



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. MR MARTIN BOLLDORF
NEW AMBASSADOR OF AUSTRIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Castel Gandolfo

Friday, 18 September 2006

*Your Excellency,
Mr Ambassador,*

I welcome you with joy on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Austria to the Holy See.

I am most grateful for the cordial words you have just addressed to me and for the greetings you bring me from President Heinz Fisher.

In turn, I send to the Head of State, the Federal Government and the entire Austrian People my very best wishes, with which I express my confident hope that during your mandate relations between Austria and the Holy See, traditionally good and still good today, will continue and grow deeper.

Indeed, the harmony between Austria and the Holy See is age-old and fruitful. It is more than a historical fact. It is based above all on the membership in the Catholic Church of the majority of the Austrian population. This already gives rise to a common outlook, options and interests, which concern in particular the human being, his freedom, dignity and his future, in time and in society.

From different viewpoints, both the State and the Church are concerned with the good of human beings.

At the service of humankind is the fact that in Austrian politics - in the small towns and large cities,

in the districts and regions, in Parliament and especially in the Government - people let themselves be guided by a "vision of the world" in which the values transmitted through the Christian faith are all important.

Those, therefore, who place man created by God at the centre of creation and of history, such as Judeo-Christian revelation, direct their social and political action to the authentic good of human beings, whose interests and dignity can never be subordinated to parameters of "feasibility", utility or productivity. Every authentic human policy always derives from the fact that a nation's greatest wealth is constituted by its inhabitants.

Europe and in particular the further development of the process of European union are "common interests" which the Holy See and Austria share.

The history and culture of Europe have been moulded by Christianity perhaps as in no other part of the world. This also applies, therefore, to the area in which 457 million inhabitants of 25 member countries of the European Union live, most of whom say they are Christian.

The regional and national area, the closest and the most remote homeland from which as a rule the majority draw the most important elements of their cultural identity, is increasingly becoming the common European homeland.

Mobility and the means of social communication that cross borders make a considerable contribution to this.

The Catholic Church, as the creator of the history and culture of the European Continent down the centuries, on the whole greets this development favourably. Wherever people and peoples consider themselves members of the same family, there is an increase in the possibilities of peace, solidarity, exchange and mutual enrichment.

Less and less is modern society with open frontiers allowing itself to be defined in terms of nationality. Because of this and because of their lively historical awareness Austrians, like their neighbours' next of kin, rightly feel that they are Europeans, citizens of the United Europe which is gradually taking shape.

Furthermore, Austria is a Country journeying with Europe. Its rich history as a Country formerly composed of various peoples has predisposed it to a convinced European commitment both in and beyond the framework of political and institutional directives.

Finally, the care it devotes to strengthening neighbourly relations with the trusting collaboration of all its members for the peace and good of the peoples in the Danube region forms part of Austrian foreign policy. These principles and experiences also inspired the Austrian Presidency of the

Council of the European Union in the first half of 2006, which desired to express it as a "service to Europe" and focused on the task of creating trust between the Member States of the European Union.

Mr Ambassador, the path of European integration, the successful construction of a great European house under whose roof the people of the Continent can forge their future in peace, mutual respect and exchanges, essentially depends on the citizens' confidence in this project. In discussions on the process of enlargement of the European Union on the one hand, and on the other, on the European Constitution, new issues of fundamental importance are arising.

Lastly, it is always a matter of the identity and spiritual foundations on which the community of peoples and of European States is built.

Neither a more or less effective economic union nor a bureaucratic body of norms that regulate coexistence can ever fully satisfy people's expectations for Europe. Rather, the tap-roots of a solid European "reciprocity", exempt from crises, are embedded in the convictions and common values of the Continent's Christian history and humanist historical tradition.

Without authentic, common community values it is impossible to build any reliable community of rights, which instead is what people expect.

Today, Austria is one of the smallest Countries in Europe. Yet it can make a great contribution: a contribution to ensuring that the inviolable rights and dignity of the human being as well as the role of the family as the primary cell of society are respected and safeguarded always and in every circumstance; a contribution to ensure that Europe, in the necessary process of self-determination, turns its gaze to God, Creator of all life, in whom justice and love coincide.

Mr Ambassador, your accreditation also affords me a good opportunity to stress with pleasure once again that in your treasured Country, a fruitful and effective cooperation exists between State and Church for the good of all the inhabitants.

Mention has been made of the context of this cooperation on previous occasions. I wish here to mention only the development of secondary schools, in agreement with the Church, and to underline the commitment of the State based on the Concordat with regard to the teaching of Catholic religion, which in Austria is one of the obligatory disciplines.

In view of the growing number of students who do not belong to any religious denomination, the State is also faced with the duty of making known to these children and young people the basis of Western thought and of the "civilization of love", imbued with the Christian spirit.

Mr Ambassador, Austria is known for its great openness to the universal mission of the Successor

of Peter at the service of the dissemination of the Gospel of hope and of liberating faith in Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour of humanity, who desires to give reconciliation, justice and peace to every people.

I can also tell you that there is gratitude throughout the world for the help that Austrian Catholics and countless people of good will offer to social, humanitarian and missionary projects in the Homeland.

In the course of your diplomatic work, you have already become familiar with the mission of the Holy See. I am sure that your new task in Rome will bring you joy and full satisfaction.

Through the intercession of the Mother of God of Marizell, of Bl. Charles of Austria and of all the Patron Saints of your Country, I wholeheartedly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, Mr Ambassador, to the members of the Embassy of the Republic of Austria to the Holy See and to your beloved family.

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