



The Holy See

***DISCOURS DU SAINT-PÈRE JEAN-PAUL II
À S.Exc. M. SEMIH BELEN, NOUVEL
AMBASSADEUR DE TURQUIE PRÈS LE SAINT-SIÈGE****

Lundi 26 juin 1995

Mr. Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to greet Your Excellency and welcome you to Rome for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Turkey to the Holy See.

2. I thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for the friendly words with which you have just addressed me and for the good wishes you have conveyed to me from Mr. Suleyman Demirel, President of the Republic of Turkey. I would be grateful if you would express to him, in return, my deferential wishes for him personally, and for his exalted mission at the service of all his compatriots, as well as my wishes for those who are responsible for serving the nation and for all the Turkish people.

You mentioned my interview with the President of the Republic, then Prime Minister, when I visited your country in 1979 for the Feast of St Andrew, at that memorable time when I met Patriarch Dimitrios I. In a few days I will be receiving with deep emotion his successor, His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew I, thereby taking a further step on the way of ecumenism.

3. I particularly appreciate your words of praise for the Holy See's committed contribution to international life, and the attention you are paying to the serious issues of peace, justice and interreligious dialogue. You mention the wars that stain our world with blood, in particular the European continent. In these fratricidal struggles, it is man in his dignity who is diminished, entire peoples' fundamental rights and freedoms are disregarded, often, as you pointed out, because of ethnic or even religious differences. In this regard it would be appropriate to emphasize the efforts of religious leaders to promote a deeper understanding between the different religions, by deeper

dialogue, in a spirit of mutual trust and acknowledgment of the treasures proper to each spiritual family. You are aware of the importance the Catholic Church attaches to freedom of faith and religious practice which, as the Second Vatican Council stated in its Declaration *Dignitatis humanae* (nn. 3-4), is not only a right of individuals but also of people acting as a group. This fundamental freedom is a school of humanity and fraternity for all believers, as I recently recalled in my Message on the 50th Anniversary of the End of the Second World War in Europe (n. 1 2).

4. Although Catholics in your country are few, they are anxious to be fully involved in social life, in building the nation and in the Muslim-Christian dialogue. I take this opportunity, through you, to greet warmly the Catholic community in Turkey. The Church's members have at heart to serve their country, to further friendly relations with all their compatriots and to take part in I would like to express to you the Holy See's satisfaction with the relations established between the State University of Ankara and the Pontifical Gregorian University, as well as with the contacts made with the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, in order to develop high level intellectual exchanges and to enable the Catholic universities to take part in the research that is being pursued in the country, as was the case with the symposia on the Turkish philosopher and mystic, Yunus Emre, and again, on the new situations in the world today, at the time of the centenary of the Encyclical *Rerum novarum*. The work of the religious communities in the health-care sector should also be mentioned; this is one of the many forms of human solidarity. Like their Muslim brothers and sisters, Turkish Catholics draw dynamism from their specific religious practice, vital to their faith, in the heart of living communities which gather regularly round their Pastors. It is to be hoped that a constant effort will be made to obtain more adequate juridical recognition for them, which respects religious freedom and the Catholic Church's specific mission.

5. Since last March, your country has entered a new phase in the process leading to its total membership in the European Union. One cannot but rejoice at your Government's desire for full participation in the great Europe of nations and peoples, to set up the political and economic institutions that will improve the spiritual and material well-being of individuals and human communities. Because of its privileged position between the East and the West, Turkey has a pressing vocation in the heart of Europe to build bridges between the different cultures, to enable distinctive peoples to draw closer.

In its rich architectural heritage, particularly on the Anatolian plateau, Turkey has preserved part of the ancient culture of the Mediterranean Basin. Therefore the city in which you have just arrived will not be totally strange to you. Moreover, for Western European countries, the names of Antioch, Ephesus, Smyrna, Tarsus and Cappadocia are equally familiar and bind us to one another through history.

Especially for Christians, these are the landmarks of the faith and they call to mind figures who were famous for their intelligence, their culture and their deep spirituality.

6. I offer you my best wishes at the beginning of your mission. Be assured that you will always find in my co-workers an attentive welcome and ready understanding, in order to help you accomplish your work successfully.

I wholeheartedly invoke the Almighty's Blessings on Your Excellency, on the authorities and on the people of Turkey.

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