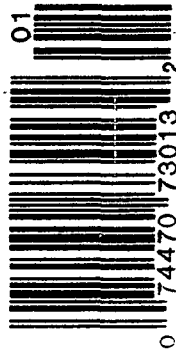


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Kids' Chronicle

Look for more letters to God in next week's edition of Kids' Chronicle.

'If You Want Peace, Reach Out to the Poor'

Holy Father's message calls on world to intensify efforts



AP/Wide World Photos

WAR



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BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

POVERTY



AP/Wide World Photos

SOMALIA

RACISM



AP/Wide World Photos

LOS ANGELES

POPE JOHN PAUL II
Vatican City, Catholic News Service

Here is a partial Vatican text of Pope John Paul II's message for World Day of Peace (Jan. 1), titled "If You Want Peace, Reach Out to the Poor."
"If you want peace..."

What person of good will does not long for peace? Today, peace is universally recognized as one of the highest values to be sought and defended. And yet, as the specter of a deadly war between opposing ideological blocs fades away, grave local conflicts continue to engulf various parts of the world. In particular, everyone is aware of the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where hostilities are daily claiming new victims, especially among the defenseless civil population, and causing enormous destruction to property and territory. Nothing seems able to halt the senseless violence of arms: neither the joint efforts to promote an effective truce, nor the humanitarian activity of the international organizations, nor the chorus of appeals for peace which rise from the lands stained by the blood of battle. Sadly, the aberrant logic of war is prevailing over the repeated and authoritative calls for peace.

Our world also shows increasing evidence of another grave threat to peace: many individuals and indeed whole peoples are living today in conditions of extreme poverty. The gap between rich and poor has become more marked, even in the most economically developed nations. This is a problem which the conscience of humanity cannot ignore, since the conditions in which a great number of people are living are an insult to their innate dignity and as a result are a threat to the authentic and harmonious progress of the world community.

The gravity of this situation is being felt in many countries of the world: in Europe as well as in Africa, Asia and America. In various regions the social and economic challenges which believers and all people of good will have to face are many. Poverty and destitution, social differences and injustices, some of them even legalized, fratricidal conflicts and oppressive regimes — all of these appeal to the conscience of whole peoples in every part of the world.

The recent conference of Latin American bishops, held in Santo Domingo in October, carefully examined the situation in Latin America, and while urgently calling on Christians to undertake the task of the new evangelization earnestly invited the faithful and all those committed to justice and righteousness to serve the cause of man, without failing to take into account any of his deepest needs. The bishops spoke of the great mission which must draw together the efforts of everyone: defense of the dignity of the person, commitment to a fair distribution of resources, the harmonious and united promotion of a society in which everyone feels welcomed and loved. It is apparent to all that these are the indispensable premises for building true peace.

Poverty and peace: at the beginning of the new year, I would like to invite everyone to reflect together on the many different links between these two realities ...

The inhuman choice of war

At the present time, there exists yet another situation which is a source of poverty and destitution: the situation caused by war between nations and by conflicts within a given country. In the face of the tragedies which have caused and are still causing bloodshed, especially for ethnic reasons, in various regions of the world, I feel the duty to recall what I said in my message for the 1981 World Day of Peace, the theme of which was: "To serve peace, respect freedom."

At that time, I emphasized that the indispensable premise for building true peace is respect for the freedom and rights of other individuals and groups. Peace is obtained by promoting free peoples in a world of freedom. The appeal I made then is

still valid today: "Respect for the freedom of peoples and nations is an integral part of peace. Wars continue to break out and destruction has fallen upon peoples and whole cultures because the sovereignty of a people or a nation was not respected. Every continent has seen and suffered from wars and struggles caused by one nation's attempts to limit another's autonomy" (No. 8).

I went on to say: "Without a willingness to respect the freedom of every people, nation and culture, and without a worldwide consensus on this subject, it will be difficult to create the conditions for peace ... This presupposes a conscious public commitment on the part of each nation and its government to renounce claims and designs injurious to other nations. In other words, it presupposes a refusal to accept any doctrine of national or cultural supremacy" (ibid., 9) ...

Poverty as a source of conflict

The number of people living in conditions of extreme poverty is enormous. I am thinking, for ex-

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