



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL
OF THE "NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE"***

*Clementine Hall
Monday, 7 February 1994*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once more, the "Nato Defense College" has brought together a group of military and diplomatic personnel, and this circumstance offers us the opportunity for this brief but significant meeting.

In welcoming you to the Vatican, I wish to think that each one of you is a true servant of the cause of peace. Peace is a word and a desire close to everyone's heart. Or at least it should be, for it is an essential good upon which depends the well-being of individuals and the progress of society and civilization. But if we look around us, we cannot fail to be shocked at the spectacle of so much violence, with a corresponding grave responsibility lying on those who have led whole peoples into cruel and dehumanizing conflicts. In many cases, primarily in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, we are told that the indescribable horrors being perpetrated daily on innocent people are the inevitable result of long—standing ethnic hostility and hatred—the hatred of one group for another. But this cannot be the whole explanation. *War is not inevitable*: it is the result of a series of concrete policies and decisions. Someone, somewhere, makes the decisions which bring a terrible aftermath of death, injury, destruction and sorrow. The turmoil and bloody conflict which is shaking Europe leaves it not at all sure of itself. Europe needs to remember that its destiny does not depend on strategic or economic interests alone. It needs above all to recover its soul, in order to be renewed in its civic, moral and spiritual life.

The Holy See's constant appeals, and those of other religious leaders and men and women of good will, are addressed to the consciences of those who can do something to change the course of things. So far, hope has not been rewarded.

When every human means seems to fail, believers turn to God who alone—in the words of the Prophet Ezekiel—is capable of taking away hearts of stone and replacing them with hearts of flesh (Cf. Ez. 11:19). This is the prayer I make for you, and for all who are at the service of the cause of peace: that your hearts will always be ruled by *immense respect for the unique worth and dignity of every human being*, and that your professional training and skills will be used to defend and uphold the rights of all, especially of the victims of injustice and force.

In this International "Year of the Family", may God abundantly bless you and your loved ones. May his protection be upon the countries you represent.

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