



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 10 June 2000

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome Your Excellency as you present the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador of France to the Holy See.

In your address, which particularly touched me, you show the trust that marks your country's relations with the Holy See. I thank you for speaking on behalf of the President of the French Republic, and I would be grateful if you would kindly convey my respectful greetings to him. I would like to greet all your compatriots, especially those who are experiencing personal, family or social hardships. In particular, I have not forgotten the many homes and businesses which are still suffering from the disasters that struck your national territory last winter. May everyone be assured of my spiritual closeness! Through you, I would like once again to extend a cordial and affectionate greeting to the pastors and faithful of your country's Catholic community. As I look forward to the next *World Youth Day*, I remember the efforts they made for the previous gathering, which bore many fruits; I encourage them to continue their spiritual mission and their involvement in society out of love for their brothers and sisters. For this they will be recognized as the servants of all, in that love which is characteristic of Christ's disciples.

2. In a few weeks your country will be assuming the presidency of the European Union for a six-month term in this year when we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the political agreement of 9 May 1950, an agreement desired by Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, your compatriots, and by Konrad Adenauer, which gave rise to a new situation in Europe. I appreciate the spirit which you mention and in which the French authorities wish to accomplish their mission at the service of Europe. It falls to your country to continue the direction of difficult work sites, to respond concretely

to the concerns and immense expectations not only of the inhabitants of the European continent but also of all their partners in the world who need help for their own development. The European Union is both a venture and a challenge; it opens the door to a future of peace and solidarity and to ever closer collaboration between the continent's different countries and with the whole world. It is important that the institutions and individuals called to exercise responsibility at every level always be concerned for the common good of the community of nations, by carrying out their mission as a service to their peoples, while respecting the rules of equity, justice and probity essential to every human being but especially to those who work for the *res publica*. In this way it will be possible to restrain the hidden networks which seek to profit from the great European market, in order to launder money from all kinds of trafficking unworthy of man, particularly from drugs, the arms trade and the exploitation of people, especially women and children. Resources, wealth and the fruits of development on the continent should be able to be allocated to the poorest people in the various countries, to the nations that are in need of further development and are still scarred today by the consequences of the economic recession and fluctuations in the financial markets.

These challenges, as well as the battle against unemployment and the protection of the environment, to mention but a few, imply that Europe must not be built primarily as a community of interests, but as one based on values and mutual trust, putting man at the centre of all struggles. All the vital forces of the nations are called to work for the good of all, taking care, in the different countries, to form the younger generation, which has high ideals as they showed in Paris at the last *World Youth Day*, so that when the time comes they can assume their share of responsibility. In this spirit, it is the duty of countries with a tradition of training in business management and civic life to offer their assistance to the nations emerging from a long period of isolation, to help their citizens acquire the political maturity indispensable to public life. It is also important to develop an ever greater European consciousness in our contemporaries which, mindful of peoples' roots, mobilizes them to form a community of destiny through a political will which seeks to unite them. This perspective will become reality only if greater importance is given to a global vision of man and society, which your country can promote by relying on its tradition, especially on the great thinkers and social leaders who have marked the 20th century and breathed a new spirit into it, thus helping to create a common culture.

3. You have just mentioned the question of human rights, to which your compatriots are very sensitive, thereby showing their attention to what is essential for individuals and for the national community. Human rights, in fact, are the foundation for the recognition of the human being and for social cohesion. It is first of all up to the public institutions to guarantee "effectively the rights of the human person, rights which flow directly from our natural dignity and, for this reason, are universal, inviolable and inalienable" (John XXIII, Encyclical *Pacem in terris*, n. IV). Among these rights, the right to life is essential, as is respect for life and the support of the family, the basic cell of society.

