



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF BANGLADESH TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 6 December 2001

Mr Ambassador,

With great pleasure I welcome you to the Vatican and accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Bangladesh to the Holy See. I thank you for conveying the greetings of President A.Q.M. Badruddoza Chowdhury and of the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, and I would ask you to assure them of my fervent prayers for the well-being of the entire nation.

Since the dramatic events of 11 September, it is clearer than ever that there is an urgent need for what you yourself have called "constructive dialogue to foster understanding among cultures and civilizations". Rather than dwelling upon what separates them, people of different cultures and religions must learn to respect one another on the basis of the many fundamental truths and values which they share. As I noted in this year's World Day of Peace Message, "dialogue between cultures... is based upon the recognition that *there are values which are common to all cultures* because they are rooted in the very nature of the person" (No. 16). And given that Islam and Christianity worship the one God, Creator of heaven and earth, there is ample room for agreement and cooperation between them. A clash ensues only if Islam or Christianity is misconstrued or manipulated for political or ideological ends.

Among the values which provide a rich soil for fruitful dialogue, one that stands out is the universal need for human solidarity. With increasing global interdependence, the common destiny of the human family and the urgent need for a culture of solidarity become more evident. Yet this growing interdependence has also thrown new light on the many inequalities existing in our world. Despite the promises held out by globalization, social and economic imbalances in some places

have become worse, and certain poorer nations may have reached a point of even further decline. For the sake of peace in the world, and in order to meet the demands of justice, these nations and their peoples must be helped, not only with immediate aid but also with the educational and technological support that will enable them to be a part of the process of global development and not remain excluded or marginalized. It is not a matter of dispensing favours but of recognizing the basic human right to a just share of resources. The promotion of justice is essential to a culture of solidarity.

Another point of quasi-universal agreement among the world's peoples is a yearning for true peace. Sadly, there are some in the world who want conflict, and they will always try to wreak havoc. But most individuals and nations are prepared to make the courageous choices required to build genuine peace. At a time like this, the quest for peace sets before the international community decisions which can no longer be postponed. Even the most entrenched and long-standing conflict can be resolved if the will to work for reconciliation prevails.

Religion has an important role in this regard. The view of the person and of the world which it teaches greatly determines attitudes and thinking in facing the challenge of building a properly ordered society. Both Muslims and Christians insist upon the essentially transcendent character of the human person, created by God for a higher destiny, and the need to respect that element of transcendence in each individual. They agree further that the Creator has also revealed a way of life, based upon what you rightly call "fundamental human values and norms" which have their origin in God himself. In a sense, it is in regard to these fundamental values and norms that Islam and Christianity can most fruitfully engage in the constructive dialogue needed at this time.

A clear example of the possibility of such dialogue is to be seen in the shared reverence for the value of life itself. For Islam and Christianity, human life is a sacred and inviolable reality, since it has its origin and destiny in God himself. Therefore, it is never possible to invoke peace and despise life, a contradiction found all too often within human societies and human hearts. In cultures of both East and West, rich and poor, traditional and post-industrial, respect for human life is being threatened and eroded in so many ways. A great educational effort is needed in all religious traditions to teach the sacred value of life and spread an attitude of respect for it in every circumstance.

In the values which all people share we find what I have called the "moral logic which is built into human life and which makes possible dialogue between individuals and peoples" (*Speech to the United Nations General Assembly, 5 October 1995*). This is the point where Islam and Christianity can and must meet, not only in a dialogue of words, but in a dialogue of service for the peace of the world.

Mr Ambassador, I am confident that the mission you are assuming today will help to strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation between your nation and the Holy See; and I assure you

that the various offices of the Roman Curia will always be ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. Renewing my good wishes for your success and happiness, I invoke the abundant blessings of the Most High God upon yourself, the Government and the beloved people of Bangladesh.

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