



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 13 September 2001

Mr. Ambassador,

I am pleased to accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Holy See. You are beginning your mission at a moment of immense tragedy for your country. At this time of national mourning for the victims of the terrorist attacks on Washington and New York, I wish to assure you personally of my profound participation in the grief of the American people and of my heartfelt prayers for the President and the civil authorities, for all involved in the rescue operations and in helping the survivors, and in a special way for the victims and their families. I pray that this inhuman act will awaken in the hearts of all the world's peoples a firm resolve to reject the ways of violence, to combat everything that sows hatred and division within the human family, and to work for the dawn of a new era of international cooperation inspired by the highest ideals of solidarity, justice and peace.

In my recent meeting with President Bush I emphasized my deep esteem for the rich patrimony of human, religious and moral values which have historically shaped the American character. I expressed the conviction that America's continued moral leadership in the world depends on her fidelity to her founding principles. Underlying your nation's commitment to freedom, self-determination and equal opportunity are universal truths inherited from its religious roots. From these spring respect for the sanctity of life and the dignity of each human person made in the image and likeness of the Creator; shared responsibility for the common good; concern for the education of young people and for the future of society; and the need for wise stewardship of the natural resources so freely bestowed by a bounteous God. In facing the challenges of the future, America is called to cherish and live out the deepest values of her national heritage: solidarity and

cooperation between peoples; respect for human rights; the justice that is the indispensable condition for authentic freedom and lasting peace.

In the century now opening before us, humanity has the opportunity to make great strides against some of its traditional enemies: poverty, disease, violence. As I said at the United Nations in 1995, it is within our grasp to see that a century of tears, the 20th century, is followed in the 21st century by a "springtime of the human spirit". The possibilities before the human family are immense, although they are not always apparent in a world in which too many of our brothers and sisters are suffering from hunger, malnutrition and the lack of access to medical care and to education, or are burdened by unjust government, armed conflict, forced displacement and new forms of human bondage. In seizing the available opportunities, both vision and generosity are necessary, especially on the part of those who have been blessed with freedom, wealth and an abundance of resources. The urgent ethical issues raised by the division between those who benefit from the globalization of the world economy and those who are excluded from those benefits call for new and creative responses on the part of the whole international community. Here I would emphasize again what I said in my recent meeting with President Bush, that the revolution of freedom in the world must be completed by a "revolution of opportunity" which will enable all the members of the human family to enjoy a dignified existence and to share in the benefits of a truly global development.

In this context, I cannot but mention, among so many disturbing situations throughout the world, the tragic violence which continues to affect the Middle East and which seriously jeopardizes the peace process begun in Madrid. Thanks also to the commitment of the United States, that process had given rise to hope in the hearts of all those who look to the Holy Land as a unique place of encounter and prayer between peoples. I am certain that your country will not hesitate to promote a realistic dialogue which will enable the parties involved to achieve security, justice and peace, in full respect for human rights and international law.

Mr. Ambassador, the vision and the moral strength which America is being challenged to exercise at the beginning of a new century and in a rapidly changing world call for an acknowledgment of the spiritual roots of the crisis which the Western democracies are experiencing, a crisis characterized by the advance of a materialistic, utilitarian and ultimately dehumanized world view which is tragically detached from the moral foundations of Western civilization. In order to survive and prosper, democracy and its accompanying economic and political structures must be directed by a vision whose core is the God-given dignity and inalienable rights of every human being, from the moment of conception until natural death. When some lives, including those of the unborn, are subjected to the personal choices of others, no other value or right will long be guaranteed, and society will inevitably be governed by special interests and convenience. Freedom cannot be sustained in a cultural climate that measures human dignity in strictly utilitarian terms. Never has it been more urgent to re-invigorate the moral vision and resolve essential to maintaining a just and free society.

In this context my thoughts turn to America's young people, the hope of the nation. In my Pastoral Visits to the United States, and above all in my visit to Denver in 1993 for the celebration of World Youth Day, I was able personally to witness the reserves of generosity and good will present in the youth of your country. Young people are surely your nation's greatest treasure. That is why they urgently need an all-round education which will enable them to reject cynicism and selfishness and to grow into their full stature as informed, wise and morally responsible members of the community. At the beginning of a new Millennium, young people must be given every opportunity to take up their role as "craftsmen of a new humanity, where brothers and sisters – members all of the same family – are able at last to live in peace" (*Message for the 2001 World Day of Peace*, 22).

Mr. Ambassador, as you begin your mission as your country's representative to the Holy See, I reiterate my hope that in facing the challenges of the present and future the American people will draw upon the deep spiritual and moral resources which have inspired and guided the nation's growth, and which remain the surest pledge of its greatness. I am confident that America's Catholic community, which has historically played a crucial role in the education of a responsible citizenry and in the relief of the poor, the sick and the needy, will be actively present in the process of discerning the shape of your country's future course. Upon you and your family and all the American people I cordially invoke God's blessings of joy and peace.

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