



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
AT THE PRESENTATION OF THE LETTERS
ACCREDITING NEW AMBASSADORS TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 12 December 1996

Your Excellencies,

I am pleased to welcome you, the distinguished Ambassadors of *Cape Verde, Congo, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Fiji, Haiti, Mali, Nepal, Rwanda, South Africa and Zimbabwe*, for the presentation of your Letters of Credence. With this solemn act you officially begin a period of close contact with the Holy See, which I hope and pray will be a time of fruitful service to your countries and to the international community. Through you I greet your respective Heads of State, your Governments, and the peoples whose well-being you serve.

As we approach the end of the 20th century and the beginning of a new millennium, humanity is faced with many important challenges. Looming large on the world's horizon is the difficult and complicated task of achieving a just and equitable sharing of the world's resources between that part of the human family which has already reached an adequate standard of life and that much greater part which is still striving, against almost overwhelming odds, for a dignified existence. Upon the outcome of this immense challenge depends the very future of humanity. The present moment offers many signs of hope, but there are also serious reasons for concern. It is difficult to define clearly the changes taking place in policies and attitudes at this stage of world history. On the one hand, a confluence of many complex developments - in the fields of science and technology, in the economy, in growing political maturity, in the pervasive power of the global means of communication - is producing new aspirations to freedom, new demands for a share in all aspects of social life, and a worldwide interdependence from which no one can truly escape. On the other hand, these objectives are being strongly jeopardized by the ever present human tendency to self-interest and the unrestrained defence of particular interests.

The challenge before everyone with public responsibilities is to respond to this moment of awakening without falling into the moral relativism and utilitarianism which dominates much of modern culture. It is particularly in the area of defending the sacredness of human life itself that the utilitarian ethic shows its flawed nature. When the value of life, from its natural beginning to its natural end, is no longer fully respected, every other value is relativized, to the point that only the will to dominate survives as a criterion for behaviour. A different, superior path is needed. The leaders of nations should foster new levels of co-operation between men and women of religion, science, culture, politics and economics in facing the problems of the world: vexing problems such as the preservation of the planet and its resources, peace between peoples and nations, justice in society, and an effective response to all the different forms of poverty affecting millions of human beings.

These are some of the important issues which will require your attention as you fulfil your diplomatic mission to the Holy See. May Almighty God sustain you in your task and noble profession! Upon yourselves and upon the peoples which you represent I willingly invoke an abundance of divine blessings.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XIX, 2 p.1000-1001.*

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