



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE HELLENIC REPUBLIC TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 26 May 2000

Mr Ambassador, It is with pleasure that I welcome you to the Vatican at the beginning of your mission as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Hellenic Republic to the Holy See. In accepting your Letters of Credence, I wish to thank His Excellency President Constantinos Stephanopoulos and the members of the Government for the greetings and kind expression of esteem which you present on their behalf. I am pleased to note Your Excellency's determination to promote our bilateral relations in a spirit of mutual understanding and respect. I assure you that the Holy See is no less committed in its efforts to do likewise. I am also grateful for your words of appreciation for the Holy See's diplomatic activity, by which it seeks to render a quite particular service to the human family. This is a service motivated not by any national interest, nor by narrowly institutional or confessional views, but by loving concern for the common good of all peoples and nations. Nowadays, diplomacy must also face the challenges presented by globalization in order to overcome threats to peace and development such as the poverty of countless human beings, social inequalities, ethnic tensions, environmental pollution and respect for human rights and political freedom. These are the prime threats to stability and they are the questions which diplomacy needs to address. Efforts to address these questions will founder unless they are based upon an objective criterion of moral accountability. The effort to establish an international court of justice for crimes against humanity is one expression of the demand for such a criterion in international public opinion. Yet ironically, the call for an objective criterion of moral accountability is in many cases accompanied by the spread of a relativistic approach to truth, which effectively denies any objective criterion of good and evil. The root of this dilemma, with its grave consequences for the life of society, is the tendency to exalt individual autonomy at the expense of the bonds which unite us and make us responsible for one another. Society needs a coherent vision which embraces both the dignity and inalienable rights of each individual, especially the weakest and most vulnerable, and a clear consciousness of the fundamental values and relationships which ultimately constitute the common good (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 47). It is this vision which the Holy See seeks to promote through its diplomatic activity. Within Europe, such a vision is especially important at this time when there is a new impulse towards unity on various levels. The drive towards economic and political unity however will not succeed without what you yourself have called the spiritual edification of Europe. Anything less than a union based upon moral and spiritual values would be unworthy of the deepest traditions

and accomplishments of Europe, to which your own country has contributed so much. The Hellenistic culture which Christianity encountered in its early centuries proved to be the rich soil in which the seed of the Gospel took root and flowered in ways that raised the human spirit to exalted levels of thought and action. Greek culture has been a vital element in the shaping of European society down to our own days, and today Greece has a vital role to play in the process of integration now taking place in Europe. At the beginning of the new millennium it is not enough to look back upon past achievements. There is much that must be done. If Europe is to be faithful to its finest traditions and aspirations, if there is to be that new unity desired by so many, then Europe must draw afresh from the deep springs of true humanism which brought those traditions and aspirations to birth. This is a humanism which flows from the truth of the human person created in the image of God and therefore possessing an inviolable dignity and inalienable rights, including the fundamental right to religious freedom. From this vision of the human person there rises that true and noble concept of human society which recognizes that we are responsible for one another, and which therefore demands an ethic of solidarity. This is why it becomes especially urgent to construct an ever more deeply rooted ethic of solidarity and culture of dialogue, since these alone are the path to a peaceful future. Mr Ambassador, as you enter the community of diplomats accredited to the Holy See, I assure you that the various offices will do all they can to assist you in the discharge of your duties. May your mission serve to strengthen the bonds of understanding and friendship between Greece and the Holy See; and may these bonds contribute richly to the well-being of your nation. Upon yourself, your family and the people of the Hellenic Republic I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty

God.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XXIII, 1 p.968-970. L'Osservatore Romano 27.5.2000 p.5. L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n. 23 p.6. © Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana*

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