The lengthening of life also requires special attention for the elderly, so that they can live in decent conditions and benefit from the necessary care and support until the natural end of their lives. In fact, how could individuals in a nation trust one another, if they were not guaranteed what is everyone's most precious possession, i.e., his own life, which cannot be subjected simply to criteria of efficiency and profitability or to purely arbitrary decisions? In the name of human rights it is a country's duty and an honour for its institutions to support and defend every human being against whatever belittles his dignity and rights and to provide him with spiritual, human and material aid, so that everyone can have a happy and dignified life and no one will be marginalized. In this regard, I am aware of your compatriots' devotion to the defence and dignity of children. Many associations are working to that effect. I can only encourage them to continue their efforts, especially so that every child can be born, enjoy a family with a father and mother who will help him grow personally, form balanced and balancing human relationships and not be subject to shameful exploitation.

4. As for young people, it is important that their formation and education take place in a context which enables their personalities to develop. I wish to salute the work of the social services, teachers and educators who are patiently and persistently dedicated to guiding young people and creating the conditions that will make teaching accessible to all and control the scourges which mark modern society, such as violence and drugs. This service is essential to the nation, to which all educational institutions should make their contribution. You know the part played for many years in this area by the Church in France, in conjunction with all her partners, in the world of education, in trusting dialogue and mutual esteem, with the primary concern of serving individuals and the national community, while contributing her specific nature and characteristics and receiving the guarantees and support necessary to accomplish this task of national interest. She fervently hopes to pursue this mission, out of respect for her convictions, in order to give the young people and families who so desire, not only a quality education, but the philosophical, theological and spiritual perspectives that correspond to her vision of the human person and to the teaching of the Magisterium, while respecting the rules of secular society that give a juridical basis to the service of education and to freedom in your country, by permitting autonomy in earthly affairs and allowing religious denominations to carry out their mission. French law also guarantees this freedom by offering families the possibility of religious education for their children during free periods in their school schedule. All the partners should be concerned that possible changes in the school curriculum will allow this freedom in conformity with the laws in force, while respecting the schedules and rhythms of the children and their families. This perspective fulfils the wish that education not be a mere apprenticeship in scientific and technical knowledge but the transmission of know-how, savoir-vivre and values, based on a spiritual and moral outlook that allows the meaning of life to be perceived and, as you have stressed, are part of your country's heritage.

5. As I have often recalled, the first human right is religious freedom, in the full sense of the term. It means a freedom that is not limited to the private sphere. This freedom presupposes on the part of the authorities and the entire national community, especially the school and the media, which have

an important role in transmitting ideas and in forming opinions, an express desire to give individuals and institutions the possibility to develop their religious life, to pass on their beliefs and values and to participate in the different levels of social life and in consultative bodies without being excluded for religious or philosophical reasons, according to the rules of a State governed by law. Ridiculing religious beliefs or discrediting this or that religious practice and the values held by a considerable number of people seriously injures the individuals who profess them, represents a form of exclusion contrary to respect for fundamental human values and seriously destabilizes society, where a certain form of pluralism in thought and action should exist, as well as an attitude of fraternal kindness. It can only create a climate of tension, intolerance, opposition and suspicion, hardly favourable to social peace. I therefore encourage all of society's leaders to be attentive to respect for individual freedoms. I invite the media especially to renew their vigilance in this area, and to deal fairly and objectively with the various religious confessions.

6. Among the many missions awaiting you and which you have just recalled, you must continue the work undertaken by your predecessor to accommodate French-speaking pilgrims during the Great Jubilee and to foster the development and vitality of the French community. In this regard, I would like to repeat to you how much I appreciate your embassy's involvement in the preparations for *World Youth Day*, to be held this coming August, and I salute the investments made so that the young people can derive much benefit from this important spiritual and ecclesial time. This action shows the attention that your country's authorities pay to France's active presence in Rome and throughout the world, in line with what has been done by your compatriots who down the centuries have actively spread culture and faith to all the continents.

As you officially begin your mission, I offer you, Mr Ambassador, my best wishes. I can assure you that my assistants will endeavour to give you and all the members of your embassy the help you may need. I ask God to support the people of France so that they will find true happiness and will continue to work generously for peace and understanding among their compatriots and among all peoples. I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, to your loved ones and to all those who are called to work with you.

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