs in this regard: on the one hand, to reassess the high levels of consumption due to the present model of development, and on the other hand to invest sufficient resources in the search for alternative sources of energy and for greater energy efficiency. The emerging counties are hungry for energy, but at times this hunger is met in a way harmful to poor countries which, due to their insufficient infrastructures, including their technological infrastructures, are forced to undersell the energy resources they do possess. At times, their very political freedom is compromised by forms of protectorate or, in any case, by forms of conditioning which appear clearly humiliating. *Family, human community and economy* 9. An essential condition for peace within individual families is that they should be built upon the solid foundation of shared spiritual and ethical values. Yet it must be added that the family experiences authentic peace when no one lacks what is needed, and when the family patrimony—the fruit of the labour of some, the savings of others, and the active cooperation of all—is well-managed in a spirit of solidarity, without extravagance and without waste. The peace of the family, then, requires an *openness to a transcendent patrimony of values*, and at the same time a concern for the prudent management of both material goods and inter-personal relationships. The failure of the latter results in

the breakdown of reciprocal trust in the face of the uncertainty threatening the future of the nuclear family. 10. Something similar must be said for that other family which is humanity as a whole. The human family, which today is increasingly unified as a result of globalization, also needs, in addition to a foundation of shared values, an economy capable of responding effectively to the requirements of a common good which is now planetary in scope. Here too, a comparison with the natural family proves helpful. Honest and straightforward relationships need to be promoted between individual persons and between peoples, thus enabling everyone to cooperate on a just and equal footing. Efforts must also be made to ensure a *prudent use of resources* and an *equitable distribution of wealth*. In particular, the aid given to poor countries must be guided by sound economic principles, avoiding forms of waste associated principally with the maintenance of expensive bureaucracies. Due account must also be taken of the moral obligation to ensure that the economy is not governed solely by the ruthless laws of instant profit, which can prove inhumane. *The family, the human community and the moral law* 11. A family lives in peace if all its members *submit to a common standard*: this is what prevents selfish individualism and brings individuals together, fostering their harmonious coexistence and giving direction to their work. This principle, obvious as it is, *also holds true for wider communities*: from local and national communities to the international community itself. For the sake of peace, a common law is needed, one which would foster true freedom rather than blind caprice, and protect the weak from oppression by the strong. The family of peoples experiences many cases of arbitrary conduct, both within individual States and in the relations of States among themselves. In many situations the weak must bow not to the demands of justice, but to the naked power of those stronger than themselves. It bears repeating: power must always be disciplined by law, and this applies also to relations between sovereign States. 12. The Church has often spoken on the subject of the nature and function of law: the *juridic norm*, which regulates relationships between individuals, disciplines external conduct and establishes penalties for offenders, has as its criterion the *moral norm* grounded in nature itself. Human reason is capable of discerning this moral norm, at least in its fundamental requirements, and thus ascending to the creative reason of God which is at the origin of all things. The moral norm must be the rule for decisions of conscience and the guide for all human behaviour. Do juridic norms exist for relationships between the nations which make up the human family? And if they exist, are they operative? The answer is: yes, such norms exist, but to ensure that they are truly operative *it is necessary to go back to the natural moral norm as the basis of the juridic norm*; otherwise the latter constantly remains at the mercy of a fragile and provisional consensus. 13. Knowledge of the natural moral norm is not inaccessible to those who, in reflecting on themselves and their destiny, strive to understand the inner logic of the deepest inclinations present in their being. Albeit not without hesitation and doubt, they are capable of discovering, at least in its essential lines, *this common moral law* which, over and above cultural differences, enables human beings to come to a common understanding regarding the most important aspects of good and evil, justice and injustice. It is essential to go back to this fundamental law, committing our finest intellectual energies to this quest, and not letting ourselves be discouraged by mistakes and misunderstandings. Values grounded in the natural law are indeed present, albeit in

a fragmentary and not always consistent way, in international accords, in universally recognized forms of authority, in the principles of humanitarian law incorporated in the legislation of individual States or the statutes of international bodies. *Mankind is not "lawless"*. All the same, there is an urgent need to persevere in dialogue about these issues and to encourage the legislation of individual States to converge towards a recognition of fundamental human rights. The growth of a global juridic culture depends, for that matter, on a constant commitment to strengthen the profound human content of international norms, lest they be reduced to mere procedures, easily subject to manipulation for selfish or ideological reasons. *Overcoming conflicts and disarmament* 14. Humanity today is unfortunately experiencing great division and sharp conflicts which *cast dark shadows on its future*. Vast areas of the world are caught up in situations of increasing tension, while the danger of an increase in the number of countries possessing nuclear weapons causes well-founded apprehension in every responsible person. Many civil wars are still being fought in Africa, even though a number of countries there have made progress on the road to freedom and democracy. The Middle East is still a theatre of conflict and violence, which also affects neighbouring nations and regions and risks drawing them into the spiral of violence. On a broader scale, one must acknowledge with regret the growing number of *States engaged in the arms race*: even some developing nations allot a significant portion of their scant domestic product to the purchase of weapons. The responsibility for this baneful commerce is not limited: the countries of the industrially developed world profit immensely from the sale of arms, while the ruling oligarchies in many poor countries wish to reinforce their stronghold by acquiring ever more sophisticated weaponry. In difficult times such as these, it is truly necessary for all persons of good will to come together to reach concrete agreements aimed at *an effective demilitarization*, especially in the area of nuclear arms. At a time when the process of nuclear non-proliferation is at a stand-still, I feel bound to entreat those in authority to resume with greater determination negotiations for a *progressive and mutually agreed dismantling of existing nuclear weapons*. In renewing this appeal, I know that I am echoing the desire of all those concerned for the future of humanity. 15. Sixty years ago the United Nations Organization solemnly issued the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948-2008). With that document the human family reacted against the horrors of the Second World War by acknowledging its own unity, based on the equal dignity of all men and women, and by putting respect for the fundamental rights of individuals and peoples at the centre of human coexistence. This was a decisive step forward along the difficult and demanding path towards harmony and peace. This year also marks the *25th anniversary* of the Holy See´s adoption of the *Charter of the Rights of the Family* (1983-2008) and the *40th anniversary* of the celebration of the first *World Day of Peace* (1968-2008). Born of a providential intuition of Pope Paul VI and carried forward with great conviction by my beloved and venerable predecessor Pope John Paul II, the celebration of this Day of Peace has made it possible for the Church, over the course of the years, to present in these Messages an instructive body of teaching regarding this fundamental human good. In the light of these significant anniversaries, I invite every man and woman to have a more lively sense of belonging to the one human family, and to strive to make human coexistence increasingly reflect this conviction, which is

essential for the establishment of true and lasting peace. I likewise invite believers to implore tirelessly from God the great gift of peace. Christians, for their part, know that they can trust in the intercession of Mary, who, as the Mother of the Son of God made flesh for the salvation of all humanity, is our common Mother. To all my best wishes for a joyful New Year! *From the Vatican, 8 December 2007* BENEDICTUS PP. XVI (1) Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 1. (2) Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 48. (3) John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 40: AAS 81 (1989), 469. (4) *Ibid.* (5) Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 211. (6) Second Vatican Council, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11. (7) Art. 16/3. (8) Holy See, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, 24 November 1983, Preamble, A. © Copyright 2007 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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