



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO FRANCE

MEETING WITH MR. JACQUES CHIRAC, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC

*ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*

*Tours, September 19, 1996*

*Mr. President*

1. Thank you for your gracious greeting and warm words of welcome. I am pleased to meet again the man who presides over the destiny of this country. I would also like to greet the dignitaries who accompany you, and in general all those engaged in public service in your nation, as well as the various people who helped to arrange my visit. On my arrival I would also like to extend my greetings to all your fellow countrymen.

2. I come as a pilgrim to meet the Catholics of France and to join with them in prayer in those places that are important to the religious history of their country and of Europe, in order to strengthen and deepen their Christian life and faith. As I make my various stops, I will invite them and their fellow countrymen to understand better the debt the Church owes some of their forebears in the faith, whose memory is still very much alive in the Vendée, Brittany, Tours and Reims. My first stop will be at Saint-Laurent-sur-Sevre, at the tomb of St Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort to pray with the religious communities who give public testimony to their practice of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. I shall also meet the Catholics of the Vendée. Then I will go to Sainte-Anne d'Auray to join the pilgrims and Christians of Western France, and thus meet the families who are the nation's strength and hope. As I said in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (n. 17), I look forward to the coming of the Great Jubilee. during which all those who follow Christ are invited to conversion of heart.

3. I am aware that French society faces many problems, such as the economic crisis, which is also

the case for many countries throughout the world. My thoughts go first of all to those who are suffering trials, particularly to those who live in situations of poverty, marginalización, precarious conditions or illness. Our heart cannot find peace as long as people are faced with these hard situations that weigh so heavily upon them. Our heart cannot find peace as long as we have not done everything we can to go to the aid of life's wounded, who must not be excluded from the life of society, and to offer them a helping hand as did St Martin, whom I will venerate during the third stage of my journey. The holy Bishop of Tours reminds us that the basic attitude of every human being must be marked with thoughtfulness and respect, with sharing and compassion for each of his brothers and sisters in humanity. In this regard I would like to pay tribute to the French who continue a long traditions of solidarity and brotherhood. I appreciate the help given by your compatriots to developing countries, who are undergoing so many trials. This attention must be accompanied, on the part of the Western world, by a new attitude that refuses to use these poor nations simply for the goods they produce. It is the special responsibility of the planet's richer nations to see that poor countries are the first to benefit from their own resources and economic endeavor. Your reference to this on one of your recent trips to Africa, Mr. President, was most appropriate.

4. The Catholic community in France has a rich history. In going back to their spiritual roots, the faithful and their- pastors are strengthened in both their faith and mission, they tirelessly pursue dialogue with all the components of the nation, especially with the members of the other Christian denominations, and with those of the Jewish and Muslim religions. For Christians, faithful acceptance of the Word of God is an invitation to respect each and every person. In their search for truth they wish to establish friendly and constructive relations with all the brothers and sisters of their own nation, regardless of religious beliefs. During my journey, I will recall in Reims the figures of St. Remigius, St Clotilde and Clovis. By accepting the Catholic faith Clovis, in his own way and according to the ideas of his time, was able to lead different peoples towards the founding of a single nation

It is thus fitting that, in keeping with its deepest feelings and beliefs, and within the limits of its competence and its particular goals, France should wish to honour the memory of one of the significant moments of its origins with civic initiatives, cultural events and religious celebrations. It is to France's credit that it is rising above legitimate differences of opinion in remembering that the Baptism of Clovis is one of the events that brought it into being. It is good for the citizens of a country to turn back to their history in celebrating the values that motivated their forebears and that remain both a foundation of their present life and an orientation for their future.

5. For Catholics, involvement in civil life means a sense of hope, a practising of their personal faith, a service to humanity and a participation in the fraternal bond among individuals, which is based on love. They thus take part quite naturally in public life and exercise their lawful responsibilities as citizens. They do this by promoting political freedom, working for peace and helping others «to live a truly human life», as the French philosopher, Jacques Maritain said (Man

and the State, p. 57). Faithful to the Gospel and the example of Christ, Christians stand side by side with their compatriots, truly equal partners in civil life, striving to act disinterestedly and generously. Charity, justice and respect for others are the source of inspiration and vitality for their involvement. That is why the Church is convinced of her spiritual mission, which obliges her to recall, among other things, the basic values of social life, man's calling and the transcendent character of the human person, whose dignity must always be respected. The Church also invites all citizens to work together to build a welcoming society, giving every person the freedom to choose the most appropriate means of taking part, with respect for the common good (cf *Centesimus annus*, n. 43)

6. France, one of the oldest nations of the continent, has an important role to play in the family of nations, especially within the framework of building Europe. Unity and solidarity between States are essential if peace is to triumph over war, if each person is to have his or her rightful place, and if peoples are to be recognized as living cultural and spiritual realities,

7. As I arrive on French soil on the occasion of a Pastoral Visit, I would like to say once again, Mr. President, how grateful I am for your welcome. I express my warmest wishes for your person, for your family and for your compatriots. Upon all of you I invoke divine blessings.

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