



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr VLADETA JANKOVIĆ
NEW AMBASSADOR OF SERBIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 21 February 2008

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to welcome you at the start of your mission and to accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Serbia to the Holy See. I thank you for your kind words and for the greetings you bring from President Boris Tadić. Please convey to him my respectful good wishes on the occasion of his recent re-election, and the assurance of my prayers for all the people of your nation.

The Holy See greatly values its diplomatic links with Serbia, and hopes thereby to offer encouragement to the continuing efforts to build a future of peace, prosperity, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence throughout the region, as Serbia and its neighbours seek to take their proper place within Europe. Few countries in the continent of Europe escaped the ravages of war in the last century, and all can learn from the lessons of the recent past. As you work towards a more secure future, it is vital to remember that the identity and the rich cultural tradition of your nation, as of all European nations, is deeply rooted in the heritage of Christian faith and the Gospel of love. "There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 28). The followers of Christ are called to offer that service of love to all their brothers and sisters without distinction: only in this way can long-standing tensions finally be laid to rest.

Thus it is that, if we choose to live by the values drawn from our Christian roots, we discover the courage to forgive and to accept forgiveness, to be reconciled with our neighbours and to build together a civilization of love in which all are accepted and respected. I know how deeply the Serb people have suffered in the course of recent conflicts and I wish to express my heartfelt concern

for them and for the other Balkan nations affected by the sad events of the last decade. The Holy See shares your earnest desire that the peace which has been achieved will bring lasting stability to the region. In particular, with regard to the current crisis in Kosovo, I call upon all interested parties to act with prudence and moderation, and to seek solutions that favour mutual respect and reconciliation.

Not least among the various divisions between the peoples of Europe are those resulting from the tragic loss of Christian unity over the past thousand years. I rejoice in the progress that has been made in relations between Orthodox and Catholic Christians, and I am especially grateful to the Serbian Orthodox Church for graciously hosting the 2006 meeting of the mixed commission for theological dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox, with the active support of senior members of your Government. Indeed there have been many hopeful developments in this area, encouraged by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, including the recent joint initiatives between the Pontifical Lateran University and the Orthodox Theology Faculty of the Patriarchate of Serbia in Belgrade, to which Your Excellency has made reference. I earnestly hope that these positive developments will continue to bear fruit, in particular through joint exploration of Christian social doctrine, and in this regard I gratefully recall the welcome accorded to Cardinal Renato Martino, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, on his recent visit to the Orthodox Theology Faculty.

Serbia's geographical location on the border between Eastern and Western Christianity gives her a unique opportunity to promote ecumenical dialogue, while her familiarity with Islam, both through her encounter with the Ottoman Empire and through the presence of many Muslims in the region today, opens up rich possibilities for progress in inter-religious dialogue. Both of these processes are of the utmost importance in establishing greater mutual understanding and respect between peoples and nations in the modern world. Be assured that the Catholic Church in Serbia is eager to build further on its good relations with the Holy Synod and to play its part in joint initiatives designed to foster Christian unity and a genuine *rapprochement* between the adherents of different religions, contributing in this way to the building of peace and harmony within and between nations.

Freedom of religion is an indispensable element in building the kind of society in which such harmony can develop, and the steps taken by Serbia in recent years to guarantee this fundamental human right are greatly appreciated. The plan to restore to Churches and religious communities property which had been nationalized by the Yugoslav Federation and the introduction of religious teaching in schools have contributed to the spiritual renewal of your country, and in this regard an important example has been given from which other governments can learn. I pray that this openness to religious values in society will continue to grow, so that public debate may be truly nourished by the principles derived from faith. As I indicated in the [lecture that I prepared recently for "La Sapienza" University in Rome](#) (17 January 2008), if reason "becomes deaf to the great message that comes to it from Christian faith and wisdom, then it

withers like a tree whose roots can no longer reach the waters that give it life.” Without the nourishment that comes from living faith, culture is deeply impoverished and prospects for a truly humane civilization rapidly recede.

Your Excellency, I pray that the diplomatic mission which you begin today will further strengthen the good relations that exist between the Holy See and your country. I assure you that the various departments of the Roman Curia are always ready to offer help and support in the fulfilment of your duties. With my sincere good wishes, I invoke upon you, your family, and all the people of Serbia, God’s abundant blessings.

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