



The Holy See

*ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr M. BERNARD KESSEDJIAN
AMBASSADOR OF FRANCE TO THE HOLY SEE**

Monday 19 December 2005

Mr Ambassador,

I am delighted to receive from your hands the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of France to the Holy See. As I thank you for the courteous words you have kindly addressed to me, I wish you a cordial welcome on the occasion of this solemn meeting that inaugurates the mission entrusted to you here.

I am touched by the good wishes of H.E. Mr Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic, and ask you to reciprocate by expressing to him my best wishes for him personally and for the entire People of France.

You are aware of the special attention that the Catholic Church and the Holy See pay to the French Nation. You also know of the Catholic Church's commitment to society at every level.

Through you, Mr Ambassador, allow me to address my fraternal greetings to the Catholic Pastors and faithful of your Country, encouraging them to pursue their apostolic mission and actions of brotherly solidarity in the parishes, movements and associations; these approaches are part and parcel of the Christian tradition and are founded in the love of Christ for each person, who deserves to be loved for his or her own sake.

This year, your Country is celebrating the centenary of the law that separated the Church and the State. As my Predecessor Pope John Paul II recalled in the Letter he addressed to the Bishops of France last 11 February, the principle of secularity consists in a "clear division of powers", which is no way in opposition and does not prevent the Church from taking "a more and more active part in social life with respect for the competence of each one" (*Letter to the Bishops of France, 11*

February 2005, nn. 2, 3; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 23 February, p. 3).

This concept must permit a greater promotion of the Church's autonomy, both in her organization and in her mission. In this regard, I welcome at all levels the existence and meetings of the bodies for dialogue between the Church and the civil Authorities. I am sure that this dialogue will enable all the forces thus brought into play to contribute to the citizens' good and that it will produce results in social life.

As you recalled, your Country has just been through a socially difficult period which laid bare the deep discontent of a part of the youth; such a situation seems not only to have spread to the suburbs of the large cities, but has more profoundly affected all sectors of the population.

Yet, the internal violence that marks societies, which one cannot but condemn, bears a message especially from young people, inviting us to take their requests into account and, as Archbishop Jean-Pierre Ricard of Bordeaux, President of the French Bishops' Conference, said at the end of the Lourdes Assembly last November, requesting "a response equal to dealing with these dramatic tensions in our society".

May I greet here all those who have undertaken, especially through dialogue with young people and fraternal closeness to them, to restore a peaceful atmosphere to society, because this responsibility is incumbent upon all citizens.

Your Country has welcomed many foreign workers and their families, who have contributed much to the Nation's development since the end of the Second World War. Today, it is important to thank them and their descendents for this financial and cultural wealth in which they have played a part.

Most of them have become full French citizens. The challenge today consists in living the values of equality and fraternity that are part of the values inscribed in France's motto, taking pains to ensure that all citizens, with respect for their legitimate differences, can build a true common culture that transmits the fundamental moral and spiritual values.

It is also important to propose a social and personal ideal to young people, so that they will preserve their reasons for living and hoping and will have greater confidence in a better future that allows them to build their lives and to find employment to meet their own and their family's needs in order to attain the well-being to which they naturally have a right.

Therefore, your Country is definitely invited to take a further step towards the social integration of one and all, like other nations on the Continent, in the very name of the dignity proper to every person and of his or her central role in society, which the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council recalled (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 9), as you yourself mentioned. Social peace generally comes at

this price.

It is also right to focus special attention on the institutions of marriage and the family. No other form of organized relationship can compare with them. Indeed, they are the basis of social life. They have an irreplaceable role in the education of the young, combining authority and emotional support, imparting to all young people the values that are indispensable to their personal development and sense of the common good, and the necessary reference points for social life. If the family is to do this, it must be aided and supported, so that it does not renounce its educational mission and leave young people to themselves.

Here I would like to greet the educators, the school context and all the movements that seek to support parents in their educational task and help them form young people's consciences, so that in the future they will be adults not only responsible for themselves but also for their brothers and sisters in humanity and for the good functioning of society. May they all know that the Church, which endeavours to defend the family everywhere, desires to help them in their task.

Moreover, it is important that young people be guided so that they can be responsible for their own lives and feel full members of society. All this will make a great contribution to bringing the Nation and the generations closer together and creating a stronger social fabric.

In this same spirit, I likewise want to draw the attention of all people of good will to the decisions and actions in the context of bioethics. These show that there is an increasing tendency to consider the human being, especially in the very first stages of life, simply as an object of research. It is important not to see ethical questions first from the scientific viewpoint, but rather from the viewpoint of the human being for whom respect is imperative. Unless this fundamental moral criterion is accepted, it will be difficult to create a truly human society that respects all the beings of which it consists without any distinction whatsoever.

For many reasons, your Country is attentive to the developing countries and those finding it difficult to embark on real economic and social development. The recent Africa-France Summit, held in Mali, is an expression of this concern.

Wealthy countries have a great responsibility for the growth of societies and for the complete fulfilment of the citizens of nations in difficulty. They must not only provide financial aid for them, but also technical formation for the executives and personnel who will make these nations more and more autonomous and protagonists of the world economy. They are called especially to help set up self-sufficient local structures that will enable the inhabitants to have the necessary resources for their subsistence.

Indeed, it is becoming more urgent than ever to continue and to intensify the most concrete actions possible, relying on the local populations, especially women and young people, who

particularly in African societies have a place of paramount importance and much to contribute by giving a new impetus to the economy and social life.

At the end of our meeting, Your Excellency, I offer you my most cordial good wishes for the mission you are beginning today. You may rest assured that you will always find with my collaborators the attention and help that you may need.

As I entrust the People of France and its Authorities to the care of Our Lady of Lourdes and to the many saints of your Land, so dear to the hearts of a large number of your compatriots, I ask the Lord to support them all so that by drawing from their spiritual patrimony and long spiritual tradition, they may build a society of peace and justice, and contribute to an ever greater solidarity between individuals and peoples.

I very willingly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you, Your Excellency, as well as to your collaborators and your loved ones.

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