



The Holy See

***DISCOURS DU SAINT-PÈRE JEAN-PAUL II
AU PREMIER AMBASSADEUR DE L'ÉTAT D'ISRAËL PRÈS
LE SAINT-SIÈGE, S.Exc. M. SHMUEL HADAS À L'OCCASION DE LA
PRÉSENTATION DES LETTRES DE CRÉANCE****

Jeudi 29 septembre 1994

Mr. Ambassador,

1. I welcome you with great pleasure for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as the first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Israel to the Holy See. The importance of this ceremony will be recognized by all, since our recently established diplomatic relations become effective by the presence of a Head of Mission of the highest rank, in accordance with the Fundamental Agreement signed on 30 December 1993 in Jerusalem.

It is a pleasure for me to recall today that in the past, like my predecessors, I have had the opportunity to receive several important figures from the State of Israel. While taking into account the differing viewpoints on certain subjects, these contacts have made it possible to progress towards the systematic dialogue that was entrusted over two years ago to the Permanent Bilateral Working Commission. I would like to express my gratitude to the members of this Commission; on both sides, they have ably devoted themselves to the deeper exchange of views that led to the signing of the Fundamental Agreement, opening up a new era in our relations.

2. Mr. Ambassador, I thank you for the words you have just addressed to me which deeply touch me. As you emphasize, it is true that diplomatic relations are not an end in themselves but represent a starting point for specific collaboration, bearing in mind the distinctive nature of the Holy See and the State of Israel. The study of various bilateral issues is continuing, as specified in the Agreement of 30 December last, with the establishment of two subcommittees which should enable us to progress together on the path of a collaboration founded on a solid basis.

Furthermore, this collaboration does not only concern the Holy See and the State of Israel; it also involves a trusting relationship between the Israeli authorities and the different institutions of the Catholic Church present in the territory of the Holy Land.

3. As you have said, over and above bilateral negotiations, the Holy See and the State of Israel, each in its own sphere and with its own means of action, must promote the essential principles mentioned in their Fundamental Agreement. In the first place, they are linked to respect for right to freedom of religion and conscience, an indispensable condition for the respect of every human being's dignity. They have joined forces to oppose every form of intolerance, in whatever way it is expressed. Most particularly, they are vigilantly working together to oppose all anti-Semitism, aware that we have recently been forced to observe some deplorable manifestations of it.

4. In many parts of the world, violent conflicts are unfortunately continuing to harm many peoples. The Holy See spares no effort, within the limits of its specific mission, to overcome opposition or resentment, which often originated in the distant past, and to open up the paths to peace. Without peace, integral human development is hindered, the survival of entire groups jeopardized, the culture and very identity of more than one nation are threatened with extinction.

Therefore, the Middle East peace process, which the Holy See has long desired, can only be encouraged. There is still a long and arduous way to go, but now it seems no longer utopian to say that mutual trust between the peoples of the Middle East can be established. Noting with satisfaction what has already been achieved by the leaders of Israel and of the whole region, I invoke upon them the help of the Almighty, so that they may continue their efforts with the courage of peace.

5. You have also expressed, Mr. Ambassador, the desire to see your cultural institutions intensify their co-operation with the cultural institutions of the Catholic Church. I welcome these proposals all the more gladly, since the university exchanges, already begun in different circumstances, seem to me to be most desirable. This is true in a general way, for intellectual life naturally benefits from them. It is particularly opportune, inasmuch as we have an important part of our cultural roots in common, starting with the writings of the Bible, the Book of Books, an ever-living source. Among Jews and members of the Church, the Holy Books shed remarkable light on the concept of man, of his spiritual vocation and of his morality. It can only be useful to both to share their knowledge in order to deepen their understanding of the Scriptures and to increase their knowledge of the civilizations and historical setting where they have developed over so many centuries, especially with the aid of archaeology, philology and the study of religious, doctrinal and spiritual traditions.

6. The particular nature of the relations between the State of Israel and the Holy See quite obviously stem from the unique character of this Land which is the focus of attention for the

majority of believers, Jews, Christians and Muslims, throughout the world. This Land was sanctified by the one God's Revelation to men; it continues to bear the mark and does not cease to be a place of inspiration for those who can make a pilgrimage there. Most especially, believers of the great monotheistic religions turn to the Holy City of Jerusalem, which we know today is still the scene of division and conflict, but which remains a «sacred heritage for all those who believe in God» (Apostolic Letter on the subject of Jerusalem, 20 April 1984) and, as its admirable name implies, a crossroads and a symbol of peace. It is also to be hoped that the unique and sacred character of this Holy City will receive international guarantees that will also ensure its access to all believers. As I had occasion to write not long ago: «I dream of the day when Jews, Christians and Muslims will hail one another in Jerusalem with the greeting of peace» (ibid.).

7. Mr. Ambassador, you yourself have insisted on the historical significance of this ceremony, over and above the usual diplomatic conventions. Indeed, a new age is dawning in relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel, by a persevering dialogue and by active collaboration in the areas I have just mentioned. All this will help intensify the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people of Israel and of the whole world. Important progress has already been made in mutual understanding, especially under the impetus of the Second Vatican Council (Declaration *Nostra aetate*). I hope that these Jewish-Christian exchanges will continue and be deepened, and that they will enable both to better serve the great causes of humanity.

8. Your Excellency, you have been the spokesman for the sentiments of the President of the State of Israel and the Government of the country, and of their wishes on a deeply meaningful occasion. I beg you to convey to the senior authorities of the State of Israel my gratitude for their message, and my sincere wishes for the accomplishment of their tasks in service to the harmony and peace desired by all their fellow citizens.

I also offer to you, Your Excellency, my warm wishes for the success of your mission and your stay in the city of Rome. Be assured that my assistants will always be glad to welcome you and offer you any help you may need.

As I bless the Most High who has made this historic meeting possible, I pray that he will grant you, your loved ones and all your compatriots an abundance of his gifts.

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