



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 6 December 2001

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome your Excellency on this solemn occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Finland to the Holy See.

I warmly thank you, Mr Ambassador, for the greetings you have conveyed to me from President Tarja Halonen. In return, I would be grateful if you would kindly express my respectful good wishes to her as well as to the Finnish people who are celebrating their national feast today. I pray God to guide the efforts of each one in the work of building a nation that is ever more fraternal and supportive.

2. You recalled, Mr Ambassador, that today Finland is celebrating the 84th anniversary of its Independence, won during the tragedy of the great war that devastated Europe. Your country, that has always been attached to the quest for peace, joined in the project of building Europe and today fully participates in it. As you know, the Holy See is carefully following this development that reveals a spirit of dialogue and negotiation, for it has enabled nations who were formerly enemies to take part first of all in a project of mutual cooperation and later, in a real community of nations. The common currency that will be in use from 1 January is yet another step in this direction. The process of the expansion of the Union to include new member countries in Europe is clearly underway and this is a cause of joy. Can one not think that what takes place on this continent could be an example to many other nations or regions of the world that are still torn by hostility and internal conflicts? I want to congratulate Your country that in this spirit and aware of Europe's moral and political responsibility, it is investing in a very definite way in the defence of human

rights and in aid to developing countries.

3. Mr Ambassador, you have also stressed how the international situation that our world has lived for several months gives rise to questions among the civil authorities of nations and among their citizens. Over and above the horrific and intolerable act of terrorism that struck the United States of America, this situation has brought to light the grave tensions that threaten the fragile balance between nations, the situations of injustice that have prevailed for too long, stirring up bitterness and hatred, that have erupted in violence among men and women. As you aptly put it, this situation is leading us to reassess today's world and to question ourselves about our fundamental values.

The European plan we are referring to was not born by chance. It has a history and a soul, forged by an age-old cultural, moral and religious tradition in which the Christian faith has an important place that no one can deny. And if, today, the European States live in accord with the principle of the legitimate autonomy of earthly realities, they cannot and must not forget the tradition that supports them. Europeans have a taste for freedom and a sense of the person, they know of human rights and of each person's fundamental dignity, they aspire to peace. They owe all this largely to their rich history. Europe is called to keep this heritage alive and revive the institutions on which social life is based, marriage and the family. Nor can it proclaim the inalienable rights of the person while at the same time allowing attacks on human life, at its conception or at its end or by manipulations that are contrary to the respect due to the human being. On the contrary, may Europe encourage in every sector a true culture of life !

4. Through you, I am pleased to greet Finland's Catholic community. The community is small and is used to living ecumenically with Christians of other confessions who are more numerous. I encourage Catholics to take their distinctive place in Finnish society, with confidence witnessing to their faith in Christ, developing brotherly ties through prayer and through a common witness with the Christian brothers and sisters of other confessions. I am delighted to know that the Catholic Church is appreciated in your country, not only for her spiritual contribution but also for her social and educational contribution, and I formulate the wish that the new law on religious freedom will make it possible to recognize and promote concretely a greater equality among all the religions officially recognized in Finland.

5. Mr Ambassador, today you are beginning your noble mission of representing your country to the Holy See. Please accept my cordial wishes for your success, and be assured of finding among my collaborators the understanding and support you need !

I cordially invoke an abundance of divine Blessings upon you, upon your family, upon your staff and upon your compatriots.

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