



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr MILTIADIS HISKAKIS
AMBASSADOR OF THE HELLENIC REPUBLIC TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 15 March 2008

Your Excellency,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the letters by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Hellenic Republic to the Holy See. I am grateful for the courteous greeting which you have conveyed from His Excellency Mr Karolos Papoulias, and I would ask that you assure him, the leaders of your country and the people of Greece of my good wishes and prayers for their well-being and peace.

Recently, several significant encounters have strengthened the bonds of goodwill between Greece and the Holy See. In the wake of the Jubilee Year of 2000, my venerable predecessor Pope John Paul II visited your country during his pilgrimage in the footsteps of Saint Paul. This led to an exchange of visits from Orthodox and Catholic delegations to and from Rome and Athens. In 2006, I was happy to receive your President here at the Vatican, and I was graced by a visit from His Beatitude Christodoulos, whose recent death Christians in your country and throughout the world continue to mourn. I pray that the Lord will grant this devoted pastor rest from his labours and bless him for his valiant efforts to mend the breach between Christians in the East and West. I avail myself of this occasion to extend to the new Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, His Beatitude Ieronymos, my sincere fraternal greetings of peace, together with an assurance of my constant prayers for his fruitful ministry and good health.

Let me also take this opportunity to reiterate my eagerness to work together as we travel the road towards Christian unity. In this regard, Your Excellency has highlighted the signs of hope emerging from the ecumenical meetings that have taken place over the past decades. Not only have these reaffirmed what Catholics and Orthodox already hold in common, but they have also opened the

door to deeper discussions about the precise meaning of the Church's unity. Undoubtedly, honesty and trust will be required from all parties if the important questions raised by this dialogue are to continue to be addressed effectively. We take courage from the "new spirit" of friendship that has characterized our conversations, inviting all participants to ongoing conversion and prayer, which alone are able to ensure that Christians will one day attain the unity for which Jesus prayed so fervently (cf. *Jn 17:21*).

The imminent Jubilee dedicated to the bi-millennial anniversary of the birth of Saint Paul will be a particularly auspicious occasion to intensify our ecumenical endeavours, for Paul was a man who "left no stones unturned for unity and harmony among all Christians" (cf. *Homily at the Vespers celebration of the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul*, 28 June 2007). This brilliant "Apostle to the Gentiles" dedicated his energies to preaching the wisdom of the cross of Christ amidst the people of Greece, who were formed by the highly sophisticated Hellenistic culture. Because Paul's memory is forever planted in her soil, Greece will play an important role in this celebration. I am confident that the pilgrims who come to Greece in order to venerate the holy sites associated with his life and teaching will be embraced with the warm spirit of hospitality for which your nation is renowned.

The vibrant exchange between Hellenistic culture and Christianity allowed the former to be transformed by Christian teaching and the latter to be enriched by Greek language and philosophy. This enabled Christians to communicate the Gospel more coherently and persuasively throughout the world. Even today, visitors to Athens can contemplate Paul's words—now etched on the monument overlooking the Areopagus—which he proclaimed to the learned citizens of the *polis*. He spoke of the one God in whom "we live and move and have our being" (cf. *Acts 17:16-34*). Paul's powerful preaching of the mystery of Christ to the Corinthians, who highly esteemed their philosophical heritage (cf. *1 Cor 2:5*), opened their culture to the salutary influence of the Word of God. His words still resound in the hearts of men and women today. They can help our contemporaries to appreciate more deeply their human dignity, and thus promote the good of the entire human family. It is my hope that the Pauline Year will become a catalyst that will spark reflection upon the history of Europe and stir its inhabitants to rediscover the inestimable treasure of values they have inherited from the integral wisdom of Hellenistic culture and the Gospel.

Mr Ambassador, I thank you for the assurance of your government's resolve to address administrative issues concerning the Catholic Church in your nation. Among these, the question of its juridical status is of particular significance. The Catholic faithful, though few in number, look forward to the favourable results of these deliberations. Indeed, when religious leaders and civil authorities work together to formulate fair legislation in regard to the life of local ecclesial communities, the spiritual welfare of the faithful and the good of all society are enhanced.

In the international arena, I commend Greece's efforts to promote peace and reconciliation, especially in the surrounding area of the Mediterranean basin. Her efforts to quell tensions and

dispel the clouds of suspicion which have long stood in the way of a fully harmonious coexistence in the region will help to rekindle a spirit of goodwill between individuals and nations.

Finally, Mr Ambassador, I cannot help but recall the devastation caused by the wildfires that raged through Greece last summer. I continue to remember in my prayers those who were affected by this disaster, and I invoke God's grace and strength upon all those involved in the process of rebuilding. As you assume your responsibilities within the diplomatic community accredited to the Holy See, I offer you my prayerful good wishes for the success of your mission and assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia will always be ready to assist you in your duties. I cordially invoke upon you and all the beloved people of Greece the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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