



The Holy See

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

Friday, 28 June 2002

Mr Ambassador,

As I accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the Holy See, I offer you my cordial welcome. I am grateful for the warm good wishes that President Boris Trajkovski has conveyed to me through Your Excellency. Please reciprocate with my heartfelt good wishes, which I accompany with a special prayer to God, that the beloved people of your country may continue to act wisely for the authentic human development of the nation, as well as for peace and justice in the region. By so doing, your fellow citizens will show that they are faithful heirs to the rich Christian tradition which the Apostle Paul and the holy brothers, Cyril and Methodius, bequeathed to them.

Today's solemn ceremony of the presentation of your Letters of Credence is taking place in a world context that is very far from peaceful. There are alarming outbreaks of violence in different parts of the world, which are often motivated by long-standing animosity and the temptation to rekindle past hostilities.

Unfortunately, your country too has gone through painful experiences. The authorities of your nation, in close collaboration with the leaders of the international community, have dealt carefully with these difficulties. The necessary constitutional reforms have been made. Laws have been promulgated that further respect for the rights of minorities by encouraging the participation of the different members of the population at the various levels of the political process. This will lead to progress on the path of dialogue, to reconciliation and to peaceful coexistence.

In this process, the Church does not cease to recall that the main focus of attention must be the human heart. Indeed, it is here that hatred and abuse can take root, sentiments that give rise to every act of oppression. The intention, therefore, to uproot these sentiments and replace them with an attitude of brotherhood and openness to others, seeing in them what unites rather than what divides, must come from the heart. Actually, any society that wants to be truly civilized and desires to contribute to the progress of peoples must foster an objective and impartial understanding of others in all its members. The value of this kind of understanding in helping individuals to accept cultural and religious traditions that differ from their own is invaluable. It really is the first step towards reconciliation, given that the respect of differences is an indispensable condition for genuine relationships between individuals and groups. An ethnocentric culture, even when it claims to solve the problems on the table, only succeeds in exacerbating the difficulties and spreading further divisions.

The Church is profoundly concerned about the social dimension of human life, and concern for the well-being of society is an essential part of the Christian message (cf. *Centesimus annus*, n. 5). She therefore invites her members to take an active part in political, economic and social life in their respective countries, to ensure that the light of faith and the Gospel message of reconciliation and forgiveness are spread in them.

The prerequisites of justice demand that every time an error is made or a wrong committed it be recognized and as far as possible atoned for; but human justice is ultimately founded in the law of God and in his plan of salvation for humanity (cf. *Dives in misericordia*, n. 14). Therefore, if it is fully accepted, justice is not limited to re-establishing what is right between the parties in conflict, but presupposes restoring the proper harmony of each one with God, with others and with himself.

This is why there is no contradiction between forgiveness and justice. Indeed forgiveness does not diminish the needs of justice, but seeks to reintegrate individuals and groups in society, and states that in the community of nations, through a renewed sense of responsibility and wherever possible, solidarity with the victims of past injustices.

This is the reason why all social classes must act together to build a civil coexistence in which the dignity of the person and the respect for human rights is the norm of conduct for all: individuals, governments and international organizations. Yes, true peace is the fruit of justice, "that moral virtue and legal guarantee which ensures full respect for rights and responsibilities, and the just distribution of benefits and burdens" (*Message for World Day of Peace 2002*, n. 3). This must be the broadest context for the various priorities which - in the long tradition of tolerance and respect for the different ethnic groups to which you referred - the Government follows, as it strives to introduce a new era of peace and stability for the nation.

I am pleased to be able to assure you that Catholics, despite their situation as a small minority in the country, will not fail to join in the building of civil society, and in particular in promoting and

safeguarding human rights, in relieving situations of poverty and in the education of youth.

Mr Ambassador, your Government's decision to appoint an ambassador to the Holy See who is resident in Rome cannot but strengthen the bonds of friendship and understanding that already exist.

I am sure that the period of your service in this role will help to deepen this relationship, and I would like to assure you that the various offices of the Holy See will cooperate in every possible way to facilitate the fulfilment of your mission. With these sentiments, I invoke the abundant Blessings of the Most High upon you and upon the beloved people of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

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