



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr THIERRY MUÛLS,
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 6 July 1998

Mr Ambassador,

I am particularly pleased to welcome Your Excellency to the Vatican for the presentation of the Letters with which His Majesty King Albert II accredits you to the Holy See as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Belgium.

I was touched, Mr Ambassador, by your respectful words which express your desire to continue the deep relations that unite the Apostolic See and Belgium. As I recall the recent visit to Rome made by your sovereign, I would be grateful if you would tell him once again of my joy in receiving him and express to him my fervent good wishes for his person, for the royal family, for the members of the government and for all the people of Belgium. I ask the Lord to grant that your compatriots may live in a society where a spirit of solidarity and fraternity prevails, through the harmonious and united efforts of all.

You have stressed the concern of your country's authorities for the fundamental respect of the dignity of the person and of peoples in the sometimes delicate affairs of domestic or foreign policy. In her social teaching, the Church never ceases to recall that the management of public affairs must put man at the heart of the decisions of those responsible for governing; progress cannot be made to the detriment of persons and peoples, nor of authentic human development. Today we understand that a society which is totally subjected to the primacy of politics or the economy at the national or international level, that is, to a "mere accumulation of goods and services, even for the benefit of the majority, is not enough for the realization of human happiness" (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 28). Attention to every person and to every people is a fundamental element of public life.

It is also in this spirit that all the European countries must be more and more committed to making a concerted effort to

resolve essential matters concerning international co-operation. In particular, the different nations of the continent must face the serious situation in the Balkans; they must work more closely together to solve this conflict, so that refugees and displaced persons may return to their places of origin, that freedom of movement be granted to all and aid provided to rebuild houses and public buildings. More comprehensively, Europe is called to encourage and firmly support reconciliation among the region's peoples and to take part in the economic development of countries generally weakened by war. Peace depends on the common action in solidarity of all the partner-nations of a continent which, with the international community's support, will certainly strengthen the bonds between the countries.

You have just described some features of Belgian society which is made up of various religious confessions and cultures that are not only required to coexist, but rather to intensify their dialogue and collaboration in building a single society with many faces. Therefore the leaders' first challenge consists in presenting a social model which enables several communities to coexist with respect for their specific features but with the concern that all people share in building the national community, founded on the essential human, spiritual and moral values of its heritage, over and above particular interests. Many Belgians, especially affected by painful events, would like people to be better protected because human life is a primordial and inalienable value. To respond to this legitimate request, as well as to adapt facilities to the current situation and to fulfil their mission in the most appropriate way with all the inhabitants of Belgium, your country's authorities have wished to restore the citizens' trust by means of federal and local institutional reforms; trust in persons and in institutions is in fact one of the essential elements of democratic life. In this area, elected officials and State employees have a decisive role. They are called to ensure the triumph of moral values such as concern for the common good, equity, justice, solidarity and integrity, and to provide a disinterested service for their compatriots. At this point, I would like to acknowledge the courageous decisions made by the country's leaders as well as the humble, hidden work of men and women at the service of all their brothers and sisters.

Governments are invited to pay renewed attention to the young and to supervise their integration into the social and economic networks. In this way they will avoid the increasing marginalization of a growing number of young people, and will prevent, particularly in the cities and suburbs, the development of exacerbated forms of violence and crime which would weaken social relations and those between the generations. Likewise, the family, as the basic cell and essential structure of society, must be given priority in political and economic decisions. The parents, father and mother, fulfil a most important social role with their children. They are responsible for their moral and civil education. To carry this out properly, they need to be sustained and backed by the leaders.

In the areas of education, the family and health care in which she has a long experience, as well as in all the other social contexts in which the faithful are involved beside their brothers and sisters, the Catholic Church in Belgium intends to participate fully in the national endeavour, in a spirit of dialogue and collaboration with all people of goodwill and through her own specific role. I shall avail myself of your presence in the Vatican to greet warmly, through you, the Bishops and all the Catholics of Belgium. I know their deep attachment to their country and I encourage them in their ecclesial life, so that they may express the essential spiritual, moral and human values in their words and actions.

At the moment when your mission as the Kingdom of Belgium's representative to the Apostolic See is beginning and when you have expressed your satisfaction at being called to this new office, I offer you my best wishes. I can assure you that you will always find a warm, welcome and attentive understanding with my co-workers.

I cordially invoke an abundance of divine Blessings on His Majesty King Albert II and on the royal family, on the Belgian people and on those who are responsible for the country's future on the threshold of the third millennium, on Your Excellency and your loved ones and on the embassy staff.

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