



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE HOLY SEE*

25 May 2000

Your Excellency, It is with pleasure that I welcome you at the beginning of your mission as New Zealand Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. In accepting your Letters of Credence, I extend greetings to His Excellency the Governor-General, Sir Michael Hardie Boys, and to the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Helen Clark. I ask you to convey to them and to the people of New Zealand my good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the harmony and prosperity of the nation. I am grateful for your words of appreciation of the Holy See's diplomatic activity, through which it undertakes to be an active partner of the world's peoples as they seek a fully human life and work for their own development and the progress of others. You have mentioned peace, justice and respect for human rights as important for your country, and these values and goals are also central to what you have called the Holy See's unique perspective on international issues. The Holy See's activity in the international forum stems from a perspective which is the result of a specific vision of the human person, and from the conviction that when this vision is undermined or abandoned the very foundation of human society is shaken. It is a perspective based on respect for the inalienable dignity of every human being, a dignity which is intrinsic to life itself and not granted or conceded by any individual, group or state. It is a vision which calls for the perfection of freedom, but of freedom linked to truth – in particular, to the truth of the human person, which alone provides a sound basis for constructive political and diplomatic activity. Everywhere, even in a country like your own, freedom is a fragile achievement; and the last century teaches us how easily freedom is eroded once the truth of the human person is denied. The most destructive untruths about the human person which the twentieth century produced were born of materialistic views of the world and the person. Totalitarian systems may have foundered, but new forms of materialism have emerged, less ideologically driven and less spectacular in their manifestations perhaps, but nonetheless destructive in their effect on people and on the fabric of society. We are quickly learning how vital it is to respect the ecology of nature, if we are not to cause serious harm to the world which future generations will receive from us. More urgent still, though more difficult, is the need to learn to respect the ecology of the human world, by which I mean the truth of the human person and the social implications of this. The Holy See's action in the international sphere follows from its conviction that certain fundamental elements of this human ecology must absolutely be understood and defended. One of these elements is the family, the basic cell of human society and the surest indicator of a nation's health and stability. Attempts to define the family as something other than a solemnized lifelong union of man and woman which looks to the birth and nurture of children is bound to prove destructive. This claim

is not a matter of attachment to a bygone cultural model which refuses to face facts, but precisely a recognition of a fundamental truth: the family is the basic cell of human society not only because it is there that human life is born, but because it is there that children best learn the dispositions and skills which they require in order to grow into mature human beings capable of contributing to the common life and good of society. It is in the family that they best learn the truth of what it means to be a person endowed with intelligence and will, called to freedom and responsibility, and challenged by rights and duties. The facts suggest a logic which is clear and certain: weak families mean a society unable to sustain its members, especially the young, in the building of the common good. Individuals and even social structures are enfeebled by forms of egoism and escapism which leave little room for commitment, self-giving love, and solidarity with the weaker members of society. Another key element of human ecology is the inviolability of human life, especially at its beginning and its end. The Holy See insistently proclaims that the first and most fundamental of all human rights is the right to life, and that when this right is denied all other rights are threatened. The assumption that abortion and euthanasia are human rights deserving legislative sanction is seen by the Holy See as a contradiction which amounts to a denial of the human dignity and freedom which the law is supposed to protect. A society will be judged on the basis of how it treats its weakest members; and among the most vulnerable are surely the unborn and the dying. A materialistic view of the human person will concede little value and dignity to either. What is then claimed as a victory for human rights is really the sanctioning of a freedom sundered from truth. In the end, that is no freedom at all but a descent into arbitrariness and the dominion of the strong over the weak. The Holy See therefore hopes for a profound reflection on the part of the political and diplomatic communities on the great challenge which accompanies the opening of the new millennium: the challenge of ensuring a new flourishing of the human spirit, mediated through an authentic culture of freedom, hope and trust (cf. *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, 5 October 1995, No. 16). Your Excellency, as you take your place in the community of diplomats accredited to the Holy See, I assure you of the ready collaboration of the various offices and agencies of the Roman Curia. May your mission serve to strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation between your Government and the Holy See. Upon you and your fellow New Zealanders, I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty

God.

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