



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC
OF YUGOSLAVIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday 11 April 2002

Mr Ambassador,

1. It is with pleasure that I welcome you to the Vatican at the beginning of your mission as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the Holy See. In accepting your Letters of Credence, I thank you for your gracious words, and I ask you to convey to the President, Dr Vojislav Koštunica, my heartfelt best wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the good of the nation at this important and complex time in its history.

2. The conflict which occurred in your country left in its wake, as you say, "material and moral damage", with an entire society in need of rebuilding. This is a long and difficult process which, I am pleased to note, is already under way in Serbia and Montenegro; but great determination and patience on the part of the people and continuing solidarity from beyond your borders are required if this process is to come to full term.

In the first place, there is *a need for reconciliation within Yugoslavia itself*, so that all may work together, with respect for one another's differences, to rebuild society and the common good. This is never easy, and it is made still more difficult in the case of Yugoslavia because of the instability and conflicts which followed the collapse of the former regime based on atheistic materialism.

As the process of reconciliation and, in a real sense, of authentic peace-making goes forward, there is a need to put aside ethnic and nationalistic introversion, and to further build a Nation whose democratic institutions, while sustaining unity, ensure that all its peoples, especially the minorities, are active and equal participants in the political and economic life of their communities.

3. Looking further afield, it is important to pursue *the process of reconciliation within the Balkan region as a whole*, and to reject definitively any resort to violence as a way of settling disputes. Your own country has known better than most through its history that violence begets more violence, and that *dialogue alone can break that death-dealing spiral*. The ethnic and religious differences in the region are real, and many of the antagonisms have deep historical roots, which at times make the prospect of true and lasting peace seem remote.

In my [Message for the 2001 World Day of Peace](#), I noted that "in the past, cultural differences have often been a source of misunderstanding between peoples and the cause of conflicts and wars" (No. 8); yet I went on to insist that "dialogue between cultures [is] a privileged means for building the civilization of love" and that this dialogue "is based upon the recognition that there are values which are common to all cultures because they are rooted in the nature of the person" (*ibid.*, 16). Among these universal values, I named *solidarity, peace, life and education*, and for the peoples of Yugoslavia these are the beacons lighting the path into the future. I would also echo my [Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace](#), which stresses *forgiveness as an overarching value*, for there is no peace without justice, and there is no justice without forgiveness; and there will only be true healing for those many "wounded souls" whom you have mentioned if there is forgiveness and reconciliation.

The need to build bridges extends beyond the Balkan region to *the whole of Europe*. The continent's efforts to build a new kind of unity require, as you have observed, "full integration of Southeastern Europe into a new political, economic and cultural structure". *Europe needs the Balkan nations, and they need Europe*. This is a fact which recent antagonisms may have obscured, but upon which history and culture insist.

4. The Catholic Church, faithful to the spiritual and ethical principles of her universal mission, seeks to promote not some narrow ideological or national interest but *the full development of all peoples, with particular attention to and solidarity with those most in need*. That is why, with her ethos of communion and long experience of negotiating differences, the Church is deeply committed, through her religious and cultural action, to cooperate with Yugoslavia as it develops a mature and forward-looking democracy based on respect for the dignity, freedom and rights of every human person.

It is important for all to recognize that in a situation such as the one you face, *religion is not the root of the problem, but an essential part of its solution*. At the recent Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, I stressed that "religions are at the service of peace" and that it is their duty "to foster in the people of our time a renewed sense of the urgency of building peace" ([Address](#), 24 January 2002, No. 3). That is why I am pleased that religious education has been re-introduced in Serbian schools, for it provides a special opportunity to teach the young those universal values which are rooted in the nature of the person and ultimately in God. In this way citizens are trained in a genuine humanism and culture of peace. Religious education also *opens the young to*

transcendence in a way that would make any relapse into the soul-destroying world of atheistic materialism more difficult.

5. Mr Ambassador, as you enter the community of diplomats accredited to the Holy See, I assure you of the ready collaboration of the various Offices of the Roman Curia. May your mission serve to strengthen the bond of friendship and co-operation between your Government and the Holy See; and may that bond contribute richly to the well-being of your nation at this decisive time. Upon Your Excellency and the beloved peoples of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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