



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H. E. Mr PAAVO KAARLEHTO
NEW AMBASSADOR OF FINLAND TO THE HOLY SEE****

Friday, 21 June 1991

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Finland to the Holy See. Recalling with pleasure the warm welcome and kind hospitality which I received during my Pastoral Visit to Finland two years ago, I ask you to convey my greetings to President Koivisto and the members of the Government, to assure them of my cordial good wishes for the well-being of your country and all its people.

I am grateful for Your Excellency's kind reference to the Holy See's efforts to promote justice and peace in the world. My Visit to your country, and in particular my Address to the Paasikivi Association in Helsinki, afforded me an opportunity to explain the nature of the Holy See's presence and activity in the international community, and to point out that the goal of the Holy See's activity is to promote respect for the fundamental ethical and moral principles which are the basis for harmonious cooperation among nations with a view to the common good of all mankind. Foremost among these principles is respect for the dignity of each human person and for the inalienable rights which flow from that dignity. As a result of the success of the 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe held in your capital, the name *Helsinki* has become almost synonymous with the conviction that respect for human rights constitutes the essential foundation of a world of peace and justice. This conviction, which is likewise an integral part of the Christian vision of man and society, is deeply imbedded in your own people's culture and I trust that it will always continue to inspire Finland's progress and her involvement in the community of nations.

As the events of this century have demonstrated, a refusal to acknowledge respect for human

dignity and freedom as a moral imperative to be applied to every sector of human activity inevitably leads to grave injustice and acts of violence against individuals and entire social groups. While we can rejoice at the profound changes taking place in the structures and policies of many countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the leaders of the nations, with the intelligent participation of all sectors of society, must at the same time be ready to meet the many new and grave challenges already demanding urgent attention. Among the more serious threats to human dignity I would note the emergence of a concept of freedom detached from truth and from the demands of a transcendent moral law. It is not possible for a society to live in an ethical vacuum. Certain moral imperatives spring from the very being and nature of things, especially of man and his vocation to peaceful and constructive coexistence with others.

An important part of the Holy See's activity within the international community consists in drawing attention to the ethical and moral values involved in decisions and policies affecting people's lives. The Holy See is committed to insisting on the fact that efforts to solve serious national and international problems call for important changes of attitude, behaviour and structures, as well as attention to the spiritual dimension of life (Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 60). Because the health of any society ultimately depends upon the integrity with which its citizens work together to address social issues in the light of the criteria of truth, justice and morality, I again express the hope that your own nation's efforts in this regard will remain "rooted in the lofty moral and social principles that are part of Finland's most precious heritage" (John Paul II, *Meeting with the President of Finland, Mr. Mauno Koivisto*, 4, [4 June 1989]).

Although Catholics in Finland represent only a small portion of the population, they too have an active contribution to make to the well-being of their homeland. The Church wishes to help in developing a social order firmly based on respect for human dignity, by educating people to spiritual values, by inculcating ethical and moral principles, and by showing a special concern for the vulnerable and the poor. Indeed, the way in which people are involved in building their own future ultimately depends on the understanding they have of themselves and of human destiny. As I pointed out in my recent Encyclical "*Centesimus Annus*", "it is on this level that the Church's specific and decisive contribution to true culture is to be found" (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 51). Against this background, I hope that the already warm relations between Finland and the Holy See will lead to ever closer understanding and cooperation in matters of common concern.

Mr Ambassador, I offer you my best wishes as you begin your mission, assuring you of the readiness of the various offices of the Holy See to assist you in your work. Upon yourself and all the people of Finland I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

*AAS 84 (1992), p. 309-310.

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