



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr FRANK DE CONINCK
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 26 October 2006

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome Your Excellency to the Vatican on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Belgium to the Holy See.

I cordially thank you for conveying to me the courteous message of His Majesty King Albert II and Her Majesty the Queen. Remembering the visit that Their Majesties paid to me last April, I would be grateful if you would kindly reciprocate by expressing my best wishes for them, for Queen Fabiola, for Prince Philip and for Princess Mathilde, as well as for the Civil Authorities and the entire Belgian People.

Fifty years after the great project of building Europe was launched, which stems from the Christian spirit and to which Belgium was party from the outset, considerable progress has been made, even if new difficulties have recently arisen: the European Continent is gradually and peacefully rediscovering its unity and the European Union has become a major economic power in the world, as well as a sign of hope for many.

In the face of the demands of the globalization of exchanges and of solidarity among human beings, Europe must continue to open up to become involved in the great initiatives of the planet.

The issue of peace and security is on the front line of these challenges, while we are seeing an international situation weakened by lasting conflicts. This is especially the case in the Middle East with the ongoing dramatic situation in the Holy Land, in Lebanon and Iraq, but also in Africa and in Asia.

It is of the utmost importance that the international community and especially the European Union be resolutely mobilized to further peace, international dialogue and development. I know that Belgium spares no effort in this regard.

In particular, I acknowledge its efforts to help the Central African Countries settle their future in peace. I also hail its efforts in the context of Lebanon, to which you have just referred. For my part, I can assure you of the determined commitment of the Holy See to do all it can to further peace and development.

Another challenge concerns the future of man and his identity. The immense progress of technology has upset many practices in the field of medical sciences, whereas the erasing of customs has considerably relativized norms that seemed inviolable. Hence, in the Western societies most characterized by a superabundance of consumer goods and by subjectivism, man is confronted by a crisis of meaning.

In a certain number of countries, we are actually seeing the appearance of new legislation that calls into question respect for human life from its conception until its natural end at the risk of exploiting it as an object for research and experimentation, and thereby striking a serious blow to the fundamental dignity of the human being.

On the basis of her long experience and on the treasure of the Revelation which she received as a deposit to be shared, the Church intends to recall forcefully what she believes concerning the human being and his fantastic destiny, giving to each one the key to the interpretation of life and of the reasons for hope. It is this that she desires to propose during the evangelization congress that will begin in a few days' time entitled: *"Brussels All Saints 2006"*.

When the Bishops of Belgium plead for the development of palliative care to enable those who so desire to die in dignity, or when they intervene in social debates to recall that "an invisible moral frontier exists to which technological progress must give way" (*Dignité de l'enfant et technique médicale*), their intention is to serve the whole of society, pointing out the conditions for a future of true freedom and dignity for humankind.

With them, I invite the political leaders in charge of making laws for the common good to take serious stock of their responsibility and of the human issues at stake.

Your Country, the Kingdom of Belgium, is built around the monarchical principle, making the King the guarantor of national unity and of respect for the linguistic and cultural particularities of each community in the heart of the Nation. A country's unity, to be constantly perfected as we know well, demands of everyone the desire to serve the common interest and to be ever better acquainted with one another by means of dialogue and mutual enrichment.

Today, the acceptance of ever more numerous immigrants and the multiplication in the same land of communities with different cultural or religious backgrounds makes intercultural and interreligious dialogue absolutely indispensable in our societies, as I recalled during my recent Journey to Bavaria and as you yourself have emphasized.

It would be right to deepen mutual knowledge, respecting the religious beliefs of each person and the legitimate requirements of social life in conformity with the laws in force, and to welcome immigrants in such a way that their dignity is always respected.

To do this, it is important to implement an immigration policy that can reconcile the interests of the host country with the necessary development of the less-privileged countries. This policy should also be supported by a desire for integration which leaves no room for the development of situations of rejection or no-rights, such as revealed by the drama of those without documents.

Thus, the risks of self-withdrawal, exacerbated nationalism or even xenophobia would be avoided and it would be possible to hope for a harmonious development of our societies for the good of all the citizens.

At the end of our conversation, Mr Ambassador, may I be permitted through you to greet the Bishops and all the members of the Catholic Community of Belgium, in order to encourage them to witness tirelessly to the hope that is in them in all the sectors of social and professional life without forgetting prisons, hospitals and all the new situations of poverty that can exist. May they carry with them the Good News of God's love!

Mr Ambassador, at the time when you are beginning your noble mission, rest assured that you will always meet with an attentive welcome from my collaborators. I offer you my best wishes for its success and for the continuation and development of harmonious relations between the Holy See and the Kingdom of Belgium.

I invoke an abundance of divine Blessings upon you, Your Excellency, and upon your family and all the Embassy staff, as well as upon the Royal Family, the leaders and all the Country's inhabitants.

**L'Osservatore Romano* n. 47 p. 4.

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