



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA TO THE HOLY SEE\****

*Thursday 15 May 2003*

*Mr Ambassador,*

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to the Vatican as I receive the Letters appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Latvia to the Holy See. Your presence here today evokes vivid memories of my visit to your country ten years ago, when, as "a pilgrim of peace" (Speech at Welcoming Ceremony, Riga, 8 September 1993, 4), I came among the Latvian people not long after the nation had "emerged from a painful human, political and social trial which lasted more than half a century" (*ibid.*, 3). In asking you kindly to convey my greetings to the President, Government and beloved people of Latvia, I also express the fervent hope that your country will continue to make progress along the path of freedom, social unity and peace.

In your remarks, you have referred to the Accord between the Holy See and the Republic of Latvia signed by both parties in 2000. With the ratification of this agreement last year, the Accord has now come into effect and affords a further concrete opportunity to strengthen the good relations existing between us. I am confident that, dealing with matters of common interest to us, particularly with regard to the juridical status and pastoral mission of the Catholic Church in Latvia, the prompt and full application of this Accord will serve to increase the spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation that unites us in our service of the human person. In fact, it is the personal and social vocation of the same human beings that is served both by the Church and by the political community, each in its own particular sphere and with its own particular competence. For man is not restricted to temporal realities: although he lives in a specific period of history, he is called to transcendence and is destined for eternity. It is this high calling and this final destiny which must inform and shape the social, economic and political undertakings of individuals, peoples and nations.

Catholic social teaching, inspired by the universal principles ensuring justice and peace between individuals and groups, recognizes the positive role played in the life of a nation by political and economic forces. But if progress is to be genuine, these forces must be carefully subordinated to the greater ethical demands of social justice, human rights and the common good. In this way, human dignity will be defended, solidarity between individuals and groups will be encouraged, social harmony and prosperity will be fostered. In short, "the material and spiritual well-being of humanity, the protection of the freedom and rights of the human person, selfless public service, closeness to concrete conditions: all of these take precedence over every political project and constitute a moral necessity which in itself is the best guarantee of peace within nations and peace between States" ([Speech to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See](#), 13 January 2003, 6).

The values of which we are speaking here are no stranger to your country: ever since the twelfth century, when Saint Meinhard, the Apostle of Latvia, preached the Gospel in your land, these ideals have been woven into the very fabric of your national life. They must be ever strengthened and fostered as Latvia continues its journey into the Third Millennium and as your nation prepares to become a full-fledged member of an enlarged European Union. In this regard, I am pleased by your observation on the profound impact that Christianity has had on European history and culture. Indeed, Christianity holds a unique claim to a privileged position among the values that will forge and give cohesion to a new Europe: for "a Europe which disavowed its past, which denied the fact of religion, and which had no spiritual dimension would be extremely impoverished in the face of the ambitious project which calls upon all its energies: constructing a Europe for all" (*ibid.*, 5).

It is for this reason that the Holy See urges that the future Constitutional Treaty of the European Union should contain in the Preamble explicit reference to religion and to the Christian heritage of Europe. It would in fact seem desirable that, in full respect for the secular state, this Constitution should recognize three complementary elements: first, the importance of religious freedom, not only in its individual and collective aspects, but also in its institutional dimension; second, the need for dialogue and consultation between the European Union and communities of believers; third, respect for the juridical status already enjoyed by Churches and religious institutions within member States of the Union. These three interrelated principles will enable religion in general and Christianity in particular to continue to make an irreplaceable contribution to European life and institutions.

Of course, essential to any programme of authentic progress and integral human development, whether in Europe or elsewhere, is the family. In the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights the family is recognized as "the natural and fundamental group unit of society", and this same document states unequivocally that the family "is entitled to protection by society and the State" (Article 16.3). This is an essential truth of human social existence which must not be overlooked or underestimated, for any weakening of this indispensable institution cannot fail to be

a potential source of grave difficulties and problems. For example, when a utilitarian and materialistic notion of the family prevails, its members will tend to have self-centred expectations and to make individualistic demands that are detrimental to the family's unity and undermine its ability to build harmony and educate in solidarity. On the other hand, where the family is seen as a value in itself, the members realize that their personal good coincides with their duty to love, respect and help one other.

The same is true of human life itself and of individual human beings. When the value, dignity and rights of the human person are upheld and promoted, the social fabric is strengthened and the priorities of peoples and nations are set in proper order. This is why the Church will never tire of reminding consciences that life at every stage of its existence, from conception to natural death, must be rigorously and uncompromisingly defended. Likewise, the human person at all stages of life — during childhood, as an adult and in old age — is a priceless treasure to be cared for and cherished. Neither human life nor the human person can ever legitimately be treated as an object, as a possession, but must be seen as endowed by the Creator with a most sublime dignity that demands the greatest respect and vigilance on the part of individuals, communities, nations and international bodies.

Mr Ambassador, I am confident that the bonds of friendship that unite the Holy See and the Republic of Latvia will grow ever stronger and will prove helpful in laying the Christian foundation upon which the Europe of the Third Millennium is to be built. As you begin your mission I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia are ready to offer whatever assistance you may need in carrying out your high responsibilities. Upon yourself and the beloved people of Latvia I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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*\*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XXVI, 1, p. 752-755.*

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