



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED KINGDOM
TO THE HOLY SEE****

Saturday, 7 September 2002

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to welcome you today as you present the Letters by which Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has appointed you her Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. The greetings which you bring from Her Majesty are very much appreciated; as I recall the visit which she and Prince Philip paid to me two years ago I ask you kindly to convey to her my prayerful good wishes during this year of the Golden Jubilee of her Reign.

Your reference to the reprehensible terrorist attacks of 11 September last, and to the many preoccupying situations of injustice throughout the world, reminds us that the millennium just begun presents great challenges. It calls for a resolute and uncompromising commitment on the part of individuals, peoples and nations to defending the inalienable rights and dignity of every member of the human family. At the same time, it demands the building of a global culture of solidarity which will find expression not simply in terms of more effective economic or political organization but more importantly in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation in the service of the common good.

In recent years, your Government has made notable efforts to advance such a culture and to strengthen the foundations of international peace and human development. I think, for example, of the generosity shown in reducing or even cancelling the international debt of poorer countries; the leading role played by the British military in bringing security to the new government in Afghanistan; and the priority given to the African continent, seen especially in the appeals made at the recent G-8 meeting in Canada for the "Africa Action Plan". I likewise express my appreciation of the continuing efforts to bring peace and normality to Northern Ireland.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of last September, the international community has recognized the urgent need to combat the phenomenon of well-financed and highly-organized international terrorism, which represents a formidable and immediate threat to world peace. Spawned by hatred, isolation and distrust, terrorism adds violence to violence in a tragic spiral that embitters and poisons successive generations. Ultimately, "terrorism is built on contempt for human life. For this reason, not only does it commit intolerable crimes, but, because it resorts to terror as a political and military means, it is itself a true crime against humanity" (*Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace*, No. 4).

As an essential part of its fight against all forms of terrorism, the international community is called to undertake new and creative political, diplomatic and economic initiatives aimed at relieving the scandalous situations of gross injustice, oppression and marginalization which continue to oppress countless members of the human family. History in fact shows that the recruitment of terrorists is more easily achieved in areas where human rights are trampled upon and where injustice is a part of daily life. This is not to say that the inequalities and abuses existing in the world excuse acts of terrorism: there can never of course be any justification for violence and disregard for human life. However, the international community can no longer overlook the underlying causes that lead young people especially to despair of humanity, of life itself and of the future, and to fall prey to the temptations of violence, hatred and a desire for revenge at any cost.

It was out of concern for these more profound human issues that I invited the leaders and representatives of the world's religions to join me in Assisi last January in order to bear clear and unambiguous witness to our shared convictions concerning the unity of the human family and the particular obligation of religious believers to cooperate, together with men and women of good will everywhere, in building a future of peace. In the end, it is in the conversion of hearts and the spiritual renewal of societies that the hope of a better tomorrow lies. The building of such a global culture of solidarity is perhaps the greatest moral task confronting humanity today. It presents a particular spiritual and cultural challenge to the developed countries of the West, where the principles and values of the Christian religion have long been woven into the very fabric of society but are now being called into question by alternative cultural models grounded in an exaggerated individualism which all too often leads to indifferentism, hedonism, consumerism and a practical materialism that can erode and even subvert the foundations of social life.

In the face of this cultural and spiritual challenge, I am confident that the Christian community in the United Kingdom will continue to make its voice heard in the great debates shaping the future of society, and will continue to offer credible testimony to their convictions through their programmes of educational, charitable and social outreach. The past decades have, by God's grace, seen significant progress in the building of cordial ecumenical relations which are more genuinely expressive of our common spiritual roots (cf. *Address to Her Majesty*, 17 October 2000). The common witness of committed Christians can greatly contribute to the renewal of social life in a way which respects and builds upon the incomparable patrimony of political, cultural and spiritual

ideals and achievements which has shaped your nation's history and her contributions to the world.

In this regard my thoughts turn immediately to the need for an uncompromising defence of the rights of the family and the legal protection of the institution of marriage. The family plays a decisive role in fostering those values upon which any civilization worthy of the name is built. The whole of human society is deeply rooted in the family, and any weakening of this indispensable institution cannot but be a potential source of grave difficulties and problems for society as a whole.

Another area of concern in which Christians can offer a privileged witness is that of respect for life in the face of attempts to legitimize abortion, the production of human embryos for research and processes of genetic manipulation such as the cloning of human beings. Neither human life nor the human person can ever legitimately be treated as an object to be manipulated or as a disposable commodity; rather each human being – at every stage of existence, from conception to natural death – is endowed by the Creator with a sublime dignity that demands the greatest respect and vigilance on the part of individuals, communities, nations and international bodies.

Your Excellency, I offer you my prayerful good wishes as you take up your high responsibilities. I am confident that the fulfilment of your diplomatic duties will contribute to a further strengthening of the friendly relations between the United Kingdom and the Holy See, and I assure you of the constant readiness of the offices of the Holy See to assist you. Upon you and upon all whom you serve I cordially invoke the blessings of Almighty God.

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