



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr PEKKA OJANEN
AMBASSADOR OF FINLAND
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE****

Thursday, 1 December 2005

Mr Ambassador,

I am delighted to welcome you at this solemn ceremony for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Finland to the Holy See, and I thank you for your cordial words. At the same time I ask you to convey my gratitude to Mrs Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic, for her greetings to me. I too send my best wishes to her and to the Finnish People.

Mr Ambassador, I am pleased at the good relations that have long existed between your Country and the Holy See. They have certainly made an edifying collaboration possible at the international level, which pursues multiple targets such as the safeguard and defence of human rights, the encouragement of an equitable and lasting development and the effort for peace. Your esteemed Country, proud of its independence, drew close to the European Union (EU) in the past and has now been a fully-fledged member of it for 10 years.

Thus, it can also carry out an active and valuable role in expanding the Union, particularly in view of the annexation of the Baltic States. As you know, the Holy See has favoured this opening of the European Union to Eastern European States since the last century; it was they that helped to overcome the arbitrary division of Europe which was contrary to the authentic identity of the Continent.

Today, it is important to guarantee and deepen this rediscovered unity. It must not be limited to

creating a great common economic space; it must also aim specifically to develop a European initiative through constant, dynamic endeavour, drawing from its age-old history and its cultural, philosophical and religious roots both for its own future and for its service to the world.

Europe represents a space of well-being in our fragile world fraught with dangers. Consequently, from an economic point of view, it is a rich Continent that will also attract in the future numerous poor people who come above all from the underprivileged regions of the Southern Hemisphere.

The European Union can correctly claim the right to be a union of democratic States that are associated with one another in a newly conceived form. For other groups of States it is a model to imitate because it is becoming ever more necessary to constructively join forces in order to satisfy the demands of globalization. Finland, which has always aimed at multilateral international relations in the heart of the European Union, can help the Union carry out its responsibilities in the global family of nations.

The Holy See, for its part, will endeavour to take a path of dialogue, both with international organizations and in places of tension between peoples and States, and thereby cooperate in solving the problems that arise between human groups and States.

Likewise, only an authentic development policy based on equitable relations between rich and poor countries will be able to remedy the innumerable and alarming injustices which cause suffering to many of our peers and can very easily spawn violence and terrorism.

Interreligious dialogue, as I pointed out with determination at the beginning of my Pontificate, is an irreversible venture for the Catholic Church, which "wants to continue building bridges of friendship with the followers of all religions in order to seek the true good of every person and of society as a whole" (*Address to Delegates of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and of other Religious Traditions, 25 April 2005; L'Osservatore Romano English edition [ORE], 4 May, p. 3*).

In the course of my Apostolic Visit on the occasion of the 20th World Youth Day in Cologne, I repeated and deepened these reflections with Representatives of Islam: "Interreligious and intercultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is in fact a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends" (*Address to Muslim Communities in Germany, 20 August 2005; ORE, 24 August, p. 9*).

It is very important that all the faithful oppose with determination and clarity the exploitation of religion as a pretext to justify violence, which violates human dignity and is therefore also in opposition to the Creator of all life. I assure you, Mr Ambassador, that the Holy See will spare no effort in its commitment at all levels for peace and the dignity of every human being created in the image of God.

I am pleased through you to be able to also greet the Catholic believers in Finland, who recently celebrated the 850th year of the proclamation of Christianity in the Country thanks to St Henry's evangelizing activity, as well as the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Catholic Diocese of Helsinki. The small Catholic Community, which is nevertheless well integrated in Finnish society, will pursue ecumenical dialogue for unity with Christians of other denomination, and at the same time will encourage interreligious dialogue, an important factor for achieving peace in our modern societies.

In this regard, the Holy See has observed with pleasure the promulgation in Finland of a new law on religious freedom, which guarantees real freedom of religion and gives religions greater autonomy and equality under the law, especially in the area of formation. Hence, the contribution that each one of them can make to the well-being of the whole people is being promoted.

I am sure that, with all other people of good will, Catholics too will witness to the dignity and greatness of human life that must be protected from its beginning until its natural end.

Through their behaviour and commitment, Christians in Finland also desire to witness to the value of married couples and the family, so that the whole of society may recognize the family as the primary cell of every human community which should be protected and supported. Thus, also for the future, the family will constitute the way to a happy and satisfying life!

Dear Mr Ambassador, at the beginning of your honourable mandate I wish you a successful mission, and at the same time, I assure you of the support and help of my collaborators. Upon you, Mr Ambassador, your family, collaborators in the Embassy and the entire People of Finland, I wholeheartedly implore the constant protection of God and his abundant Blessings.

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