



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr PJETER PEPA,
AMBASSADOR OF ALBANIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 1 March 1997

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome you at a special audience for the presentation of your Letters of Credence. In addressing a cordial greeting to you, I ask you kindly to convey my sentiments of respectful esteem to the President of the Albanian Republic, to whom I offer my most heartfelt wishes for fruitful service to the welfare of the Albanian people.

As I take pleasure in receiving the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See, I also express my wish, Mr Ambassador, that you will fulfil the lofty mission entrusted to you with the same spirit expressed in your noble words and will reap the satisfaction Providence promises to those who work generously for the common good.

2. Meeting you, Mr Ambassador, reminds me of 25 April four years ago, when I had the joy of making a Pastoral Visit to Albania. Although it was quite short, this was one of the most intense and significant of my Apostolic Visits because of the tragic events your homeland had previously experienced. Indeed, only a few years ago a papal visit would have been absolutely unthinkable. Images and impressions of it remain clearly in my mind and heart. Naturally, I remember in particular the Catholic community of Albania, for which I had the joy of ordaining the first four new Pastors in the cathedral of Shkodrë, after long years of oppression and communist dictatorship. I likewise remember the entire population and especially my last great meeting with the Albanian people in Skanderbeg Square in Tiranë.

Mr Ambassador, through your kind offices I would like to assure the beloved Albanian nation and

its political leaders that the Holy See and the Catholic Church intend to show with renewed commitment their effective closeness and prompt solidarity, so that the progress of the country's young democracy can advance quickly and bring about the expected human and social development.

3. The Church's contribution cannot fail to be connected with her evangelizing mission: that is, sowing the good seed of the Gospel in the furrows of peoples' history, so that by welcoming the vital seed of saving faith, they can produce fruits of justice and peace, freedom and truth. This will certainly encourage the citizens to live together in fraternal love and solidarity. Particularly in Albania, where for a long period a violent, systematic deprivation of religious freedom was practised, the Church knows she is sent to carry out a new and, so to speak, "refounding" evangelization. Christ, the liberator of man, must be able once again to walk freely in the country's cities and villages, healing all those who are weary and oppressed, and spreading comfort and hope.

Only if the sense of certain basic values, beginning with the inviolable dignity of the person and of human life, is reinforced and recognized, will it be possible to establish democratic coexistence on firm and lasting foundations (cf. *Message to All the People of Albania, Tiranë, 25 April 1993*, n. 4; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 5 May 1993, p. 4).

As I could see during the above-mentioned Pastoral Visit to Albania, "recognition of this value centred in the human person will certainly ensure that in the economy the proper balance is maintained between the rationale of efficiency and the priorities of solidarity, and will make political involvement a responsible search for the common good, to be pursued always with full respect for all the ethical and moral demands" (ibid., n. 5: *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 5 May 1993, p. 4).

While respecting these principles, one can and must seek a solution to the problems of the present time, initiating a dialogue with all the responsible forces of society who, despite the many difficulties they must overcome, are working to strengthen the democratic system in Albania.

The Catholic Church wishes to make her own contribution to this effort, in a spirit of deep respect and loyal collaboration with the other great religious communities, first of all with Orthodox Christians as well as with Muslims. I renew my hope that believers will feel committed to contributing to the country's moral renewal, constantly witnessing to those relations of mutual esteem and cordial collaboration of which they are rightly proud.

4. Mr Ambassador, you have courtesouly wished to offer me the book you have edited, which documents the atrocious persecutions of the communist regime and the heroic witness of so many innocent victims, including many priests. I warmly thank you for this tribute, which I greatly appreciate.

The book gives me the idea of returning to a reflection of great importance not only for Albania, but for every nation. If the tragedy of the dictatorship should be left behind as soon as possible, the memory of the suffering and tyranny of that period should be preserved as a warning for the present and the future, and as an incentive to constant spiritual and moral renewal. At the end of a century in which humanity has experienced aberrant human exploitation and unprecedented violence, the generations facing the third millennium have a right to be helped in forming their own critical judgement about the causes and consequences of such phenomena, to alert them to and enable them to oppose the negative tendencies that unfortunately continue to ensnare man and even the social structure of contemporary society.

The memory of the martyrs is a positive source of courage and hope, because it shows that the forces of faith and love are superior to every kind of wickedness. In the end the victory is theirs. May this vivid memory of the sacrifice of her countless children light the way for the present and future generations of Albania, on whom I invoke the protection of Our Lady of Good Counsel and an abundance of divine blessings.

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