



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR ANDERS THUNBORG
AMBASSADOR OF SWEDEN TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 6 July 1996

Mr Ambassador,

I offer you a cordial welcome to the Vatican, and I gladly accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Sweden to the Holy See. I thank you for your kind words regarding the role and activity of the Holy See in the international community, and in particular for the good wishes which you have conveyed on behalf of His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustaf. I assure His Majesty of my own esteem and I pray for the continuing peace and prosperity of the nation.

Your Excellency has recalled the visit I made to Sweden in 1989 and especially the visit to Uppsala and Vadstena, which was as it were a journey to the very heart of Sweden's spiritual, cultural and historical heritage. For me it was a delightful encounter with Sweden's past and present. At Uppsala I had occasion to refer to the ecclesiastical origins of the city's renowned University and that institution's proud history of educating in a Christian humanism based on universal values. At Vadstena I met the youth of Sweden and of other Nordic countries, who are not only our future but also a serious, present challenge to our capacity to pass on the religious truths and cultural achievements that constitute the very heart of *Europe's identity and heritage*. The new Europe emerging from almost 50 years of effort, of which Sweden is an active participant, must not lose sight of the fundamental values of our civilization, which at Uppsala I succinctly listed as "the dignity of the person, the sacred character of life, the central role of the family, the importance of education, the freedom to think, to speak and to profess one's own convictions or religion, the legal protection of individuals and groups, the co-operation of all for the common good, the concept of work as a sharing in the Creator's own work, the authority of the State, itself governed by law and reason" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Coetus cum Communitate*

Universitatis Sueciae, 4, die 9 iun. 1989: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XII, 1 (1989) 1611).

These values are the result of a long and sometimes painful intellectual and social development, "a spiritual achievement of reason and justice which honours the peoples of Europe as they strive to implement in the temporal order the spirit of Christian brotherhood taught by the Gospel" (*Ibid.*). The Church, as the depositary of that Gospel, with all the glory of her great men and women - saints, teachers and founders, like your own St Birgitta - and despite the limitations of so many others of her members, was instrumental in creating the conditions which made that development possible. Is it any wonder that the Church looks to the new Europe with immense expectation and hope, and offers her accumulated wisdom for the difficult and delicate task of building a genuine culture of justice, peace and solidarity on this Continent?

Nor is this the desire of the Catholic Church alone. The progress made in ecumenical relations over recent decades greatly serves to enhance the contribution of religious thought and life to the common task. I am more than happy to know that relations between Catholics in your country and members of the Church of Sweden are solidly grounded in mutual esteem and broad co-operation. From my many meetings with the Bishops of the Church of Sweden I know that we share a deep and unfeigned desire to arrive at the ultimate goal of our ecumenical commitment, the unity which corresponds to the will of Christ himself (Cfr. *Io.* 17, 21).

The Catholics in your country, including those who are recent immigrants, form a small minority. Nevertheless, in union with their Lutheran neighbours and all people of good will, they play an active part in fostering those cultural and civic values which stand at the source of a just and caring society. In their faith they find the motives and resources for exercising their rights and duties as citizens who have the good of their nation deeply at heart.

Diplomatic relations between Sweden and the Holy See, formally established in 1982, have brought new possibilities of contact and co-operation in the service of peace and justice in the international community. I wish to express the Holy See's appreciation of the role which Sweden plays in programmes of development and assistance in needy parts of the world, its dedicated work in defence of human rights, and in particular the contribution which it has made and continues to make to the search for peace in the Balkans.

I am certain, Mr Ambassador, that in the fulfilment of your mission you will contribute all your personal qualities and skills to further strengthening the bonds of friendship and goodwill which unite us. I assure you of the ready collaboration of the various departments of the Roman Curia. Upon yourself, upon His Majesty and the Royal Family, and upon the Swedish people whom you represent I cordially invoke abundant divine blessings.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XIX, 2 p.44-46.

L'Osservatore Romano 7.7.1996 p.5.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n. 29 p.7.

© Copyright 1996 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana