



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF JAPAN TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 29 October 2001

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am delighted to welcome Your Excellency on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters by which His Majesty Emperor Akihito accredits you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the Holy See. I thank you for having brought the greetings of your Sovereign. I ask you to convey my best wishes to His Majesty and the imperial family. I also wish through you to greet the Japanese people and leaders cordially, and I ask Almighty God to bless the efforts to build a more fraternal and united society, for the good of the nation and of all the countries in the region.

2. Mr Ambassador, I am particularly receptive to your words on what the Church lived during the Great Jubilee and to your appreciation of the Holy See's action on behalf of respect for human life, for peace and for harmony among all peoples. You have just expressed your deep concern, shared everywhere as well, about the events which in recent weeks have threatened world peace and for millions of people became a source of terrible anxiety. The history of your nation during the 20th century, especially thinking of the somber days of Hiroshima and Nagasaki whose photographic coverage, showing the distress of adults and children, had global repercussions, continues to haunt the conscience of the whole international community. This is why the deep and active concern for peace of Japanese society is something shared by all peoples, so they can do all that is possible at a personal, community and institutional level to ensure that the cause of peace and fraternity triumph, and that all decisions be made in view of the common good of humanity. Since numerous areas of tension persist and develop in recent times, I strongly appeal to all men of good will to adopt dialogue and collaboration as the way to recognize the right of each people to its own land and the right of each person to live in peace. Trust between persons

and between peoples will make terrorism retreat forever. Terrorism can never lead to the acknowledgement of a group of people or an ideology, nor lead to a new form of government in a country or region.

Indeed, the use of violence in all its forms is not conducive to settling conflicts nor to establishing a society that respects its members. On the contrary, through the wounds violence inflicts, it prevents peaceful social life and it reduces to nothing the most fundamental rights of the person and of peoples to peace and an integral and shared development. The religious, spiritual, cultural and human values that are at the base of Japanese and other societies, such as respect for creation and life, the eagerness to work, a profound sense of solidarity, the capacity to be open to transcendence, are essential to building the civilization of love and peace; they hold a special place in the activities of social and political institutions, they can transform from within the political, economic, social and cultural life and give it a human dimension that ensures fuller service to mankind and the family.

3. Mr Ambassador, you have recalled that dialogue between civilizations is a necessary condition for peace. In order to resolve calmly the conflicts and tensions taking place in Asia, dialogue must be carried out in a special way through an exchange between peoples, cultures, religious and philosophical traditions, respecting the legitimate freedom of persons and peoples, especially in the sector of religion, so that religion may never be a pretext for acts that undermine respect for human beings and for the human community. In Japan, as elsewhere, the challenge of dialogue between cultures rests particularly on "the recognition that there are values which are common to all cultures because they are rooted in the nature of the person". Therefore it is essential "to nurture that intrinsically universal cultural "soil" which makes for fruitful and constructive dialogue. The different religions too can and ought to contribute decisively to this process" (*Message for the World Day of Peace 2001*, n. 16).

4. The Catholic Church, by the mission received from Christ, actively participates in this dialogue, in order to contribute, with all men of good will, to the building of a united human community. I appreciate the great esteem and the high reputation of the Catholic Church in Japan, especially in the areas of social assistance and education. You know that Catholic schools not only prepare young people and form their minds for a better mastery of knowledge, but aim to give them an integral formation, so that as leaders of social life, they can truly serve the human person and Japanese society, and transmit the spiritual and moral values they need for their development and that of their compatriots. At a time of globalization, it is necessary to sensitize nations so that they be aware that "the present reality of global interdependence makes it easier to appreciate the common destiny of the entire human family" (*ibid.*, n. 17). At a time when Japanese society has to deal with increased unemployment, a weakening of personal relations and social problems, the Catholic Church wishes to represent the meaning of life and the true destiny of man, by fortifying the spirit of mutual support among people, and by creating a greater sense of concord and justice among all the members of the nation.

5. Mr Ambassador, through you allow me to greet the Bishops of Japan warmly, since in the course of this year I had the joy of welcoming them on their *ad limina* visit. I also want to greet the members of the Catholic community. Once again I want to encourage them, and invite them to be, as were their fathers in the faith in Japan, faithful disciples of Christ, attentive to all their brethren, and, especially, to the poor and to young people, who are fragile and whose lives are insecure in a materialistic society. With all the members of Japanese society, they should contribute to build a united nation where each one feels respected, welcomed, and, above all, recognized for what he/she is and not for the value he/she might have in the economic order!

6. As You begin your mission, I offer you my best wishes for the noble task which awaits you. I assure you that you will always find that my collaborators will offer you a positive welcome and cordial understanding.

On His Majesty the Emperor, on the imperial family, on the Japanese people and its leaders, on Your Excellency and your family, and on all the personnel of the Embassy, I invoke the abundance of divine Blessings.

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