



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR  
OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY  
TO THE HOLY SEE\***

*Thursday, 19 October 2000*

*Mr Ambassador,*

1. Please accept my sincere thanks for your very friendly words on the occasion of the presentation of your Letters of Credence as the new Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See. I cordially welcome you as you take office and I congratulate you on this noble and important task. At the same time, I ask you to convey my greetings to the Federal President and my best wishes for his health. You are beginning your service as the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 draws to a close. The motto, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever" has put the human person again in the light which lets his value as the image and likeness of God shine in full splendour.

2. Calling attention to the message about the inalienable value of every human being is particularly urgent at the end of the 20th century, especially since the last hundred years, soaked in blood and tears, will go down in history for their wars and conflicts as well. But in recent weeks your compatriots, the citizens of friendly neighbouring States and countless people in Europe and throughout the world were also able to commemorate the happy events which over 10 years ago had so carefully and, at the same time, so resolutely begun your country's reunification process that it could finally arrive at the memorable event on 3 October 1990: Germany - a united homeland.

The Berlin Wall had fallen. The Brandenburg Gate, which has been closed for decades and symbolized division, was opened and once again represented what it had before: a sign of unity.

The Constitution's demand that the unity of Germany be realized in free self-determination was thus fulfilled. We can rightly say: the Brandenburg Gate has become the gate of unity and freedom.

Through the gentle revolution, which had opened the way to freedom without bloodshed, great hopes were raised for over 10 years. The saying about scenes of prosperity, which had long been dismissed as utopian, has proved to be accurate - even if delayed - in not a few areas of the new German states. But unemployment and new poverty are the other side of the coin, which, seen from the obverse, shows the economic upturn and outward prosperity, the vast array of goods for sale and the strengthening of the infrastructure. Above all, overcoming the spiritual aimlessness and inner emptiness caused by decades of communist indoctrination is a task that cannot be dealt with quickly and requires every effort.

Many people have bravely accepted the challenges of the past 10 years and made their contribution, so that what is outwardly reunited may inwardly grow closer and closer. They see this as a school of solidarity, in which one can learn to support in word and deed those who want to put their lives on solid ground. I express my sincere appreciation to your country's government leaders and to all who, at various levels and in the different sectors of society, foster the inner unification of the once artificially separated parts of Germany and the welfare of its citizens. By joining forces it has been possible to deal peacefully with a difficult phase of German history. Barricades, barbed wire and orders to shoot, which once painfully separated families from one another, have given way to connecting bridges, unrestricted streets and open doors.

3. I am delighted that the heavy commitment to German unity has not obscured the vision of European unification. On the contrary, the reunification of your homeland even became an incentive for the leaders of State and society to broaden their view beyond Germany to Europe, to which the fall of the Iron Curtain has given a whole new horizon. With deep respect I realize that the Federal Republic of Germany is a respected international authority and a sought-after partner. Germany has accepted increasing responsibility and plays a crucial role in the European unification process. It is in a position to carry out its task effectively, since decades of experience show that the State's democratic institutions are solid and the overwhelming majority of citizens support them. I would like to take this occasion to express to you, the ambassador of a country which is certainly one the "pillars" of the European house, my hope that it will succeed, within the framework of the negotiations about expanded membership, in bringing the East and West of the old continent closer together, those two lungs without which Europe cannot breathe.

Through their preservation and mutual enlightenment, the variety of Eastern and Western traditions will enrich Europe's culture, as well as provide the foundation for the longed-for spiritual renewal.

Perhaps, then, we should speak less of the "Eastern expansion" than of the "Europeanizing" of the whole continent. What became German's motto after the collapse of the Wall can also serve as a rule for European unification: What belongs together should grow together.

These thoughts are not prompted by boldness or reverie, but by a vision based on hopeful realism. Precisely my three Pastoral Visits to Germany, a treasury of European civilization, have led me to an important realization: European art and culture, history and the present moment were and are still so greatly moulded by Christianity that a dechristianized or atheistic Europe is really impossible. At the same time, I am convinced that Germany and Europe have a future only if they know about their origins.

4. Particularly since your esteemed country remains aware of its own history in a kind of ongoing, collective examination of conscience and is attentively working on the "purification of its memory", it is especially sensitive to injustice and the disregard of human rights. Indeed, it can be increasingly observed in many modern democracies that a spontaneous propensity to violence precisely among young people is combined with a politically desired and organized ideology, which could weigh permanently on domestic peace. General appeals and pleas to learn from history are not enough to overcome the widespread intellectual and spiritual vacuum. What is called for instead is an attentive and sensitive culture of spiritual values among the younger generation, as well as a concrete work of reconciliation which not only offsets the past, but will help in the future to break down mutual prejudices and thus enable Germany to be a solid pillar of support for the common European home.

