



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 14 December 2000

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you today to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of India to the Holy See. I thank you for the kind greetings you have expressed on behalf of President Kocheril Raman Narayanan and the Government and people of India, and I ask you kindly to convey my good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the peace, well-being and harmony of the nation.

My thoughts often turn to your country, which I have had the joy of visiting on two occasions. During those visits, I had the opportunity of meeting a people shaped by ancient cultures and religions and time-honoured wisdom, which continue to play a vital role in the life of society. India has been greatly enriched by its variety of peoples, traditions and languages, and Indian society can take pride in its long-standing respect and esteem for this rich patrimony. In the midst of a great and fascinating diversity, a vision of a united nation has emerged over the centuries in the works of philosophers, mystics, writers and outstanding statesmen, who have made a significant contribution to your history and have enabled your country's specific voice to be heard in the world community.

You have emphasized India's commitment to peace and friendship with all nations. The promotion of peace is one of the major challenges facing the international community at the beginning of the new millennium. The world which until recently lay in the shadow of the threat of conflict between two opposing blocs continues to be threatened by old and new rivalries between peoples, and by the increasing gap between rich and poor sectors of society, a gap which risks becoming more and more radical as globalization of the economy and of technology increases. Solid and lasting

foundations for peace demand that the defence and the promotion of the dignity of the human person become the guiding principle of all aspects of life. Likewise, the common good must become the overriding commitment of all those who bear responsibility for the life of nations (cf. *Message for the World Day of Peace 1999*, No. 1).

Human dignity is a transcendent value, independent of place or circumstance, and is an essential feature of the truth about man, which can be ignored only to the detriment of peoples and nations. Recognition of the innate dignity of all the members of the human family, and recognition of the equality and inalienability of their rights is a fundamental premise of the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights* and the foundation of liberty, justice and peace in the world. Failure to respect this dignity leads to the various and often tragic forms of discrimination, exploitation, social unrest and even national and international conflict with which we are unfortunately so familiar.

Indian society is permeated by a deep awareness of the importance of the spiritual and transcendent dimension of human life. Your country is renowned for its respect for the religious traditions followed by its peoples, a respect guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, which recognizes the right of all to practise their religion freely. Religious traditions play a vital part in the life of the nation, and are a source of joy, strength and meaning to its citizens. They make an essential contribution to the genuine progress of society by drawing attention to the most profound human questions and values. They likewise indicate the spiritual and moral standards of growth which should always accompany economic, scientific and technological advances.

It is to be hoped that the mutual respect and harmony which has traditionally prevailed among the followers of the various religions in India will continue and become even more stable. In recent times there have been moments of tension, and even tragic incidents where ethnic and religious groups have not respected the dignity and rights which are basic to peaceful co-existence. Recourse to violence in the name of religious belief is a perversion of the very teachings of the major religions. The good of society requires that the right to religious freedom enshrined in law be reaffirmed and given effective protection. In accordance with India's best traditions, there is a need for dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation among the followers of the various religions, in order to enable all together to work for a civilization built upon the universal values of solidarity, justice and freedom. As I emphasized on the occasion of my meeting with religious leaders in Delhi: "Religious leaders in particular have the duty to do everything possible to ensure that religion is what God intends it to be – a source of goodness, respect, harmony and peace!" (*Address to Religious Leaders*, 7 November 1999, No. 3). While we hold firmly to what we believe and do not abandon our own convictions, it is essential that we all strive to listen respectfully to one another in order to discern all that is good and holy, all that makes for cooperation and peace.

I thank you for your kind remarks about the contribution of Christianity in the course of the last almost two thousand years to your country. The Catholic community which has been present in India for all that time is small in relation to the whole population, but its members are proud to

place themselves at the service of their fellow-citizens in accordance with the example of Jesus Christ, who came not to be served but to serve (cf. *Mt 20:28*). In her various activities, the Church seeks no special privileges, but merely wishes to exercise her rights freely and to have these rights respected. In this way she will continue to be able to pursue her spiritual and humanitarian mission, and make her particular contribution to building a society that is a true home to all its members.

Mr Ambassador, it is my hope that as you undertake your responsibilities the bonds of friendship between the Holy See and India will be increasingly strengthened. You can rest assured that the various offices of the Roman Curia are ready to assist you in fulfilling this mission. Upon yourself and all the beloved people of your Nation I invoke abundant divine blessings.

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