



# The Holy See

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***DISCOURS DU SAINT-PÈRE JEAN-PAUL II  
À S. E. MONSIEUR KIRIL KIRILOV MARITCHKOV,  
NOUVEL AMBASSADEUR DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE  
DE BULGARIE PRÈS LE SAINT-SIÈGE\****

*Samedi, 14 novembre 1992*

Mr. Ambassador,

I am happy to welcome Your Excellency on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as the first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Apostolic See. This meeting is an important milestone in the relations between the Holy See and the noble nation of Bulgaria.

I am touched by the warm words you addressed to me. I thank you particularly for the message of esteem which you conveyed to me from the authorities of your country. I ask you in return to express to them my respectful greeting and my wishes for those who bear the responsibility of serving the nation and their fellow citizen.

1. You yourself mentioned the fruitful ties which for more than a millennium have united the Apostolic See and Bulgaria, a nation with a rich cultural and religious past. Saints Cyril and Methodius, the evangelizers of Central Europe, are particularly honoured by your people and their leaders. They are a part of your history and tradition. The annual pilgrimage of your fellow citizens to the Church of Saint Clement in Rome attests to your people's devotion to those men who fostered the development of an authentically Slav culture by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a language accessible to everyone. Throughout the centuries and successive generations, this culture of Central Europe promoted the awareness of belonging to peoples who had to achieve their national unity and who were capable of playing a specific role in the continent's renewed unity.

2. You mentioned, Mr. Ambassador, some personal events related to Archbishop Angelo Roncalli's presence in your country. Your memories show the affection of the Bulgarian people for the person of my venerable predecessor and the confidence which inspired his tireless work. Evidence of this is in the fact that today a street in the capital of Bulgaria bears his name. Your testimony also shows one of the essential dimensions of ecclesial life within societies where the Church exercises her spiritual mission, namely, the exercise of charity and national solidarity. Indeed, Archbishop Roncalli, first as Apostolic Visitor and then as Apostolic Delegate in Sofia, did much to promote charitable work on behalf of refugees and the poor. We particularly recall how he helped to aid the victims of the 1928 earthquake. Before ending his mission in Bulgaria, the future Pope John XXIII said: «I leave your country as a friend.... I take with me wonderful memories of Bulgaria». The Catholic hierarchy and people of Bulgaria are part of this tradition of fraternity and friendship. The Church wants to have adequate diocesan structures with sufficient material means to accomplish her spiritual mission of proclaiming the Gospel in fraternal respect and a spirit of cooperation with the Orthodox hierarchy and communities.

3. The Catholics of Bulgaria are certainly not very numerous. However, they want to participate actively in society because of their good will for their fellow citizens and the acceptance they give their authorities, helping to foster ever more cordial relations among all the inhabitants of the land of Bulgaria, regardless of social or ethnic origin or religious creed, in order to affirm the national conscience which has already expressed itself so greatly in the peaceful transition to democracy. With their fellow citizens they want to promote cordial understanding with neighbouring nations so that each people may enjoy the peace and freedom they have finally regained thanks to the political changes which recently occurred in the Balkans. The many years of suffering and trial experienced by many of your fellow citizens have not dampened their enthusiasm. They have the resources of tenacity, hope and daring necessary to build a fraternal society. People of other cultures can benefit from the proverbial Slav hospitality and be integrated into the nation. They contribute their help and expertise to the life of the nation. It is important that they always be respected and recognized according to the principles inspiring the sense of justice and an equitable distribution of land among people.

4. This day my thoughts turn to all your fellow citizens. I express my fervent wish that each nation of the European continent may experience within its borders the unity and peace to which all aspire and thus participate in building the international community. During the long period in which the communist yoke weighed so heavily on many peoples, as you know, the Church did not cease reiterating, in season and out of season, the right of individuals and peoples to have their autonomy recognized and to enjoy freedom of association, enterprise and religious practice. The Holy See wants to foster relations between peoples and the leaders of nations in order to establish constructive dialogue and increase trust among States, two indispensable elements for the building of a fraternal world in which each person can take his or her proper place.

At this time when your mission as the representative of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Holy See is

beginning, I offer my best wishes to you, Mr Ambassador. I hope that the discoveries in Roman history which you can make will allow you to be a bridge between the Latin and Slav cultures so that the brothers and sisters of a single continent can draw closer together and undertake a more intense dialogue. The new diplomatic relations for their part, express the bonds which have remained throughout the vicissitudes of history. I hope that they will be strengthened and increased through mutual trust. Be assured that in my co-workers you will always find the attentive support and cordial understanding which you will need so that your activity may be successful and give you the satisfaction you hope for.

Upon Your Excellency the people of Bulgaria and their leaders, I cordially invoke an abundance of divine blessings.

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