



The Holy See

**DISCOURS DU SAINT-PÈRE JEAN-PAUL II
À S.Exc. M. HISAKAZU TAKASE,
NOUVEL AMBASSADEUR DU JAPON***

Vendredi 4 octobre 1996

Your Excellency,

I thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for the respectful words you have just addressed to me and for the message you have conveyed from His Majesty the Emperor and Her Majesty the Empress. I retain a vivid memory of the cordial visit Their Majesties paid me in this palace in September 1993, showing the importance that they and your country's authorities attach to diplomatic relations and bonds of friendship with the Apostolic See, as well as their concern for its international activities, particularly for the sake of understanding between peoples. Your presence with the Successor of Peter and the very fact of your residence in the Eternal City are also an eloquent sign of your country's esteem for the Holy See. I would be very grateful if in return you would kindly express to His Majesty Emperor Akihito my best wishes for his person, for the Imperial Family, for the members of the Government and for all the Japanese people.

2. You have just recalled your nation's paramount interest in peace, disarmament, the peaceful resolution of conflict and solidarity among men. Your country remembers the painful episodes of the Second World War that struck countless innocent victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For this reason, it has a particular mission of peace to carry out among the other nations of the world. Recent history invites us to avoid personal and collective actions that can lead to armed conflict. As I stressed during my moving visit to Peace Memorial Park on 25 February 1981 and again on 8 May 1995 in my Message on the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe (n. 9): "To remember the past is to commit oneself to the future. To remember Hiroshima is to abhor nuclear war. To remember Hiroshima is to commit oneself to peace. To remember what the people of this city suffered is to renew our faith in man, in his capacity to do what is good, in his freedom to choose what is right, in his determination to turn disaster into a new beginning"

(L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 17 May 1995, p. 3). These tragedies must not be forgotten by the young generations, who should be taught about the meaning of human life, about peace, about dialogue and tolerance, the human values that undergird a nation's future.

3. You know the many efforts and appeals of the Holy See, which has signed the principal international treaties and conventions to reinforce the norms regarding the non-proliferation of nuclear arms and the total, definitive elimination of chemical and biological weapons, as well as all weapons that indiscriminately strike innocent populations. It is up to the international community and to each country to take courageous decisions at the political and economic level to halt the arms race, which will never resolve conflicts of any sort in a lasting way and with respect for individuals and peoples. The logic of weapons can only lead to an escalation of violence and disfigure man and the whole human race. As you have stressed, the quest for an ever stronger friendship among peoples and the recognition of an interdependence that benefits all nations must be priorities.

4. In its most recent history, your country has been repeatedly affected by tragedies connected with natural disasters or the irresponsible actions of people. On these occasions, the Japanese people have shown genuine solidarity. I can only appreciate the close co-operation between all constituents of the nation, in extraordinary circumstances and in everyday life, which is urgently needed in a world increasingly marked by poverty and by a growing number of people excluded from the structures of work and the economy. This concern for the poorest of their brothers and sisters leads your citizens to make decisions that do credit to them with regard to a fraternal and more equitable sharing of work and wealth within the national community.

5. While seeking to protect the most fragile individuals and groups from ideologies that can threaten people and that try to destroy their own judgment and conscience, your country's authorities insist that every spiritual community should enjoy freedom, thus allowing cultural and religious pluralism. For their part, the leaders of the Catholic Church in Japan wish to encourage dialogue between these different communities. The relations, daily co-operation and fraternal sharing between Catholics and their fellow citizens increase mutual esteem, recognition and love, elements of social cohesion and personal development.

6. Though few in number, Catholics want to contribute actively, along with their brothers and sisters, to the social life of their country. They particularly wish to carry out their role in the school and university, anxious to give all the young people they enrol in their institutions quality instruction and an education in the human and spiritual values needed for making personal decisions which will enable them to live a worthy life and to be responsible partners in a public life based on dialogue and respect for others. You know, Mr. Ambassador, that through her institutions and her members the Catholic Church has no other goal in international life than to defend man, his spiritual freedom and harmony between peoples so that human individuals and communities can find their place, grow and enjoy the wealth and beauty of creation. It is in this spirit of service that

Caritas, present in your country, comes to the aid of the most destitute people.

7. As you begin your mission, I offer you my best wishes and assure you that you will always receive attentive help and cordial understanding from my assistants.

I invoke divine blessings upon you, your loved ones and your embassy staff, as well as upon your fellow citizens.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n. 42 p.4.*

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