



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
A S.E. IL SIGNOR WILLY GJON KAMSI,
PRIMO AMBASCIATORE DI ALBANIA PRESSO LA SANTA SEDE****

Giovedì, 22 aprile 1993

Your Excellency,

1. I am pleased to welcome you, the first Ambassador, of the noble Albanian people to the Apostolic See. This meeting is in some way an anticipation and preparation for the long-awaited one scheduled for this coming 25 April, when I shall have the joy of visiting Albania for the first time and meeting that illustrious nation. At this time, however, through Your Excellency, I want to express my deepest appreciation, not only to my brothers and sisters in the faith, but to all the people whom you are honoured to represent in their various ethnic and religious elements, and the authorizes who govern them.

As you mentioned, throughout history relations between Albania and the Church have known diverse phases: times of constructive cooperation - and how could I fail to mention here that «athlete of Christ», Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu, who had close, fruitful relations with the Roman Pontiffs - and others however, which were filled with painful tension. Here our thoughts turn in particular to the difficult political situations of which the nation was the victim in the last half century at the hands of a regime inspired by a totalitarian, anti-religious ideology.

In the Albanian spirit, however, the golden thread of faith was never broken it resisted the violence of persecution and today is manifest in all its vigour. The attachment to religious values is a solid foundation for rebuilding democratic life. In referring to religious belief, I do not mean merely the Catholic community, but also the Orthodox and Muslim communities which have established an exemplary relationship of esteem and respect with the Church. As for Catholics, they gladly reciprocate these sentiments and are happy to make their contribution of moral and civil involvement in their country's rebirth.

2. Certainly, what the Church plans to offer is not of a political nature, because this would not be in conformity with her mission. As the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council recalls, «the political community and the Church are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields» (Gaudium et spes n. 76). The Church's goal is essentially a religious one. Therefore, it is not up to her to build the «earthly city», but rather the «kingdom of God», proclaiming the Gospel, opening up to people the presence and love of God, inviting them to a new life in Christ's footsteps.

Such an essentially religious orientation, however, in no way leads her to an attitude of indifference and apathy regarding the fate of civil society. Christianity is the religion of God made man: human events, therefore, with all their challenges, enter into the history of salvation, and the construction of a world in conformity with God's plan is an essential aspect of the Gospel message, as Christian social doctrine shows so well. The Church intends to devote herself to such a demanding mission by fulfilling her educational role and through the consistent testimony of her sons and daughters. I am convinced, Your Excellency, that the Church's presence will have definite advantages for Albanian society, especially through the contribution which Catholics will offer in promoting freedom, justice, solidarity and peace.

3. Albania is undergoing a difficult period because of the onerous inheritance of the old regime. Success in overcoming the problems of the present situation must be the ambition and boast of the young democracy, called to resolve grave problems regarding the economy and employment, the same holds true for strengthening the new political and civic structures inspired by the principles of a constitutional State, in the context of the norms of international conventions. Indeed, the problems are anything but simple: besides the commitment of all the members of the nation, their solution calls for a more generous attention on the part of the international community. To the latter the Church makes a pressing appeal not to abandon Albania at this time of historic change, marked by quite a few difficulties. However, the building of a better future, with the help of God who never abandons his children, is in the hands of the Albanian people, in the strength of their inner motivation, in their ability to hope and to persevere in the face of trials and obstacles.

In this regard, I would like to mention here what I wrote in the Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, namely, that the secret of a democracy, its success and its duration, does not depend solely on the proper functioning of structures and laws, but on the great values that should be its foundation and inspiration (cf. n. 46). Albania, which has borne the yoke of an oppressive dictatorship, is called to build its future by learning even from the less edifying experiences of the so-called free and democratic world. Indeed, «a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism» (ibid.).

It is in this perspective, Your Excellency, that the Catholic Church is committed to making her contribution to the construction of the new Albania, this is the aim of the plans for cooperation which she and the State can freely realize, in total respect for their mutual autonomy and specific

purpose.

Your Excellency, I ask you to express my regards to the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr Sali Berisha. Please express to him my esteem and the affection which bind me to the Albanian people, as I wait to come personally to meet them.

Your Excellency, in expressing once again my best wishes for the success of the noble mission which you begin today, I assure you of my prayer to Almighty God, that with his gifts he may always help you, your co-workers, and those who govern your noble nation, as well as the beloved Albanian people, whom I always recall with particular affection.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n.18 p.6.*

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