



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr VALENTIN VASSILEV BOZHILOV
NEW AMBASSADOR OF BULGARIA TO THE HOLY SEE****

Saturday 13 May 2006

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you, Your Excellency, on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Holy See.

I thank you for your warm good wishes for the first anniversary of my Pontificate and the greetings you have brought to me from H.E. President Georgi Parvanov, and I would be grateful if you would kindly reciprocate by conveying to him my cordial good wishes for him and for the whole of the Bulgar People. In particular, I am praying to the Lord for the population recently tried by the serious floods, that they may soon return to normal life and enjoy the solidarity of the international community.

As you mentioned, Your Excellency, still today the example of the two brothers, Sts Cyril and Methodius, the first evangelizers of your Country, is a model of dialogue between cultures. It was thanks to their apostolic zeal that the Good News of Christ reached the inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe in their own language, and a new culture, nourished by the Gospel and the Christian Tradition, was born and was able to develop under their guidance through the liturgy, the law and the institutions, until it became the common good of the Slav peoples.

These two apostles, overcoming the rivalry and dissent of the epoch, have shown us the paths of dialogue and unity to be built ceaselessly, and they therefore also became the Patron Saints of Europe. Each year, on the occasion of their feast, a delegation from your Country pays a visit to the Bishop of Rome to commemorate them and to continue to weave, after their example and in their footsteps, ties of brotherhood and peace.

Today, Mr Ambassador, your Country is preparing to join the European Union. Because of its history and culture, the Bulgar People, which continues to make its Christian heritage fruitful, is asked to play an important role in helping to restore to our Continent the spiritual enthusiasm which it often lacks.

I am thinking in particular of the situation of the youth of our countries, who readily witness to their noble aspirations at the time of important gatherings such as the World Youth Days, but who have difficulty in finding their place in our societies that are too exclusively centred on the consumption of material goods and the sometimes individualistic search for well-being, while young people need spiritual and moral values in order to build their personality and to prepare to participate in the construction of society.

Your Country will be able to contribute its special stone to the common building, so that it is not only a great market for the exchange of more and more abundant material goods but also has a soul, a true spiritual dimension that reflects the heritage of so many witnesses of the past and may be a fertile terrain for life and creativity to produce the Europeans of the future.

Thus, the young generations will be able to rediscover trust in the future and engage without fear in long-term projects, giving birth to new families solidly founded upon marriage and open to welcoming children, learning to serve the common good of society through political, financial and social activity, and also showing solidarity with the least privileged and with immigrants who come from other spheres in search of shelter or another chance.

In our uncertain and troubled world, Europe can become a witness and messenger of the necessary dialogue between cultures and religions. Indeed, the history of the Old Continent, deeply marked by divisions and fratricidal wars but also by its efforts to overcome them, invites it to carry out this mission as a response to the expectations of so many men and women in many countries of the world who are still aspiring to development, democracy and religious freedom.

As you know, the Holy See never ceases to act within its own province to encourage true dialogue between nations and between religious leaders. It is primarily a matter of discouraging violence, dangerously on the rise today, mainly by breaking down the barriers of ignorance and distrust that can give rise to it.

Moreover, since Europe cannot withdraw into itself, it is right to foster equality in the distribution of wealth in the world and to bring about the real development of Africa, which can correct the injustices of the current imbalance between North and South, a factor of tension threatening peace. I am sure that your Government will be able to become a messenger of tolerance and mutual respect in the concert of nations, as you yourself stressed.

Mr Ambassador, I am glad to be able to greet through you the Catholic community residing in

Bulgaria. It cherishes the memory of Bl. Pope John XXIII who was an appreciated Apostolic Delegate in your Country, and the memorable visit of my Predecessor, Pope John Paul II.

I know the important part that the Catholic Church is playing in the development of the Country, especially thanks to the social assistance directed by *Caritas*, and I encourage one and all to continue to do their utmost to serve the common good of the Nation.

I ask the Catholic faithful, united around their pastors, to take pains to collaborate whenever possible with their brethren of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, whose Pastors I likewise greet, so that God's Gospel may be diffused. May they know that they can count on the encouragement and prayer of the Successor of Peter, so that they may find ever renewed joy and vitality in the witness they bear to Christ!

Mr Ambassador, at the time when your mission to the Holy See is officially beginning, I express my best wishes to you for its success. Rest assured that you will always find among my collaborators an attentive welcome and cordial understanding.

Upon you, Your Excellency, upon your family, your collaborators at the Embassy and the whole of the Bulgar People, I wholeheartedly invoke an abundance of divine Blessings.

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