



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr MULUGETA ETEFFA,
NEW AMBASSADOR OF ETHIOPIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday,, 12 December 1996

Mister Ambassador, I offer you a warm welcome to the Vatican as you present the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the Holy See. My esteem and affection for the people of your country remain ever great, and I ask you kindly to convey to President Negasso Gidada and the Ethiopian Government my good wishes and the assurance of my prayers. Your Excellency has recalled the long history of relations between your nation and the Holy See, In fact, bonds of friendship and cooperation between us have existed for many centuries and indeed can be traced to the first millennium, when contacts between the Christians of Ethiopia and the Bishops of Rome were not infrequent, The Holy See holds in profound respect the rich cultural and religious traditions of the Ethiopian people and of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to which many of your fellow citizens belong. I assure you that the Holy See continues to have a keen interest in your country and a solicitous concern for the welfare of its people. Last month, the World Food Summit in Rome, sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, addressed the important question of the need to ensure worldwide food security. Your nation is acutely aware of the dramatic and tragic effects which drought and hunger can have. The disastrous famine of 1984-1985 is still deeply etched in our minds, and this dire spectre was again evoked by the food shortages which your people have endured in more recent years. Moreover, throughout the world there are still hundreds of millions of people suffering from malnutrition, and no solution is yet in sight. For this reason, the need is ever more urgent, as I said in my Address to the World Food Summit, for people to work together in order to remedy this situation, "so that we will no longer have, side by side, . . . the starving and the wealthy, . . . those who lack the necessary means and others who lavishly waste them" (John Paul II, *Address to Participants in the Inaugural Session of the World Summit on Nutrition*, 2 [13 Nov. 1996]) .Justice and solidarity are at issue here. These are the social virtues which must find expression in strategies and plans aimed at helping the poorest nations and determining fair trade terms and credit agreements. They should likewise guide the economic and political decisions of national and international bodies, as policies are developed to address the problems of the distribution and sharing of necessary resources. It is precisely the advancement of solidarity which is one of the main objectives of the Holy See's involvement in international diplomacy. By its activity the Holy See seeks to encourage mutual co-operation between sovereign States, co-operation centred on concern for human development and the defence of human dignity (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 76). The Church and the political community are independent and

self-governing, each in its proper sphere. Yet each also serves the personal and social vocation of the same human beings. For man is not restricted to temporal realities: although he lives in a specific period of history, he is called to transcendence and is destined for eternity. It is this high calling and this final destiny which must inform and shape the social, economic and political undertakings of individuals, peoples and nations (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 76). I am pleased to note Your Excellency's comments that Ethiopia respects and values differences in religion and culture. Indeed, an indispensable condition for any people to secure for itself a just and peaceful social order is that the followers of different religious traditions should strive to live in harmony. Particularly important in this regard are the provisions in Ethiopia's new Constitution guaranteeing the individual's right to freedom of religion, both in belief and practice, in public and in private. This freedom is one of the cornerstones of human rights and is a necessary component of a truly democratic society. Living in this climate of freedom, and guided by the light of the Gospel, the Catholics of your country will continue to contribute to the building up of society, through their involvement in education, health care and the work of charitable organizations. I appreciate your words of gratitude for this work of the Church. Mister Ambassador, as you assume your new responsibilities I offer my good wishes for the success of your mission and assure you of the willing co-operation of the various offices of the Roman Curia. Upon Your Excellency and all the people of Ethiopia I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty

God.

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