I realize that this plan sets high standards. For a Western European island of affluence must become more and more an all-European area of freedom, justice and peace. Material sacrifices will be unavoidable for the more affluent countries, if the tremendous drop in prosperity within Europe is gradually to decline. Moreover, spiritual help is needed to support the further building of democratic structures and a political culture in accordance with the conditions of a State governed by law. In these efforts the Catholic Church offers her selfless help to all in her many religious and social institutions. She presents Catholic social teaching as a guide for this development, in which the focus is on care and responsibility for man: "We are not dealing here with man in the 'abstract', but with the real, 'concrete', 'historical' man", whom the Church cannot abandon (Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, n. 53).

5. In this connection, I return to an issue that is very close to my heart and prompts me to raise my voice precisely at this historical moment, which is marked by rapid, tremendous scientific advances.

Since man is at the point of deciphering the complex blueprint of human genetics, what is called for now is to direct the course of science to a culture of life and love. Man may not do everything he can do. For "in our present social context, marked by a dramatic struggle between the 'culture of life' and the 'culture of death', there is need to develop a deep critical sense, capable of discerning true values and authentic needs.... All together, we must build a new culture of life: new, because it will be able to confront and solve today's unprecedented problems affecting human life; new, because it will be adopted with deeper and more dynamic conviction by all Christians" (Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, n. 95).

6. Thus there are two key points which I would like to consider more closely. The newness of the problem lies first of all in the context of freedom, in whose name many people think that you may do whatever you want. But freedom does not mean doing whatever you like. Whoever turns freedom into licence has dealt it a deathblow. Freedom requires commitment. Whoever is really free knows that his understanding and behaviour are bound to the truth. The first and greatest truth about man is that he is not self-made, but is God's creation. Just as man did not give himself life, so can no one claim the right - even on supposedly humanitarian grounds - to take his own life or someone else's.

This fundamental truth compels me tirelessly to recall the inviolable value of every human being, from the moment of his conception until natural death. I am pleased that the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany rests on the same foundation. It is inspired with the "awareness of its responsibility before God and men" (*Preamble*), and before making any other statement it recognizes: "The value of the human person is inviolable. It is the obligation of all State authority to respect and protect it" (*Art. 1*). Precisely when the value of the human person is at stake, the Church would like to

stand by the State's side. For pluralistic societies do not expect a value-free State.

That is why the Church makes an offer to the State that she understands as a service to man: he should be enabled to learn and to live a true freedom worthy of human beings. This is also why the Church is present in so many State institutions such as schools, universities, hospitals and barracks.

I am pleased to learn that the Church's outstretched hand has also been taken by the new federal states, which was expressed in the Concordat agreements that the Holy See has been able to conclude in the years since the turning-point with the states of Saxony, Thuringia, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Saxony-Anhalt. A framework was thus created for the Church to intensify her pastoral work for human beings in an area where talk of God had been stifled for decades.

7. Ecumenism, which you yourself spoke of, is another key point to be mentioned in relation to the newness of our time. Just as Germany is the country where the Reformation began, so there are also hopeful signs for the future. I am pleased to recall the solemn signing of the Joint Declaration by representatives of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, which took place almost a year ago in Augsburg. I see it as a "milestone on the difficult path to re-establishing full unity among Christians" and reaffirm that the document represents a sound basis for further theological research in the ecumenical field and for addressing the remaining problems with a better founded hope of resolving them in the future (*Angelus*, 31 October 1999).

While I never tire of thanking the Lord of history that we have achieved this intermediate goal, at the same time I consider it advisable to give direction to the ecumenical journey towards full unity, a direction which is more timely than ever precisely in view of the culture of life. Perhaps at times there has been so much concentration on ecumenism in doctrine and worship that the strength has been lacking for ecumenism in political parties and parliaments, in the social and cultural sphere. This includes a shared commitment to the kingdom of God which goes beyond the realm of pulpit and altar and includes everything - individuals, society, the whole world - in order to permeate politics, the economy and culture. Precisely the newness of the problems, which affect man in his personal dignity, cries out for the common witness of all who call themselves Christian.

This ecumenism of witness for the sake of an authentic culture of life is a service that Christians owe to their contemporaries. In addition, there are other issues such as the preservation of creation, the defence of Sunday and the sacredness of marriage as "an institution confirmed by the divine law even in the eyes of society" (Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, n. 48) and the protection of the family as the foundation of society (ibid., n. 52). For in the eyes of a world in which people live more and more as if God did not exist, "cooperation among Christians [must] become a form of common Christian witness" (Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, n. 40). Above all, when it is a question of human life and death, there can be no compromise for Christians, but only the compass of the truth which God himself has revealed about man.

8. I cannot conclude my reflection without expressing my confidence that the friendly relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Holy See, which you rightly stressed in your address, will grow even more fruitful. The close reciprocal relationship between Church and State, which both sides view with sensitive responsibility and from proven experience, and regard as enriching, constitutes a reliable premise for this. Mr Ambassador, as I cordially wish

you a good start to your new post in Rome, I gladly impart the blessing of almighty God to you, to your esteemed colleagues at the embassy and especially to your dear family.

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