



# The Holy See

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***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II  
AL NUOVO AMBASCIATORE D'AUSTRIA PRESSO LA SANTA SEDE,  
S.E. IL SIGNOR CHRISTOPH CORNARO, IN OCCASIONE DELLA PRESENTAZIONE DELLE  
LETTERE CREDENZIALI\****

*Lunedì, 28 febbraio 1994*

Mr. Ambassador,

1 Please accept my sincere thanks for the very friendly words accompanying the presentation of the Letter of Credence accrediting you as the new Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Austria to the Holy See. I welcome you most cordially as you take office and wish you well in this honorable and very important task.

You are assuming the great responsibility of ensuring that Austria, with its great history and its rich cultural heritage, can make its fitting contribution to Europe's future. Thus the Republic of Austria can help tear down the walls which were erected because of division, misunderstanding and war. It can also instill confidence in the possibility of solving the complex difficulties and conflicts which have arisen since the events of 1989.

2. Today's first meeting, as you mentioned, takes place under the shadow of a war in progress in part of Europe, with its immeasurable suffering for civilian populations. As I emphasized in my homily on 23 January of this year, «new walls seem to have risen to divide Europe in a different way and for other reasons. These modern barriers, which first and foremost separate nations, are clearly nationalism. Today we are witnesses of the undisputed erection of these divisions, as is happening in the Balkan region» (L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 26 January, p. 1). Horrors of the most brutal type, the worst violations of human rights, are destroying the civilization of love, understanding and tolerance. The acts of violence perpetrated against the elderly, women and children must stir our consciences and cannot be allowed to silence our call for peace on earth. No person of goodwill can be resigned to the situation.

In this context I want to take the opportunity to thank the Government, the Church and all people of goodwill in the Republic of Austria for the many types of aid which they have given to the refugees, the victims of persecution, migrants and the suffering. At the same time I want to express my conviction that in the future Austria will not fail to show its magnanimous goodwill and effective charity to other people who are in need.

3. The present situation also gives us cause to consider how we may combat the differing estimation of human rights that unfortunately still exists in international law. Indeed, after the collapse of ideological barriers in the former communist countries a certain agreement about the value of freedom and the meaning of human rights did develop, in our day, however, there is the great danger that the initial euphoria is changing into a new sense of disappointment and frustration. The concept of the defence of human rights sanctioned by law is now accepted in principle, but greater efforts are needed to effect their practical application. Should the international community consider itself unequal to creating effective mechanisms to prevent the flagrant violation of human rights and to safeguard peace, a grave dilemma arises, leading to serious moral problems. All ethnic and religious groups should be integrated into the State as a whole, and care must also be taken to ensure that they have equal opportunities to participate in civil life.

4. The co-operation between your country and the Holy See primarily involves creating a firm basis for ensuring peace and a just order in Europe. Here Austria's role, based on its historical and geographic position, is particularly important. In this matter we cannot return to outmoded and antiquated ways of thinking, which have proved inadequate. A policy based on the nation-state as it was conceived at the time of the First World War would be harmful to Europe. In view of the changed circumstances, the peacemaking role of Europe, and of Austria in particular, is of decisive importance.

Austria's traditional role was always that of a mediator between Western and Eastern neighbours. If the Republic of Austria's neighbouring States today are tempted to pick up where they left off at the beginning of the communist era, it should be remembered that the destruction wrought affected not only the economic and civil order, but most of all the spiritual realm. Therefore it is important to emphasize again and to pass on the spiritual principles and the value system which shaped Europe over the centuries, on the basis of its Christian convictions. As I stressed in the Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, there is an «ever more widespread and acute sense of the need for a radical personal and social renewal capable of ensuring justice, solidarity, honesty and openness» (n. 98).

The increased opportunity for human freedom is one of the great achievements of European history. In Europe's free societies the value system and morality have, however, come under the influence of the market and capitalism, and this does not always safeguard the interests of the

above-mentioned values. Thus, «in every sphere of personal, family, social and political life, morality – founded upon truth and open in truth to authentic freedom - renders a primordial, indispensable and immensely valuable service not only for the individual person and his growth in the good, but also for society and its genuine development» (Veritatis splendor, n.101).

5. Mr Ambassador, in relation to the «Year of the Family», you mentioned in your opening address the fundamental value of the family for society as a whole. The protection and promotion of the family must be a matter of concern for all of us the Church, the competent departments of the State, as well as all social forces. Parents must set an example of faith, love, fidelity and sacrifice for their children.

As I already said in my address to the Austrian Bishops on the occasion of their ad limina visit in April 1992, «public opinion increasingly spreads disdain for fidelity, the degradation of women, scorn for God's commandments, unlimited selfishness, degrading pornography and the thoughtless game of consumerism which is destroying the world» (L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 6 May 1992, p. 10). At the same time all those with responsibility in the State and in society must become increasingly aware that «the family, as the fundamental and essential educating community, is the privileged means for transmitting the religious and cultural values which help the person to acquire his or her own identity. Founded on love and open to the gift of life, the family contains in itself the very future of society» (Message for the 1994 World Day of Peace, n. 2, L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 22 December 1993, p. 1). Together let us make every possible effort to protect the valuable resource of the family and give it new lustre.

6. May the co-operation and partnership between the Church and State which is well and effectively regulated on the basis of the Concordat, contribute to the moral renewal of individuals and society. It is the human person with whose well-being the Church and State must be equally concerned as they co-operate to promote these noble values and ideals.

With deep gratitude I reciprocate the good wishes you conveyed to me from the President of the Republic. I invoke God's protection and assistance upon you, your family, and all your co-workers, and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to all.

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\*L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n.11 p.4.

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