



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO H.E. MR BAE YANG-IL,  
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA TO THE HOLY SEE\****

*Saturday, 27 March 1999*

*Your Excellency,*

I welcome you to the Vatican and am pleased to accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Korea to the Holy See. I thank you for the kind greetings which you bring from President Kim Dae-jung, and I ask you to convey to him the assurance of my prayers for your country and its people.

Your presence here today draws attention to the close bonds of friendship which exist between your country and the Holy See. You have reminded me of my first visit to Korea in 1984, when the Catholic Church celebrated the Bicentennial of its presence in your land. My memories of your country are inseparable from the experience of meeting so many of your fellow-citizens, whose friendliness, hospitality and vitality left a lasting impression on me. During that first visit, I also shared the sufferings and hopes of all the people of the Peninsula, and I continue to pray that they will one day be re-united as one family. In this regard, I encourage your Government's efforts to resolve present difficulties through mutual trust, practical assistance and open dialogue. To work for peace requires patient and persevering effort, for true peace is not a matter of power and strength, but calls for genuine reconciliation between peoples.

The resolution of the many conflicts between countries and ethnic groups represents one of the major challenges facing the international community as we prepare to enter a new Millennium. My thoughts go to all those throughout the world who continue to suffer violence, discrimination, destruction of property and loss of livelihood. In my *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, I wrote that "when human rights are ignored or scorned, and when the pursuit of individual interests unjustly prevails over the common good, then the seeds of instability, rebellion and violence are inevitably sown" (No. 1). To ensure a peace built on solid and lasting foundations, a concerted international effort is needed to promote and guarantee a culture of

human rights, and I am pleased that your Government shares this opinion. In this task, the promotion of the dignity of the person must be the guiding principle, and the search for the common good must be the overriding commitment.

Last year, the celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the promulgation of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* focused attention on this same need to ensure that rights are everywhere recognized, respected and protected. The Declaration draws attention to a number of essential features of human rights, which are sometimes overlooked or underplayed. It emphasizes that the recognition of the innate dignity of all members of the human family, as well as the equality and inalienability of their rights, is the foundation of liberty, justice and peace (cf. Preamble). Human rights, therefore, are not conferred by external authority but stem from the inherent dignity and worth of the human person; they are simply a consequence of being human and are common to all. Furthermore, they apply to every stage of life, and to every political, social, economic and cultural situation. “Together they form a single whole, directed unambiguously towards the promotion of the good of both the person and society” (*Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, No. 3). If peace between nations and groups is to be set on a firm foundation, and if individuals, peoples and nations are to develop, it is essential to defend the universality and indivisibility of human rights.

The challenge is to build a new structure of relations at every level based on guaranteed respect for human rights and human freedom. The Holy See, by virtue of its unique spiritual mission, seeks to be a positive and helpful partner in this immense and crucial task. The Church defends human rights and contributes to the political, social, economic and cultural order because she teaches the transcendent dignity of every human person. She affirms that religious freedom constitutes the very heart of human rights, since religion “expresses the deepest aspirations of the human person, shapes people’s vision of the world and affects their relations with others” (*Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, No. 5).

Your country’s culture, Mr. Ambassador, has been profoundly shaped by the religious traditions of Buddhism and Confucianism. In more recent times, Christianity has contributed in no small way to the good of the nation. Korea’s respect for religion is undoubtedly influenced by the conviction that at the heart of every culture lies man’s attitude to the greatest mystery, that of God. “Different cultures are basically different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence. When this question is eliminated, the culture and moral life of nations are corrupted.” (Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 24). Authentic democratic society and just relations between nations depend on the attitude taken to the religious dimension of human existence and to the question of transcendent and objective truth. The good of nations and peoples requires the exercise of freedom in obedience to that truth. As the measure of man’s dignity and greatness, freedom has an interior “logic” which distinguishes it and ennobles it: “freedom is ordered to the truth and is fulfilled in man’s quest for truth and in man’s living in the truth. ... Far from being a limitation upon freedom or a threat to it, reference to the truth about the human person – a truth universally

knowable through the moral law written on the heart of all – is, in fact, the guarantor of freedom's future." (*Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, October 5, 1995, No. 12).

Mr. Ambassador, it is my prayer and hope that the new Millennium will witness a new flourishing of the human spirit. By developing an authentic culture of freedom, based on human rights and recognition of the truth, men and women, groups and nations will learn to conquer anxiety and fear, and face the future with confidence. This is my hope for the Korean people, that working wisely to overcome the difficulties left by this often tragic century, they will experience a new era of peace, harmony and development.

I am confident that, as you carry out the tasks of your lofty mission, the bonds of friendship between the Republic of Korea and the Holy See will be further strengthened. I offer you my good wishes and assure you that the various departments of the Roman Curia will always be ready to assist you in the discharge of your duties. Upon Your Excellency and your fellow-citizens I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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*\*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXII, 1 p.639-642:

*L'Osservatore Romano* 28.3.1999 p.5:

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