



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF SWEDEN TO THE HOLY SEE*

Monday 20 December 1999

Mr Ambassador,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to the Vatican today and to receive the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Sweden. I would like to express my gratitude to His Majesty Carl XVI Gustaf and to the Swedish Government for their sentiments of respect and words of appreciation for the Holy See's activities in the international sphere.

Recalling our meeting last 13 November, I would like to renew to their Majesties the King and Queen and to the Crown Princess the assurance of my prayers for them and for the service they are called to render to the nation. I would like to express the same sentiments to the other members of the Royal Family, to the government authorities and to all the people of Sweden, with wishes of serenity and peace, in their constant search for all that will contribute to the protection and advancement of the human person and the development of the authentic values of civil society.

My heart still beats with joy at the recent proclamation of St Bridget, a distinguished daughter of Sweden, a pilgrim of Christ who was guided by extraordinary mystical graces, as co-patroness of Europe with St Catherine of Siena and St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. This was a providential occasion for reflecting on the joint responsibility of Christians to continue their journey towards full unity, so as to offer the continent an increasingly credible witness to the one Gospel, the source of hope and a cornerstone of the civilization of love.

A visible sign of this ardent desire, which for St Bridget formed an intense programme of life, was the ecumenical celebration which took place in St Peter's Basilica on 13 November last, when,

together with the most senior Lutheran representatives of Sweden and Finland and the Catholic Bishops of Stockholm and Copenhagen, I prayed that the desire of the Divine Teacher: *Ut unum sint*, might soon be fulfilled for all the disciples of Christ. The occasion brought back the unforgettable memory of my journey to Stockholm, Uppsala, Vadstena and Linköping over 10 years ago, when I had the opportunity to meet and talk to the beloved people of Sweden, appreciating their zest for life, their love for children and their heartfelt generosity in welcoming those who have come from other countries in search of work, dignity and hope.

The Holy See knows and esteems Sweden's action for peace, for its collaboration and for the respect of human rights at the regional and international levels, as well as its concretely demonstrated and proven generosity to poorer nations. I am certain that this programme, together with a convinced adherence to true ethical and religious values, will help establish a civilization of peace and mutual understanding among peoples. In its own specific way, the Swedish people will also succeed in integrating itself more and more deeply into the community of European peoples, helping to build the continent's common house based on the dignity of the person, respect for the sacredness of life, the enhancement of the central role of the family, acknowledgement of the importance of education, the protection of fundamental freedoms starting with religious freedom, and encouraging each to contribute to the common good in the context of a State governed by law and reason.

In this process, the Church will not fail to do her part, making the richness of her faith available to modern man through constant proclamation of the Gospel, so that the light of Christ may enliven the values that sustain civil society.

Your Excellency, the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which will begin with the now imminent opening of the Holy Door, will certainly also see the arrival in Rome of pilgrims who are your countrymen. I would like to greet them and to assure them that they will find a fraternal welcome at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. They will be able in a certain way to feel at home here, to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God with Christians from other parts of the world.

Lastly, the forthcoming Christmas holidays give me an opportunity to extend my sincere good wishes for a holy Christmas and a happy New Year to you and your family and, through you, to the sovereigns whom you represent as well as to all the Swedish people. To these wishes I willingly add my remembrance in prayer to the Lord that the cordial relations between Sweden and the Holy See may continue to develop along the well-established and by now traditional lines. I also assure you of my esteem and support in the fulfilment of the high mission entrusted to you, and I reinforce these sentiments by invoking an abundance of divine blessings upon you and your loved ones.

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