



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR  
OF THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM TO THE HOLY SEE\****

*Thursday, 31 October 2002*

*Mr Ambassador,*

1. I am pleased to welcome Your Excellency at the Vatican, for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Belgium to the Holy See, and I am most grateful to you for conveying to me the courteous message of His Majesty King Albert II. I would be grateful if, in turn, you would kindly present to His Majesty my very best wishes for him, for Queen Paola, for Queen Fabiola and for Prince Philippe, and for the Belgian people.

2. As you mentioned, Belgium was an active party in the European project from the very beginning and has always actively supported it during the successive phases of its development. It has thus enabled the old continent, which has experienced so many rifts and fratricidal wars in its history, to provide for itself the means of a stable peace and fruitful cooperation among the countries that compose it. The European Union today represents on the international scene a place for dialogue and cooperation, that has an obvious appeal for many peoples of the world who aspire to development and peace. I am delighted to know that your country encourages and supports the process of its enlargement that is under way to permit the gradual integration into the Union of the Central and Eastern European countries, the promise of a new future for all.

Mr Ambassador, you know that the building of Europe, which is slowly taking place before our eyes, requires the good will and determination of the authorities and the desire to base the Union on the common values, with the awareness of the Christian roots of the different peoples who are a permanent reality of European history and culture. In fact, the decisive contribution of Christianity, of the Christian vision to the history and culture of the different countries belongs to

the common treasure and so it would seem logical to inscribe it in the draft of the European Convention.

Moreover, it is important that the existence and freedom of action of the churches and religious confessions be recognized, as is the case in the constitutions of many European countries.

3. In the face of the serious tensions in our world at the beginning of this new millennium, the leaders of the nations need great determination to fight terrorism effectively, to reduce opposition between peoples by using the means of dialogue and common endeavour, and to combat the forms of injustice that kindle resentment, hatred or violence. In this regard, Mr Ambassador, I am eager to acknowledge the renewed attention your nation is paying to the countries on the African continent, especially those in the Great Lakes' Region with whom it has kept strong economic and cultural ties, who have suffered and still suffer from serious tensions. It is good that countries like yours are seeking to help the younger States to overcome their domestic crises and the conflicts that set them against one another, guiding them in establishing political, economic and social structures, especially by the formation of leaders, encouraging them to have recourse to a demanding but constructive dialogue between all the parties present. The Holy See appreciates this contribution to peace and solidarity which your country is making on behalf of the poorest countries on the international level.

4. The Church has always paid great attention to youth by fostering a wide range of institutions devoted to this apostolate. This is particularly true in Belgium, where Catholics participate actively in the education of children and young people, and where there are many confessional schools.

Recent events have revealed, often dramatically, in our developed societies, the need to protect children and to ensure that their education is truly at the service of their integral development, whether at home or at school. For this it is important to condemn with the greatest severity the sexual abuse of the young. It is also necessary to pursue a bold policy of support for families, to help them in their educational mission, notably by supporting the institution of marriage. As a fundamental bond between a man and a woman, marriage makes the family the place for a stable and balanced fulfilment of the children that is built on the affective ties that relate to the father and mother. It is also necessary to recall and to honour the responsibility of educators, recognizing the difficult responsibility they must assume in the name of the whole of society, in the human, moral and spiritual formation of the citizens of the future. Strengthened by her long experience in this area, the Church desires to continue to offer her loyal contribution to this demanding and exalting task for the entire society.

5. The human person, created by God and called to share his divine life, has always been at the centre of the Christian vision of the world. For this reason the Church respects and defends the gift of life. How could she fail to express her intense disquiet and rejection of the laws recently passed in several countries legalizing active euthanasia, thus making the human being the master of life

and death? In a society where all too often only good health and economic profit seem to matter, it is important to take a different look at the persons who are feeble or nearing the end of their lives.

What is especially appreciated is the setting up and developing of palliative treatment for all the sick whose situation requires it. It is a form of treatment which makes it possible to relieve pain and to accompany the dying with dignity. In fact, the recognition of the sacred and inviolable character of every human person, which has been given to them by the Creator, is the only true bulwark to protect them against the ever possible violation of their dignity and rights. A society that takes the risk of calling into question these foundations, exposes itself to very serious dangers, especially that of making the right of individuals and fundamental values depend solely on a consensus that is subject to ongoing change. The respect for every human being, at every stage of his life, is also an essential element in forming people for peace and justice, and I hope that political leaders, and also educators and those who are responsible for fostering the responsibility of citizens, will assess the great importance of what is at stake and uphold the cause of life. For her part, the Church is aware that she has a pressing duty to intervene, in season and out of season, as the Apostle says, to make people listen to the Word of the Gospel of life, and to enlighten consciences.

6. Through you, I would like to greet the Christian community of Belgium and its Pastors, and convey my encouragement to them. I appreciate the attention you are paying to the missionary work accomplished by the priests and lay people who originally came from Belgium and who, after the example of Fr Damien, have been witnesses of God's love to the ends of the earth. May I also recall the figure of Bishop Jean Huard, who died recently. As we face the situation of the increasing secularization of society, Catholics today must rediscover, without fear and without complexes, the mission of witness by their words and deeds. I know that they are deeply committed in social life, with youth, immigrants, the disabled, and people in trouble. I invite them to persevere in this commitment at the service of their compatriots. I encourage them again to work in every field in harmony with Christians of other confessions, to strengthen the bonds that already unite them and to show that the Spirit of unity is at work. May they not fear to bear witness to Christ, the source of their faith, the New Man and the true face of God's love!

7. Mr Ambassador, today you begin the noble mission of representing Belgium to the Holy See. Please accept my best wishes for its fulfilment and be assured that you will always find here, with my collaborators, an attentive welcome and cordial understanding!

Upon you, Your Excellency, upon your family, the members of the Embassy and all your compatriots I invoke an abundance of God's Blessings.

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