



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr. ANDREW EUSTACE PALMER,
THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF GREAT BRITAIN
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 26 September 1991

Mr Ambassador, I

It gives me great pleasure to accept the Letters of Credence by which Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II appoints you as her Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. I ask you kindly to convey to Her Majesty my cordial greetings and good wishes. I am certain that you will continue to strengthen and develop the close ties between Great Britain and the Holy See which made possible the establishment of full diplomatic relations almost ten years ago.

Your Excellency has referred to the extraordinary changes taking place in Europe and the world. Certainly, none of us can remain indifferent to what is happening on this continent. We are pleased but also concerned witnesses of profound transformations taking place in the social and political spheres. These are positive changes, for they move in the direction of greater respect for the liberty and self-determination of peoples. Nations which until recently were bound by force to a world order made up of artificial barriers, nations which lacked a voice of their own in the international community, are now eager to assert their sovereignty and pursue their destiny as equal partners in a new economic and political structure. I am heartened that your own country, Mr Ambassador, is acting in order to be of concrete assistance at this present delicate stage.

The current transformations can be largely ascribed to the changes advocated and introduced in the Soviet Union over the past few years. But they would not have taken on their present urgency and momentum unless they also reflected the ardent aspirations of peoples everywhere to preserve and develop in freedom their cultural and religious heritages. In the long run, man's innate need to strive for the higher values which genuinely express his dignity - values such as the

exercise of human rights, and foremost among them the right to life and freedom of conscience and religion - cannot be stifled. Recent events have given a new impulse to a universal human aspiration: the hope that cooperation and solidarity, not force, will govern relations between individuals and between States; the hope that dialogue and negotiation, not the use of arms, will become the only acceptable means of resolving conflicts.

The generally peaceful nature of the process of change which has been taking place demonstrates the maturity achieved by the peoples involved and their commitment to the democratic goals which they have set themselves. But the tensions and even violent conflicts which in some States are marking the process of change show how hard it is to overcome the injustices of the past in order to institute a truly free and fruitful form of cooperation. The Holy See encourages all efforts to end violence and reach a just settlement of current disputes, and it appreciates the European Community's policy of rejecting changes of borders brought about by force. We must continue to hope and pray that wisdom and solidarity will prevail over ethnic and political rivalry.

I have often referred to the need to overcome the prejudices or hostilities inherited from history in relations between majorities and minorities. Unfortunately, we see with what obstinacy such attitudes survive the passage of time. In a speech to the Diplomatic Corps during my recent visit to Hungary I spoke of the need to work patiently and resolutely to overcome this kind of problem. Indeed, for Christians this task is a priority: "they may not set it aside without being unfaithful to a central truth, that of the fundamental equality of all human beings who have been called to live in fraternal unity, beyond all sorts of borders. To reach that goal, a long road must be travelled; far from discouraging us, this must encourage us to undertake the journey without delay" (John Paul II, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, 5 [17 August 1991]).

These same thoughts and sentiments express my deep concern and sorrow with regard to the continuing tragedy of Northern Ireland, to which Your Excellency has also referred. The Church continues to condemn all acts of violence and intimidation, from whatever source they originate. Peace cannot come from injustice and violence; it can only be built on respect for the rights of individuals and peoples, and on a shared sense of responsibility for the well-being of the entire population. I hope and pray that every effort will be made to give new life to the process of dialogue, and that this dialogue will quickly proceed to questions of substance regarding the life of the whole community.

In the fulfilment of her universal mission, the Church constantly reminds people that there can be no genuine human progress except in respect for the ethical imperatives deriving from the human dignity of every individual, imperatives which are founded in man's very nature, antecedent to economic, cultural and political considerations, and which determine the only viable programme for the construction of a world truly worthy of man.

This solicitude for the ethical and moral demands basic to human life characterizes the Church's action everywhere, not least in the developed countries, which today perhaps even more than previously bear a special responsibility towards the peoples of the developing nations since they exercise a powerful attraction and influence over them. It is clear that in developed societies efforts to organize and legislate for the common good without reference to objective moral values have led to a widespread spiritual crisis, a crisis of fundamental values, one which has weakened the fabric of civic life and has left millions of people unsure of the ultimate meaning of their very existence and strivings. When, at the beginning of my Pontificate, I appealed to peoples and nations to open their doors to Christ, it was not a call to a merely private religious commitment. The foundations of European civilization rest squarely on the Christian Gospel.

Without an enlivening contact with the power and vision of the Gospel, the institutions which ensure the continuance of that civilization are deprived of direction and vitality.

The Church fully realizes that in the building of a more humane and peaceful world she has a fundamental role to play: to educate consciences in the demands of truth and justice. It is my hope therefore that in this respect greater cooperation between various Christian Churches and communities, and between Christians and the followers of other religious traditions, will help to invigorate public concern for the defence of life and human rights and for the responsible use of God's creation.

Mr Ambassador, I have mentioned only a few of the important issues upon which you will often have occasion to reflect in the course of your mission to the Holy See. I take this opportunity to wish you well in the fulfilment of your duties and to assure you of the willing cooperation of the various departments of the Holy See. May God's guidance and blessing be with you.

*AAS LXXXIV pp. 599-602.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XIV, 2 pp. 660-663.

L'Attività della Santa Sede 1991 pp. 796-797.

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