



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. MR AMITAVA TRIPATHI
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA*
TO THE HOLY SEE**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 18 May 2006*

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican as you present the Letters by which you are accredited Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of India to the Holy See. I thank you most heartily for the greetings which you have brought me from the Indian Government and people, and I ask you kindly to convey my own greetings to President Abdul Kalam, together with the assurance of my prayers for the peace and prosperity of the nation and its citizens.

India's ongoing efforts to build a democratic and free society are grounded in her conviction of the need to respect the variety of cultures, religions and ethnic groups which make up the nation and shape the aspirations of her sons and daughters. The Indian people are rightly proud of the stability of their political institutions, while at the same time recognizing the formidable challenges involved in promoting justice, combating all forms of violence and extremism, and establishing a climate of serene and respectful dialogue, cooperation and good will between the different components of their vast and diverse society. As the nation continues to enjoy significant economic growth, these democratic values should serve as the inspiration and the sure foundation for sound social policies aimed at enabling all citizens to share in this growth and to enjoy its benefits.

In this regard, I wish to assure you of the wish of India's Catholic community to share fully in the life of the nation in a spirit of collaboration and concern for the common good. You have graciously acknowledged the contribution which the spiritual heirs of Saint Thomas the Apostle and Saint

Francis Xavier have made to the growth of modern India, especially in the fields of education and human development. The Church sees these works as a fundamental part of her mission of proclaiming the innate dignity and rights of each human person made in the image and likeness of God, as well as an important service to the building of a just, peaceful and pluralistic society. When the gifts and talents of all citizens, men and women, young and old, wealthy and poor alike, are valued and developed, the way is opened to a future of prosperity and social harmony for the whole nation.

I very much appreciate your reference to India's rich spiritual heritage and commitment to religious tolerance and respect. In view of this commitment, no citizen of India, especially the weak and the underprivileged, should ever have to experience discrimination for any reason, especially based on ethnic or religious background or social position. The recent re-establishment of the National Integration Council and the creation this year of the Ministry for Minority Affairs offer practical means of upholding constitutionally guaranteed equality of all religions and social groups. While protecting the right of each citizen to profess and practise his or her faith, they also facilitate efforts to build bridges between minority communities and Indian society as a whole, and thus foster national integration and the participation of all in the country's development. The disturbing signs of religious intolerance which have troubled some regions of the nation, including the reprehensible attempt to legislate clearly discriminatory restrictions on the fundamental right of religious freedom, must be firmly rejected as not only unconstitutional, but also as contrary to the highest ideals of India's founding fathers, who believed in a nation of peaceful coexistence and mutual tolerance between different religions and ethnic groups.

Here I cannot fail to express the Holy See's appreciation of India's desire to settle through negotiation and peaceful means the long-standing dispute with neighbouring Pakistan. Last year's earthquake in Kashmir, with its tragic loss of life and widespread material destruction, showed the urgent need for joint efforts in responding to the emergency, providing relief to the victims and undertaking the immense work of rebuilding. Increased dialogue and cooperation should also prove helpful in meeting a number of other challenges in the region, including the threat of violence linked to political and religious extremism. As experience has shown, this troubling phenomenon, which is often the fruit of situations of poverty, lack of education, and scant respect for the rights of others, is best combated by concerted efforts to resolve these underlying social problems at their roots. Where the innate dignity and freedom of each man and woman is acknowledged, respected and promoted at every level of society, the foundations are laid for a future of justice, freedom and peace.

Your Excellency, as you undertake the mission of representing the Republic of India to the Holy See, please accept my personal good wishes for the success of your important work. Be assured that you may always count on the offices of the Roman Curia to assist and support you in the fulfillment of your high responsibilities. Upon you and your family, and upon all the beloved Indian people, I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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