



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr. FRANCISCO VAZQUEZ VAZQUEZ
AMBASSADOR OF SPAIN TO THE HOLY SEE****

Saturday 20 May 2006

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to receive the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Spain to the Holy See. I cordially thank you for your words, and likewise for the appreciated greetings from His Majesty King Juan Carlos I, from the Royal Family, from your Government and from the Spanish Nation. Please convey to them my best wishes for prosperity and spiritual well-being for themselves and for all Spaniards, whom I keep very present in my prayers.

On various occasions I have had the opportunity to visit your Country, of which I treasure very pleasant memories both for the friendliness of the people I met and the abundance and great value of the many works of art and cultural expressions scattered throughout the Land.

It is an enviable patrimony that denotes a brilliant history, deeply imbued with Christian values and enriched by the lives of outstanding Gospel witnesses, both inside and outside its frontiers.

This patrimony includes works whose creators expressed in them their own ideals and faith. If this is ignored or glossed over, it will lose a large part of its attraction and meaning, but the works will continue to be, as it were, "speaking stones".

As you said, Your Excellency, the centuries-old diplomatic relations between Spain and the Holy See reflect the constant ties of the Spanish People with the Catholic faith. The great vitality that the Church in your Country has had and still has is, as it were, a special invitation to reinforce these relations and to foster a close collaboration between the Church and public institutions,

which is both loyal and respectful of each other's province and autonomy to achieve the integral good of the people who, as citizens of their Homeland, are also to a large extent beloved children of the Church.

An important path for this cooperation was marked out by the Agreements signed by the Spanish State and the Holy See to guarantee the Catholic Church: "the free and public exercise of her own activities, especially those of worship, jurisdiction and teaching" (Art. I of the First Agreement, 3 January 1979).

Indeed, Mr Ambassador, the Church, as you know, impels believers to love justice and to take an honest part in public or professional life with a sense of respect and solidarity, so as "to promote organically and institutionally the common good" (Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 29).

She is also involved in the promotion and defence of human rights because of the high esteem in which she holds the integral dignity of the person, in whatever place or situation he or she may be. Using her own means, she devotes all her commitment to ensuring that none of these rights are violated or suppressed, either by individuals or institutions.

For this reason the Church proclaims wholeheartedly the fundamental right to life from conception to its natural end, the right to be born, to form and to live in a family, and not to let the family be supplanted by other institutions or different forms.

In this regard, the upcoming World Meeting of Families in Valencia, Spain, to which I am very much looking forward, will give me the opportunity to celebrate the beauty and fruitfulness of the family founded on marriage, its exalted vocation and indispensable social value.

The Church also insists on the inalienable right of individuals to profess their own religious faith without hindrance, both publicly and privately, as well as the right of parents to have their children receive an education that complies with their values and beliefs without either explicit or implicit discrimination.

In this regard, it pleases me to note the great demand for the teaching of Catholic religion in Spanish State schools. This means that people recognize the importance of this subject for the personal and cultural growth and training of the young. Its importance to the development of the student's personality is the basic principle of the Agreement between the Spanish State and the Holy See on teaching and on cultural subjects, which establishes that the Catholic religion will be taught "in similar conditions to those of the other basic disciplines" (Art. II).

In her evangelizing mission, charitable activity is also a special task of the Church as well as attention to any needy person who is hoping for a friendly, fraternal and impartial hand to alleviate his or her situation. In present-day Spain, as in its long history, the Church's numerous institutions for social assistance prove that this dimension of her activity has been particularly

fruitful, in all areas and with extensive goals.

Furthermore, since she is not inspired by either political or ideological strategies (cf. Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, nn. 31b; 33), the Church encounters on her path people and institutions of any origin who are also responsive to the duty of helping the destitute, whoever they may be.

Founded on this "duty of humanity", collaboration in the area of social assistance and humanitarian aid has reached many places and it is to be hoped that it will be ever further encouraged.

Mr Ambassador, at the end of this Meeting, I repeat to you my best wishes for the success of the lofty mission that has been entrusted to you, so that relations between Spain and the Holy See will be strengthened and progress will be made that reflects the respect and deep affection for the Pope of so many Spaniards.

I also hope that your stay in Rome will bring you fruitful human, cultural and Christian experiences, and that you and your distinguished family will feel at home here but will not forget the beautiful lands in the extreme west of Europe where you come from and where the Gospel very soon took root and spread under the patronage of the Apostle James, contributing to nourish and keep alive Europe's Christian roots.

I ask you to convey my respects to Their Majesties the King and Queen of Spain, and to the Authorities of this noble Nation, and I invoke abundant Blessings from the Most High upon you, your loved ones and the collaborators of this diplomatic Representation.

**L'Osservatore Romano* n. 23 p. 4.

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