



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO H.E. Mr RAYMOND R.M. TAI, NEW AMBASSADOR  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA TO THE HOLY SEE\***

*Friday, 4 October 1996*

*Mr Ambassador,*

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican for the ceremony of the presentation of the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of China to the Holy See. I am grateful for the kind greetings which you convey from His Excellency President Lee Teng-hui., to whom I offer my good wishes for his new term of office.

You have referred to the approaching Third Millennium, when Christians will celebrate the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. This event has great significance for all the Church's members, not least those belonging to the great Chinese family, always particularly close to my heart. But the Jubilee of the year 2000 has a significance which goes beyond the Christian community and affects the whole human family: the truths and values of the Gospel play a fundamental role in the advancement of moral principles and social concepts which are at the heart of the debate going on in almost all societies and cultures regarding the future direction which humanity should take.

In my address last year to the United Nations General Assembly, I noted that "on the threshold of a new millennium we are witnessing an extraordinary global acceleration of that quest for freedom which is one of the great dynamics of human history" (John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, 2 [5 Oct. 1995]). Men and women in every culture are coming to a more precise awareness of their inestimable dignity as free human beings, and they are demanding to be given a place in social, political, and economic life which is commensurate with that dignity.

In fact, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, endorsed by the United Nations in 1948, remains one of the highest expressions of the human conscience of our time, and people in every part of the world appeal to this document in support of their claims for a fuller share in the life of society. The letter and spirit of that *Declaration* received a recent solemn confirmation at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in March 1995, when Heads of State and Government committed themselves "to a political, economic, ethical and spiritual vision for social development that is based on human dignity, human rights, equality, respect, peace, democracy, mutual responsibility and cooperation, and full respect for the various religious and ethical values and cultural backgrounds of people" (*Declaration on Social Development* [March 1995]).

It is in this context that the political community and the Church, while remaining mutually independent, can—each according to its own nature—serve the personal and social vocation of the same human beings (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 76). The Church readily recognizes that her mission is not of the political, economic or social order but is a religious one. Consequently, she is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic, or social system. At the same time, "out of this religious mission itself come a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law" (*Ibid.*, 42). By her universality, the Church can create a very close bond between diverse human communities, provided they have trust in her and guarantee her right to true freedom in fulfilling her mission (*Ibid.*, 42). In this respect, I gladly recognize that in your own country the Church enjoys this freedom, a freedom which enables the Catholic community to work for the common good in a specific way, namely by promoting truth, justice and solidarity. All Chinese Catholics are eager to play their part in this mission of service. They only wish to have the freedom to contribute to the spiritual and material progress of their brothers and sisters, their fellow citizens. It is my ardent prayer that the Chinese people as a whole will have trust in the Church, even as the Church is confident that they will play an indispensable role in serving the cause of peace and development for the benefit of the entire human family.

Your Excellency, as you begin your mission as the Republic of China's diplomatic representative to the Holy See, I assure you of the full cooperation of the various Departments of the Roman Curia. It is my hope and prayer that your service here will further strengthen the bonds between us. I wish you every personal happiness in the fulfillment of your noble task, and upon Your Excellency and your fellow citizens I cordially invoke Almighty God's abundant blessings.

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\**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XIX, 2 p.509-511.

*L'Osservatore Romano* 5.10.1996 p.5.

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