



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR GRYGORII FOKOVYCH KHORUZHYI
NEW AMBASSADOR OF UKRAINE TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 7 May 2004

Mr Ambassador,

I gladly accept the Letters accrediting you as the new representative of Ukraine to the Holy See. On this happy occasion, I am pleased to greet you and extend a most cordial welcome to you.

I appreciated your kind words just now, and I ask you to convey to Mr Leonid Danilovic Kucma, President of Ukraine, my gratitude for the special greeting he has desired to send me through you. I willingly reciprocate his sentiments and offer him my best wishes for his lofty task as First Citizen of the beloved Ukrainian Nation, to which I would like to communicate my affectionate thoughts and good wishes.

Because of their typical traditions and culture, the Ukrainian People rightly feel part of Europe. They want to weave a more intense relationship with the other Nations on the Continent, while preserving the political and cultural features that distinguish them.

The Holy See believes that it is worth giving these legitimate aspirations careful consideration, since they could be useful for the plan of European collaboration. Located on the crossroads between East and West, Ukraine will be better able to carry out its mission as a place of encounter between the different peoples and cultures if it keeps its own special profile intact. By continuing to work briskly in the spiritual and social, political and economic areas, it could become an important laboratory for dialogue, development and cooperation with and for everyone.

However, to achieve this goal, all the sons and daughters of the Land of Ukraine, each one in accordance with his or her own responsibilities and skills, must dedicate themselves with far-

sighted generosity to seeking the common good. This requires that the representatives of the people, public administrators, men and women of culture and financiers put their skills at the service of the Country's authentic progress in a disinterested way, paying special attention to the poor, to young people in search of employment, to children and even to unborn infants in their mother's womb.

The Catholic Church, as far as she can and with full respect for the legitimate field of action of the civil Authorities, will not fail to contribute to building a prosperous and peaceful Nation.

Mr Ambassador, as I welcome you today, I hearken back to the Visit that Providence granted me to make three years ago to Ukraine, a Land where peoples with different cultures and traditions converge. How could I forget Kiev with its golden cupolas, its splendid gardens, its hard-working and open people, and Lviv, the city of impressive monuments, so rich in Christian memories and imbued with genuine, warm hospitality?

Ever since the purification of Baptism on the banks of the Dnieper admitted the peoples of Ukraine into the great family of Christ's disciples more than 1,000 years ago, the specific identity of that Land developed the strong profile of its own cultural and spiritual identity. The Gospel shaped its life, culture and institutions, which is why Ukraine today has a great responsibility to understand, defend and promote its own Christian heritage, a distinctive feature of the Nation that has remained fundamentally sound even after the grievous Communist dictatorship.

The Church is very glad to sustain this identity. As she has opportunely recalled, the Government is pursuing a policy of religious freedom which enables the Ecclesial Communities to carry out their mission. In this context of good will, it is to be hoped that the Churches may soon acquire juridical status with effective parity among them all and, at the same time, that honourable understandings may be reached concerning religious teaching and the recognition by the State of theology as a university discipline. It is also to be hoped that satisfactory agreements may be stipulated in the highly sensitive area of the return of ecclesiastical property confiscated during the Communist dictatorship.

When I think of the religious situation of the beloved Ukrainian People, I cannot but reflect that unfortunately Christ's disciples are still divided, and this is perceived with a certain regret by the Ukrainian Community overall. Yet ecumenical dialogue goes on, working for an ever better understanding in reciprocal respect and constantly seeking the unity that Christ desired. May this sincere and far-sighted dialogue continue and indeed be intensified by the contribution of all!

As for the Catholic Church in Ukraine, since the Country's independence to this day she has known a promising springtime of hope, and all her members are motivated by the desire to achieve full unity with all Christians.

Mr Ambassador, at the time when you are preparing to assume your lofty task, I am pleased to assure you that here in the Vatican you will always find minds and hearts ready to offer you every kind of assistance and support, so that you may carry out the mission entrusted to you as well as possible. For my part, as I express my heartfelt hope that the strong bonds which already unite the Country you represent and the Holy See will be constantly strengthened, I invoke upon you, upon the Government Authorities and upon the entire Ukrainian People, especially dear to me, an abundance of divine Blessings.

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