



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 1 June 2002

Mr Ambassador,

1. I would like to offer you a cordial welcome as I gladly receive the Letters with which President Ion Iliescu of the Republic of Romania accredits you as the new Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. I express my gratitude to the First Magistrate of the nation you represent for the words of esteem and consideration he has addressed to me through you, and in return through you I offer him my best wishes and esteem.

The occasion takes me back to my long awaited and wonderful visit to Romania, in 1999 from 7 to 9 May, whose warm memories still live in my heart. On that occasion, I was also able to embrace the beloved and venerable Cardinal Alexandru Todea, whom the Lord recently called to his eternal reward. The warmth with which I was received gave me a glimpse of the lively faith of a people who, from the very beginning of its history, was formed by the Christian proclamation and made it the basis of their national identity.

After the sad and painful years of the Communist regime, Romania has started on the path of democracy. Concrete proof of the maturity of this change of direction is the peaceful alternation of political parties after the elections. I fervently hope that it will be a constant process, so that Romania may make its voice heard in a more influential way in Europe and in the world.

2. It is a widely held opinion that the democratic, economic and social reforms, which your country has been involved in for some time, have reached a satisfactory stage and, despite some discomfort, yield positive fruit for the good of all. Efforts have been made that, while favouring the internal progress of the country that is hoped for, bode well for Romania's incorporation into the

European Union as it desires, and for its entry into other regional and international organizations that will certainly help it develop in peace and security.

In this path of renewal, through her structures and in accord with her expertise, the Catholic Church is making her own intelligent contribution. Among other things, the Catholic community is known for its work in the fields of social assistance, education and health-care, as well as in the delicate spiritual ministry of evangelization and the pastoral care of souls. On many occasions down through history, the Gospel has been the profound inspiration of the Romanian people in many of the historical manifestations that originated in Christian faith.

In view of these important spiritual antecedents, how can I fail to encourage the efforts for transparent honesty that all the country's leaders are making? May the fulfilment of their duties in accord with the dictates and spirit of the law contribute to keep the pace of reforms from slowing down and keep respect for the rights of all from being weakened, and in the final analysis, prevent betrayal of confidence in the stability of State institutions. Moreover, the more united and solidary Romania is, the better it will be able to appreciate its different members acting in such a way as to avoid giving priority to any one ethnic group, but ensure that all citizens feel an integral part of the nation.

3. During my visit to Romania, I could see at first hand the good will that permeates relations between the Orthodox Church, the majority religion, and the Catholic Church. I remember with admiration the words of His Beatitude Patriarch Teoctist, a beloved brother of mine: in them I could perceive a profound awareness of our duty to work together to announce the one Gospel of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, in reciprocal respect and effective collaboration.

I know that ecumenical projects abound and that an atmosphere of brotherhood is being created in various dioceses. I pray that there will be more and more of such initiatives, so that we may obey Christ, who asks his disciples to be one (cf. Jn 17,11).

4. There are real problems, but with everyone's help they can be resolved. I fervently hope, for example, that the agreements between the leaders of the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and the Holy See may be implemented as soon as possible. "The end of persecution", I said on this topic during my stay in Bucharest, "has restored freedom, but the problem of ecclesial structures still awaits a definitive solution. May dialogue be the way to heal the wounds that are still open and to resolve the difficulties that still exist!" (*Address to H.B. Teoctist, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, 8 May 1999, n. 5; *ORE*, 19 May 1999, p. 3). With the necessary prudence, the Special Joint Commission must bear in mind the Catholic Church's real and urgent need to have sacred buildings available for her use.

It would strengthen respect and collaboration if the civil authorities not only help to find the appropriate solutions, but also to return, following a criterion of justice, the Church property that

was previously confiscated, so that the Catholic Church may use them for the fulfilment of her mission. Never forget that the greater the efforts made to heal the wounds of the past, that are potential reasons for confrontation, the more Christians will be encouraged to devote their energies to the good of the entire society.

5. Mr Ambassador, in carrying out her mission, the Church does all she can to lead men and women fully to fulfil their vocation. She wishes to meet them at the various stages of life: in the family, at school, in the world of work and culture, in hospitals and in every place where they live. Indeed, she is conscious of having a message of hope for each one and holy gifts to offer.

For this reason I hope that the State will permit the Church to maintain a constant dialogue with the public authorities, in order to reach agreements for cooperation in the various sectors of social life.

The Church is not asking for privileges for herself or for immunity. On the contrary, faithful to her own inner ends, she desires to serve every person in the name of Christ, and her mission becomes all the more urgent when a human being is suffering or in difficulty. Here I am thinking of the many problems of unemployment, emigration, the unsettlement of families, as well as of the obstacles that prevent young people from looking serenely to the future.

6. Mr Ambassador, at the time when you are preparing to exercise the important office entrusted to you by the President, I would like to restate that you will always find my collaborators prepared to give you the help you need to carry out your duties. I warmly hope that you will contribute with your mission to reinforce the bonds that already exist between your country and the Holy See, and I invoke upon you and upon the beloved Romanian people an abundance of divine blessings.

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