



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. MRS TETIANA IZHEVSKA
AMBASSADOR OF UKRAINE TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 30 March 2007

Madam Ambassador,

I welcome you with pleasure, Your Excellency, on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Holy See.

I thank you for your kind words as well as for the greetings you have conveyed to me from H.E. Mr Victor Iouchtchenko, President of the Republic. I would be grateful if you would reciprocate by expressing to him my cordial good wishes for himself as well as my thanks for his warm invitation to visit your beautiful Country, while I remember the [Pastoral Visit of my Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, in 2001](#). Through you, I am also pleased to address my best wishes for happiness and prosperity to the Ukrainian People.

Fifteen years have passed since the Holy See and your Country established diplomatic relations, and important headway has been made. In recent years Ukraine, which has always had a vocation as a gateway between East and West due to its location on the Eastern fringes of Europe, has adopted and reinforced a policy of openness and collaboration with the other countries of the Continent.

The Holy See appreciates this perspective which helps restore to Europe its true dimension while assuring the conditions for a fruitful exchange between the countries of West and East, the two cultural "lungs" which have forged Europe's history and have left their mark in particular on its Christian history.

I am certain that the Ukrainian Nation, whose life, culture and institutions were deeply imbued with the Gospel subsequent to its Baptism in Kiev more than 1,000 years ago, will have at heart to

bring the dynamism of its identity to other nations, while preserving its original characteristics.

Indeed, in our world increasingly constrained by the urgent pressures of globalization, it is important to encourage a demanding and profound dialogue with cultures and religions. The purpose is not to level them all out in an impoverishing syncretism, but rather, to enable them to develop in mutual respect and to work for the common good, each one in accordance with its specific charism.

This approach will certainly make it possible to reduce the constantly smouldering sources of tension and confrontation between groups or nations and will thus guarantee all the conditions for lasting peace and development.

In this regard, I rejoice in the good atmosphere of relations between the Public Authorities, Communities and the Ecclesial Churches based in Ukraine. Believers in your Country enjoy religious freedom, which is an essential dimension of human freedom, hence, a major expression of human dignity.

In fact, by making a correct distinction between the responsibilities proper to the religious and civil spheres, the State recognizes the different religions and the various religious denominations. It guarantees them equal rights before the law, thereby permitting each one to find its place in Ukrainian society and play its own specific role for the good of the entire Nation.

One of the vocations of the Catholic Church is expressed in the importance she has always given to the education of the young, especially through the apostolate of numerous religious institutions dedicated to this task in the course of history.

For the Church, it is a matter of enabling young people to receive a solid and integral formation founded on Christian ethical principles, and thus on the fundamental dignity of the human being created in God's image. They will thus be able to find a way to personal, moral and spiritual fulfilment.

They will also be better equipped to take on their role in society in the future, with the ongoing concern to further respect for human dignity in its different expressions, in the areas of politics, economics and bioethics.

The Catholic Church desires to play an active part in this great educational mission, putting her experience at the service of all and being in contact with other Christian confessions, as demonstrated by the collaboration successfully undertaken and achieved in the context of the *Pan-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations*, with the goal to work out together a programme for the teaching of Christian ethics in public schools.

Theology, a university discipline

I am also eager to express my pleasure in the prerogative the Ministry of Education has recently granted to the Catholic University of Ukraine to award the Bachelor's Degree and Licentiate in Theology. This is obviously an important event for the life of the Church in Ukraine because by their decision the Ukrainian Authorities have recognized the status of theology as a university discipline.

Madam Ambassador, permit me once again to greet through you the Catholic community that lives in Ukraine. It belongs to the two Rites, Byzantine and Latin. Furthermore, it has very much at heart the ongoing dialogue between both traditions, Eastern and Western, which are part of the life of the Catholic Church and have shaped the history of the European Continent as well as that of your Country.

I thank the President of the Republic in particular for his cordial attention to the Bishops of the Latin-Rite Bishops' Conference of Ukraine, whom he recently met, and I am certain of the commitment of all Catholics in Ukraine to the service of the common good of the Country.

I know that they wish to witness to the Gospel every day through solidarity with the lowly, determination to build peace and a desire to consolidate increasingly the values of the family based on the institution of marriage.

I also know of their wish to advance on the path of unity with their Orthodox brothers and sisters, as well as with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations.

Therefore, I encourage them to show that they are always ready to support the ecumenical dialogue, which is so necessary to overcome the difficulties and achieve the long-awaited unity to offer to the world an ever truer witness of the Good News.

Your Excellency, at the time when you are officially inaugurating your duties, I offer you my best wishes for the success of your mission. You may rest assured, Madam Ambassador, that you will always find cordial attention and understanding among the different services of the Holy See.

Upon you yourself, your family, your colleagues at the Embassy and upon the Authorities and People of Ukraine, I wholeheartedly invoke an abundance of divine Blessings.

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