



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr. BENGT O. JOHANSEN
AMBASSADOR OF NORWAY TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 18 December 1997

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to welcome you today to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence by which His Majesty King Harald V has appointed you his Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. I greatly appreciate His Majesty's kind message and I would ask you to convey to him my greetings and to assure him of my prayers for the Royal Family and for the people of Norway. During my Pastoral Visit in 1989 I came into contact with the rich Christian heritage of your country. The celebrations two years ago for the Millennium of the presence of Christianity in Norway reminded us of how Christian values have made an indelible mark. Those celebrations invited people to reflect on their past, on a Christian tradition which stretches back to the return of the newly baptized King Olav I to Norway in the year 995. The Norwegian people have allowed their faith to shape their attitudes towards each other and have manifested that religious patrimony in their concern for the less fortunate at home, and for the poor in other lands. In opening its doors to refugees from various nations, your country has continually drawn the world's attention to the problem of those who lack basic necessities or whose rights are trampled on. In its involvement in international affairs, the Holy See is guided by recognition of the intrinsic worth and inalienable rights of every human person. This is the same vision which underlies the Church's commitment to every form of authentic human development. An overly narrow interpretation of development in terms of material and economic prosperity would lead to a neglect of essential questions concerning the nature and destiny of man, since the mere accumulation of goods is not sufficient for human happiness (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 28). Likewise, authentic human development requires an understanding of the human being not as an isolated individual but as a person who lives and grows in a community. It is important that people should enjoy the freedom to express themselves and their social and religious needs within the community to which they belong. Deserving of particular attention are those institutions in society which transmit to their members a sense of where true values lie and of what leads to full personal development. I refer in particular to the primordial role of the family and to the importance of the educational sector. Through their participation in these realities and corresponding social institutions, citizens develop a

sense of respect and concern for others, which expresses itself in that firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good which we call solidarity (cf. *ibid.*, 38). In the international sphere, solidarity leads to cooperation with other nations, seen as neighbours to be assisted, not as instruments to be used by the more powerful (cf. *ibid.*, 39). Attention to the demands of solidarity has led your country to be particularly generous in sharing its resources with the less fortunate. In this area, the Church seeks to draw attention to the values which need to be respected in order to achieve authentic development. She constantly seeks to remind the international community that over and above economic and technical assistance, concern for the authentic development of other nations involves respect for their cultural and spiritual values. These values and traditions represent a fount from which the life of a nation flows. They indicate the direction which should be taken in order to ensure the harmonious progress of society. However, there exists a widespread temptation today to relegate the spiritual dimension to the private sphere. If reference to the spiritual and the transcendent is removed from public life, it becomes all too easy to define the human person in merely biological or sociological terms. In such a situation, people are in danger of surrendering to forces which have the will and the means to impose their views. The experience of the twentieth century has made us painfully aware of what can happen to groups and even whole nations when any appeal to a higher law is rejected. Nations with a Christian tradition have a particular responsibility to safeguard the values which have made them what they are and to draw on those values in their efforts to defend fundamental rights, including freedom of religion and the freedom of minorities to follow their own traditions within the limits of what serves the common good. Though numerically small, the Catholic Church in Norway, together with the other Christian communities, strives to strengthen the values which have shaped Norway over the last Millennium. Respect for the poor and the marginalized, for the elderly and the handicapped, defence of the rights of minorities and promotion of the family are important elements of ecumenical cooperation. Likewise, the Church, which has at heart the transcendent vocation and the integral good of the human person, cannot but be strong in her defence of the sacred character of all human life. She is convinced that the good of every human community and of the political community itself is founded on recognition of this fundamental right. Mr Ambassador, as you assume your responsibilities as the Representative of the Kingdom of Norway, I offer you cordial good wishes. The various departments of the Roman Curia will always be ready to assist you as you carry out your duties. In renewing the expression of my esteem for His Majesty the King and for the people of your country, I invoke upon you the abundant blessings of Almighty

God.

* *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XX, 2 p. 1047-1049.

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