



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday 15 May 2003

Your Excellency,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Vatican at the beginning of your mission as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Georgia to the Holy See. My visit to your country in 1999 was a particular joy for me. I fondly recall the warmth with which I was received and the fervent ecumenical spirit in which I was able to share. I would ask you kindly to convey to His Excellency President Shevardnadze, and to the Government and people of your noble land, my gratitude for their good wishes, which I reciprocate, and to assure them of my prayers for the nation's peace and well-being.

The ideals of peace, freedom and justice to which you poignantly refer are essential and interdependent components of genuine progress in any nation. Authentic development must not however become detached from its intrinsic connection with human rights (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 33). As the people of Georgia know only too well, when these rights – rooted in the very nature of the human person – are denied, not only is the economic growth of a nation thwarted but the culture itself is undermined and the spirit of the people stifled. Nevertheless, in spite of the various forms of oppression that Georgia has suffered, the identity and unity of the nation have survived and today are flourishing anew.

As Georgia continues to engage in the delicate task of shaping its national spirit, it should constantly be borne in mind that human development cannot be reduced solely to economic elements. The "mere accumulation of goods and services, even for the benefit of the majority, is not enough for the realization of human happiness" (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 28). Indeed, the experience of history shows that no matter what the dominant political ideology may be, unless the laws and institutions of civic life are guided by an orientation towards the true good of the human

person, hallmarks of so-called economic liberation can in fact mask injustices of increasing poverty and social fragmentation. In the face of such inequalities, usually caused by the exclusion of the weakest members of society from access to resources and services intended for all, we are reminded that the gifts we receive from God are given in order that we may make them more fruitful (cf. *Mt 25:26-28*). Thus it is in accordance with the will of God the Creator that we must commit ourselves to working together for the full development of others: development of the whole human being and of all people (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 30).

Christianity has made profound contributions to Georgia in the past. It must do likewise in the present and future. Since the preaching of Saint Nino in the early fourth century, Christianity has found expression in Georgian culture and has safeguarded the nation's identity which has been so often threatened. For this reason I said during my visit to your country that faith in Jesus Christ is Georgia's "true anchor" (*Arrival Speech*, Tbilisi, 8 November 1999). This faith, which has held together the nation's resolute aspirations to unity, has been recorded and celebrated in numerous ways through Georgia's great spiritual heritage. Most importantly, this heritage has steadfastly preserved the great treasure of a unified and comprehensive notion of the human person and his destiny. With such resources Georgia can make an important contribution to the stability of the region. Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, it is in a unique position to inspire a new culture of the spirit witnessing to a civilization of love sustained by the message of the Gospel.

The cooperation and example of the Christian Churches is crucial to the attainment of national unity necessary for Georgia to take its rightful place in the new Europe. Faithful to the will of the Lord who desired all his disciples to be one (cf. *Jn 17:21*), Georgian Christians must tirelessly strive to be united in common witness to him and his Gospel. This demands that the ecumenical dialogue between Churches, the theological progress of which cannot be underestimated, must be further enhanced by practical gestures of generosity and justice, especially in regard to the right of freedom of conscience expressed most sublimely in freedom of worship. It is fidelity to truth and charity which renders anomalous, indeed even contradictory, any obstacles placed in the path of genuine religious worship and the preservation of cultural patrimony associated with it. In this regard, I am confident that the recent statement of President Shevardnadze about religious intolerance echoes the thoughts of all men and women of goodwill.

Mr Ambassador, I thank you for your gracious words of appreciation for what the Catholic Church is doing for the people of Georgia through her humanitarian organizations assisting vulnerable groups. The Church's charitable mission of service to all peoples, particularly the poor and suffering, stands at the heart of her witness to Christ's all-encompassing love. It is her ardent desire to extend where possible her "commitment to practical and concrete love for every human being" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 49). Christian charity however is always more than simply humanitarian aid. For the Catholic Church, her acts of charity are inextricably linked to the celebration of the Eucharist from which she draws the spiritual power needed to sustain the life of her people and carry out her mission (cf. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 22). And so, as the small

Catholic community in Georgia continues to gather together to worship the Lord, so too her service of unconditional love to all Georgians will prosper, bringing gestures of peace and hope to the most needful of your nation.

Your Excellency, I am confident that the diplomatic mission which you begin today will further strengthen the bonds of understanding and cooperation existing between the Republic of Georgia and the Holy See. I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia are willing to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. With my sincere good wishes, I invoke upon you, your family and all the people of Georgia, the blessings of Almighty God.

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