



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA*

March 4, 2000

Your Excellency,¹ It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican on the occasion of your first official visit, which gives me the opportunity to reaffirm the Holy See's esteem for your person and its long-standing friendship with the Republic of Korea. I warmly greet Mrs. Kim Dae-Jung and the distinguished members of your entourage. Your visit today brings back happy memories of my two pastoral visits to the "Land of Morning Calm", in [1984](#) and in [1989](#). On both of those occasions I had the joy of meeting many of your fellow citizens from various backgrounds and religious traditions. Their warm welcome, friendliness and spirit of hospitality have left a lasting impression on me. I was also able to observe the difficulties and challenges facing the Korean people in their yearning for unity and their desire to create a prosperous and peaceful society, built on the solid foundations of justice, freedom and respect for inalienable human rights.² In recent times you have taken fresh initiatives to foster inter-Korean dialogue. Certainly, the path of reconciliation will be long and difficult. Yet despite the obstacles, you have not allowed yourselves to become discouraged in your endeavours to establish a climate of good and harmonious relations. You have shown your commitment in a practical way by coming to the assistance of the many North Koreans who have been severely affected by natural calamities and poor harvests, and whose tragic plight is known to all of us. I encourage the efforts which you have been making to respond to their needs at this difficult time and I take this opportunity to call upon the international community to continue to show generosity in helping to relieve the sufferings of the victims.³ In recent times your country has also had to respond to the social and economic challenges arising from the Asian financial crisis. Aware that the most valuable asset of the nation is its people, your Government has made strenuous efforts to ensure that its negative effects on your fellow citizens are reduced to a minimum. Productivity and profit cannot be the sole measure of progress; indeed development is not authentic unless it benefits individuals and the promotion of the good of the family, the nation and the world community. True development requires that every man and woman be seen as the subject of inalienable rights and freedoms, and that the social, cultural and religious dimensions of life be always and everywhere defended and promoted. The Catholic Church's commitment to education, health-care and social welfare stems from her firm conviction of the innate dignity of the human person and the primacy of people over things. This conviction leads her to seek practical forms of cooperation with governments and international bodies involved in the development of peoples. In this area, the Church's task is not to prescribe particular social, political or economic models. As her principal contribution, she offers her social teaching as an ethical and ideal orientation which, while recognizing the positive value of the market and of enterprise, insists that

these must always be directed to the common good of people (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 43). Respect for the essential moral dimension and ethical imperatives of development is the key to authentic human progress, constituting the only viable foundation for a society truly worthy of the human family.⁴ The century that has just ended witnessed much violence, persecution and warfare, from which your own country was not spared. All this has led to an increased awareness of the need for agreement and cooperation among nations in order to prevent conflicts and preserve peace, to defend the rights and freedom of individuals and peoples, and to ensure the observance of justice. The countries of Asia are gradually coming closer together, and serious efforts have been made to bring about reconciliation between peoples divided by painful memories of past history. Within many nations there is a growing commitment to renewing the social order and eliminating the corruption which all too often mars public life. People are becoming more aware that the realm of politics is not morally neutral but must be guided by fundamental ideals and principles. These positive developments and initiatives are to be applauded and encouraged, but at a deeper level they can only succeed if the unique and inalienable value of the human person is respected and safeguarded. As the experience of the past hundred years clearly demonstrates, failure to recognize the existence of transcendent truth, in obedience to which man achieves his full identity, undermines the principles guaranteeing just relations between peoples and can lead to the rise of various forms of totalitarianism (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 44). Indeed if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power (cf. *ibid.*, 46). At the present time individual nations and the international community are faced with the challenge of formulating the fundamental principles necessary to guarantee the good of individuals, the common good and the genuine development of society. I express the hope and confidence that the people of South Korea will draw on their rich cultural and spiritual patrimony to find the wisdom and discipline of mind and heart needed to build a society worthy of your country's ancient traditions.⁵ Your Excellency, on the happy occasion of your visit, I again express my good wishes for your efforts to promote social renewal and reconciliation among all the members of the Korean family. I pray that the Korean people will safeguard those spiritual values and qualities of character which sustain freedom, dignity and truth, and provide a sure direction for the future. May the Republic of Korea prosper on the path of genuine progress and true peace. This is my heartfelt wish for you, Mr. President, and for your people.

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