



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE AMBASSADOR OF FRANCE
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 27 June 2002

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to greet Your Excellency at the beginning of your mission to the Holy See and warmly thank you for your courteous words. Through you, I cordially greet His Excellency Mr Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic, and express my fervent good wishes to him for his new mandate at the service of the French people. To all your fellow citizens, my best wishes for their happiness and prosperity.

2. On this solemn occasion, there are many subjects I would like to discuss, given the centuries-old history of relations between France and the Holy See and the new prospects that open before us for the future. I would be happy today to emphasize that France, which from now on you will be representing, has played an essential role in the creation of the European Community and in the gradual unification of the continent, which has recently been symbolized by the adoption of a single currency by 12 countries. As you know, the Holy See is delighted with the creation of this European space which many countries are eager to join and which has favoured the emergence of new living conditions. They should allow a better social development and improve each country's wealth. In this way it will also contribute significantly to fostering peace and understanding among peoples throughout the continent.

Because of its history and specific situation, France is called to play a forceful role in the construction of the European identity and in Europe's enlargement, to make shine out across the world the ideals of "fraternité, égalité et liberté" (brotherhood, equality and freedom), to which your fellow citizens are also legitimately attached. I hope that the French authorities continue to work to put in place structures that will allow Europe to be an agent of peace on all the continents. Isn't this

one of the traits of the humanist heritage of Europe, that plunges its roots into its long Christian history, to work to enable each people and nation to live in dignity with respect for the fundamental rights of individuals and groups? At the beginning of the work of the commission mandated to reflect on the appropriateness of a Constitution for the Union, it seems fundamental that the aims of the construction of Europe and the values that must support it should be made more explicit. How can I fail to mention the crucial contribution of the values of Christianity, which has contributed and still contributes to shaping the culture and humanism of which Europe is legitimately proud and without which it is impossible to understand its deepest identity?

In French schools programmes that familiarize students with religious thought and practice
In this spirit, I am very pleased with the research undertaken and the prospects of the courses suggested for the schools so that by means of familiarity with the religious fact, young people may find out about the different religions and human communities that practice them and be involved in the quest for the meaning of life, under the guidance of teachers who are aware of the value of this process. It will encourage mutual respect and contribute to a greater social peace and a deeper brotherhood among all the members of the nation.

Your previous missions, Mr Ambassador, have enabled you to judge how religion is an essential dimension of culture. Far from being a threat to social life, religious forces are in fact a benefit for community life, for they participate in the place which is theirs, in building a society in which the human person is considered in all his dimensions. The national community can thereby benefit from the contribution of the cultural, spiritual and moral values handed on by religious traditions, which tend to favour the establishment of a climate of harmony and peace.

3. In this perspective, I am pleased to underline the importance of the meeting of last 12 February with the principal members of the government. As the fruit of a patient dialogue between the State, the Holy See and the Catholic Church in France, the Prime Minister's meeting with the Apostolic Nuncio, the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris and the officers of the Bishops' Conference proves that the way of dialogue and negotiation to resolve the concrete questions concerning the exercise of freedom of religion and worship are a reciprocal advantage for the State as well as for the Church.

The Holy See is very pleased with the implementation of a permanent dialogue within the framework of the Church's relations with the State. This will certainly encourage a better mutual knowledge and the search for a point of balance between the natural intervention of the Bishops and the assistance and guarantee that are always offered by the presence of the Holy See, especially when essential principles are at stake. The creation of work groups dedicated to the study of aspects of the life of the Catholic Church in your country is promising in this regard. May this spirit of dialogue and agreement always prevail for the service of all!

4. Here in Rome the tradition of a French presence happily endures. Through its numerous initiatives, the Cultural Centre of Saint-Louis de France makes a valuable contribution to reflection

on the questions arising in society today. I realize that by this instrument your embassy may propose in a meaningful way the indispensable reflection prompted by the rapid evolution of science and technology. Indeed, the admiration and questions they give rise to call for additional wisdom and are an invitation to reflect on the consequences of applying certain discoveries that could lead to practices that disregard the dignity of the human person.

5. At the end of our encounter, through you, I am pleased to be able to greet the pastors and faithful of the Catholic Church in France, suffering from the recent death of two eminent pastors, Cardinals Pierre Eyt and Louis-Marie Billé. I thank God for the vitality and fidelity of so many of the baptized in your country who respond to their Christian vocation through their many commitments to the service of the ecclesial and human communities with immense generosity. May they all, priests, men and women religious and faithful, be assured of my spiritual closeness and warm affection!

Mr Ambassador, at the moment when your mission in the Eternal City is beginning, I offer you my best wishes, assuring you of the full availability of my collaborators to give you the help you may need to accomplish your high function. I ask God to sustain the people of France, so that faithful to its history, spiritual and cultural heritage, it may continue to work for peace and understanding between persons and among peoples, and I very gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, to your staff and to your loved ones.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n.27 p.4.*

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