



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 8 February 1999

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am very pleased to receive Your Excellency and to welcome you at the beginning of your mission, as you present the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Hungary.

2. I thank you for the cordial words you have just addressed to me, in which you show your concern for the See of Peter. You also express the spirit in which you are undertaking your task and your desire to continue the relations which were re-established between the Holy See and Hungary in 1990. Please convey to President Árpád Göncz, as well as to your fellow citizens, my best wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the nation's peace and prosperity.

3. Today, after a long and painful period, Hungary has courageously entered a new phase of its history, while taking care to respect and safeguard the dignity of the person and the principle of freedom, especially that of religious freedom. In this perspective, I am particularly impressed with the efforts made by your country's authorities to provide the Catholic Church with the means to carry out her spiritual mission and to care for her faithful, particularly by returning unjustly confiscated properties. This permits the resumption of religious life, which is indispensable to the life of faith. At the same time, the Catholic Church is in a position to help build an increasingly just and united society. In particular, you are familiar with the concern of the faithful and the members of consecrated institutes to make a contribution to their country through works of education, social assistance and sharing with the most disadvantaged. For them, it is primarily a question of being involved in young people's formation, through teaching in public or private institutions and educating them in spiritual, moral, human and civic values. We should rejoice over the 1998 agreement in which the authorities recognized the Catholic Church's service in this area, since her greatest desire is for the advancement of people and the conscience formation of the young, who will be the future leaders of the nation.

In this regard, the joint commission, which brings together representatives of the State and of the Bishops' Conference, expresses the spirit of dialogue and mutual esteem which marks our relations, so that the questions still unsettled may be resolved through the good will of all and the desire to promote the common good.

4. I have wonderful memories of my meetings with the Hungarian people and with their religious and civil leaders, and I hope that the event you will be celebrating next year, the millennium of the Hungarian State's foundation, will be an opportunity for all to strengthen their unity and to look to the future with trust. Your compatriots know that it was their religious, cultural and human roots which enabled them to endure the times of trial. Today, by drawing from this cultural heritage and, as you remark, from their faith in God and their attachment to Christian values, Hungarians have the means to build together the society of the future. Among the saints and heroes of your history, you recalled St Stephen, a servant of God and of the people and the father of the nation, as well as St Elizabeth, a queen who served the poor, and the Bishop-martyr Vilmos Apó, whom I had the joy of beatifying. I also recall with deep emotion the figure of Cardinal József Mindszenty, who continues to be for all your compatriots a defender of the faith and of the people's freedom. Thus, the younger generations have before them witnesses who can inspire them in their spiritual and moral growth and in their participation in the country's reconstruction by relying on the essential human virtues.

5. The restoration of religious freedom can only foster the nation's renewal; it allows every person to express his deepest aspirations, and thereby to fulfil his vocation in response to God's will; it is also the basis of respect for others and their dignity. The family, the nucleus of society and the sanctuary of life, has an essential role. In this regard, Christians and all people of good will should be reminded of the primordial value of every human life, particularly the life of the unborn child. To destroy the weakest of beings is to attack every person's right to life. One cannot but encourage everything being done to help couples and families, so that the family institution will be the focus of concern for those responsible for public life, and that every couple will have the means to welcome and educate the children they are given.

6. The Hungarian people are making many efforts to seek justice and peace within their borders and in their relations with neighbouring countries. In fact, building a greater Europe demands commitment of all to developing true brotherhood. The minorities in various nations must also be respected, so that their specific qualities are recognized by the national and international communities and they can make an effective contribution to building up the nation in which they live. For its part, the Holy See continues to defend the rights of all peoples and is pleased with the efforts made to find a unity that will continue to respect the cultural identity of each country and foster harmony between States.

7. As you take up your duties, Your Excellency, I assure you of the full cooperation of all who work here; they will offer you the help and support you may need. May your mission bear fruit for all the

citizens!

I invoke the abundant blessings of God upon Your Excellency, your family, your staff and the people of Hungary.

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