



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR  
OF GREECE TO THE HOLY SEE\***

*Monday, 17 February 1992*

Mr Ambassador, It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Greece to the Holy See. I am very appreciative of your thoughtful and generous words. I ask you kindly to convey my greetings to His Excellency President Karamanlis, who has entrusted you with the lofty responsibilities which you assume today. I offer you also my cordial good wishes for the success of your mission. You will certainly be at home in the Eternal City, where history and archaeology offer a constant reminder of the extent to which the Latin world is indebted to Greek culture, which remains a treasured inheritance not only of your own people but of all mankind. I am particularly pleased to receive you at a time when your country has joined the other members of the European Economic Community in signing the Treaty of Maastricht. This agreement represents a notable advance in the setting up of the new European community. It offers the peoples of this Continent a chance to share in creating and developing initiatives and structures of collaboration which, far from eliminating each nation's distinctive characteristics, will allow it instead to put its unique gifts, experiences and traditions at the service of others. The new European community faces the enormous challenge of assisting those States in which economic or political instability hinders the spread of the inestimable benefits of peace. Beyond the question of immediate economic assistance, a fundamental part of that challenge consists in giving moral support to those nations which, now freed from the yoke of totalitarianism, desire to enjoy their legitimate freedom but whose peoples have not yet acquired the experience of working together to serve the common good. Your country is blessed with an ancient philosophical and cultural understanding of the principles of democracy. The ideal of free government which inspired the City-States of classical Greece can be an inspiration to those nations which desire to live together in harmony and to build a society marked by brotherhood and cooperation. The conception of social life within the *polis* was rooted in a deep appreciation of the dignity of individuals as free persons. The thinkers who

contributed to the development of ancient Hellenic culture pointed to the inalienable dignity of the human person as the very basis of community life; it is this dignity which gives rise to each individual's right to be respected in his personal life, in his convictions, in his beliefs and in his choice of religion. The spread of these ideas was ensured both by the dominance of Greek culture in many areas bordering on the Mediterranean and by the fact that the great Macedonian leaders had extended Hellenistic culture to the East, as far away as the banks of the Indus. Your country's motto, "My power is the love of my people. Freedom or death", bears perennial witness to the commitment of the Hellenic Republic to the defence of the universal principles on which genuine freedom is based. Mr Ambassador, the diplomatic relations existing between Greece and the Holy See give expression to profound bonds of a cultural and historical nature, as well as to many shared views regarding the life of the international community. But they acquire a uniqueness all their own when we consider the origins of the Christian faith and the path which early Christianity followed in its expansion. You have mentioned Saint Paul's preaching in Greece, which in fact forms a constitutive part of the Church's doctrine. You have also referred to the saintly Brothers Cyril and Methodius, heirs of the faith but also of the culture of Ancient Greece, continued by Byzantium. Commemorating the eleventh centenary of their achievements, I wrote: "Their work is an outstanding contribution to the formation of the common Christian roots of Europe, roots which by their strength and vitality are one of the most solid points of reference, which no serious attempt to reconstruct in a new and relevant way the unity of the Continent can ignore" (John Paul II, *Slavorum Apostoli*, 25). The strength of European unity today is not unrelated to the role which the Christian faith played in the development of a European identity and continues to play in forming the ethos capable of inspiring the movement towards greater integration. The emergence of a Europe more deeply rooted in justice and solidarity depends greatly on the united witness of all Christians. It is essential in these last years of the Second Millennium that Catholic and Orthodox Christians be committed to building that communion and understanding which are so ardently desired after the painful separation which occurred nearly a thousand years ago. The Brothers from Salonika are as it were the champions and patrons of the ecumenical endeavours of the sister Churches of East and West (Cf. *ibid.* 27). As I have said on many occasions, the ecumenical commitment must be one of our priorities. Misunderstandings and difficulties at any given moment should not bring our journey to a halt. The peoples of the world, and especially those of Europe, expect that all Christ's followers be united in professing and living his Gospel. May the awareness of the fundamental reasons for mutual understanding and cooperation constantly increase, and create favourable conditions for further progress in the field of ecclesial relations. For their part, the Catholics of Greece, as patriotic citizens, remain firmly attached to the fundamental values which govern civic life. They desire to be at the service of their country and to proclaim the Gospel together with their Orthodox Brothers and Sisters, bearers of the traditions and insights of the Christian East. Mr Ambassador, assuring you of the cooperation of all the Departments of the Holy See in the fulfilment of your mission, I invoke God's blessings upon you and your fellow-citizens.

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\*AAS 85 (1993), p. 269-272.

*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XV, 1 pp. 318-321.

*L'Attività della Santa Sede* 1992 pp. 101-103.

*L'Osservatore Romano* 18.2.1992 p.6.

*L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English* n.8 p.10.

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