



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr YARO YUSUF MAMMAN
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 4 January 1992

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you today for the presentation of the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Almost ten years have passed since my visit to your country. The warm hospitality of the Nigerian people and their determination to pursue progress in justice and peace remain a vivid memory of that pilgrimage to Africa. I am grateful for the kind greetings which you have expressed on behalf of His Excellency President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, and I gladly respond with my prayerful best wishes for the well-being of all your fellow-citizens.

Until recently many aspects of international life were dominated by the division of the world into opposing blocs, in which ideological factors have been preponderant. The totalitarian ideologies of this century—declaring themselves hostile to God—have proved to be tragically hostile to the people in whose name and for whose benefit they claimed to exercise power. Their grave internal philosophical contradictions included an inability to recognize the individual as a person endowed with an indomitable spiritual thrust towards freedom, and especially towards freedom of conscience. Where those ideologies prevailed, oppressive regimes sought to separate people from their spiritual and cultural roots by changing their points of reference and systems of values. This has served only to spread the greatest alienation of all: the alienation of man from God, the alienation of so many individuals from the very foundation of truth, morality and authentic human solidarity. This is a spiritual and cultural wound which will require much healing.

Through the events of recent years a new situation has arisen in individual countries and in the

international community. In the Encyclical "[Centesimus Annus](#)" I wrote: "The events of 1989 took place principally in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. However, they have worldwide importance because they have positive and negative consequences which concern the whole human family. These consequences are not mechanistic or fatalistic in character, but rather are opportunities for human freedom to cooperate with the merciful plan of God who acts within history" (John Paul II, [Centesimus Annus](#), 26). It might be said that history at this time is concentrated and poised to take a decisive step. Whether or not this step will lead to a better future depends greatly on the wisdom of the world's leaders and the capacity of peoples to seek to resolve the complex problems facing the human family through dialogue and solidarity, rather than through rivalry and conflict. And in responding to the new international situation, there can be no "slackening of efforts to sustain and assist the countries of the Third World" ([Ibid. 28](#)). Indeed, the recent changes in the climate of international relations within Europe and the whole of the Northern Hemisphere provide a providential opportunity for the industrialized nations to act more effectively in solidarity with the peoples of the world who are in need of development.

Nigeria has been striving in recent years to consolidate a more representative and democratic form of political and social organization, and among these initiatives will be the elections for a civilian government to be held later this year. The key to the success of such positive developments lies in defending the human person, the family, the various social organizations – all of which enjoy their own spheres of autonomy and sovereignty (Cf. John Paul II, [Centesimus Annus](#) 45). Efforts to strengthen the democratic system contribute to building a more dynamic, just and peaceful society insofar as such a system enables all citizens to express their political choices, affords them the possibility of electing and holding to account those who govern them, and of replacing them by peaceful means when appropriate ([Ibid. 46](#)). When structures of participation and shared responsibility are strengthened, and opportunities are created for the advancement of individuals through education and work, society finds within itself the resources needed to fuel its own progress. May Almighty God grant that your people and your Government will see their efforts crowned by success in building a better and brighter future.

An indispensable condition for any people to secure for themselves a social order which respects the inviolable dignity of the human person is that the followers of different religious traditions in the nation strive to live in harmony. The importance of good interreligious relations for the construction of peace is a central topic of my own Message for this year's World Day of Peace: "Bearing witness to peace and working and praying for peace are a normal part of good religious behaviour. This also explains why in the sacred books of the different religions references to peace occupy a prominent place in the context of man's life and his relationship with God. For example, we Christians believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of the One who has 'plans for welfare and not for evil' (Jer. 29:11) is 'our peace'... (Eph. 2:14), and for the followers of Islam the term 'salam' is so important that it constitutes one of the glorious divine names.... [Indeed,] it is in the nature of religion to foster an ever closer bond with the Godhead and to promote an increasingly fraternal relationship among people" (John Paul II, [Message for the World Day of Peace 1992](#), 2). It is my

earnest hope that your country will stand out in the world as a beacon of understanding and mutual respect among all believers. I renew the appeal for dialogue and cooperation that I made when I visited Nigeria: "If we join hands in the name of God we can accomplish much good. We can collaborate in the promotion of justice, peace and development" (John Paul II, *Address to the Muslim Religious Leaders in Kaduna*, 4 Feb.1982).

Mr Ambassador, may your tenure as your nation's Representative to the Holy See be a fruitful contribution to building up peace and solidarity in the relations of peoples and nations. I assure you of the cooperation of the various departments of the Holy See. May the blessings of the Most High God be with you and with the beloved Nigerian people.

*AAS 85 (1992), p. 45-47.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XV, 1 pp. 9-12.

L'Attività della Santa Sede 1992 pp. 9-11.

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