



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE*

Monday, 28 April 2003 Your Excellency, It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican as you present the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Czech Republic to the Holy See. Though it took place some years ago now, my visit to your country remains vivid in my mind and I gratefully recall the warmth and hospitality with which I was received. I would ask you kindly to convey my greetings and sincere best wishes to the newly elected President, Mr Václav Klaus, to the Government and to the Czech people. Please assure them of my prayers for the nation's peace and prosperity. The Church's diplomatic relations form a part of her mission of service to the human family. While that mission is eminently spiritual and therefore distinct from the political order, her heartfelt desire to foster fruitful relations with civil society stems from her long experience of seeking to apply the universal values pertaining to truth and love to the vast array of cultures and nations that constitute our world. Indeed, it is precisely the task of promoting an understanding of the dignity of the human person and fostering peace among peoples – essential conditions for the authentic development of individuals and nations – that motivates the Holy See's diplomatic activity. To this end, I welcome the considerable progress that has already been made concerning the regulation of mutual relations between the Holy See and the Czech Republic and I eagerly await the ratification of the corresponding Agreement. As Your Excellency has mentioned, notwithstanding the political freedom that the Czech people now enjoy, the lasting effects of the totalitarian regimes should not be underestimated. History teaches us that the journey from oppression to liberty is arduous, often marked by the lure of false forms of freedom and hollow promises of hope. While economic development and the accompanying social transformation have benefitted many in your country, the weaker members of society, particularly the poor, the marginalized, and the sick and elderly, must be protected. Authentic development can never be attained solely through economic means. In fact what has become known as the "idolatry of the market" – a consequence of the so-called "civilization of consumption" – tends to reduce persons to things and to subordinate being to having (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 28). This seriously detracts from the dignity of the human person and makes promotion of human solidarity difficult at best. Instead, recognition of the spiritual nature of the human person and a renewed appreciation of the moral character of social and economic development must be acknowledged as prerequisites for the transformation of society into a true civilization of love. Such a project needs the leadership of both political and religious authorities, if the soul of the nation is to be strong enough to guide its citizens to an understanding of the source of truth and love which gives purpose to a country's development and progress. The challenges facing the Czech Republic are also being encountered by other nations in Europe. As countries across the Continent celebrated the passage into the third Christian millennium, many individuals and groups reflected upon the fundamental and defining

role of Christianity in their particular cultures. Indeed, you yourself noted that the truths and values of Christianity have long been the foundation of the very fabric of European society, giving form to its civic and political institutions. This great heritage, rooted in and shaped by the Gospel, alerts us to the fact that the hope of continuing to build up a more just world must also include a recognition that human efforts detached from their correct relationship to divine assistance will be of no lasting value: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain" (*Ps* 127:1). For this reason Christian teaching vigorously affirms and defends the source of the human person's dignity and his place in God's design: "Man receives from God his essential dignity and with it the capacity to transcend every social order so as to move towards truth and goodness" (*Centesimus Annus*, 38). In this context, we cannot fail to be concerned that an eclipse of the sense of God has resulted in an eclipse of the sense of man (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 21) and of the sublime wonder of life to which he is called. While the tragic calamities of war and dictatorship continue to disfigure violently God's loving plan for humanity, so too the more subtle encroachments of increasing materialism, utilitarianism, and marginalization of faith gradually undermine the true nature of life as a gift from God. As the nations of Europe move towards a new configuration, the desire to respond to the challenges of a changing world order must be informed by the Church's perennial proclamation of the truth which sets people free and which enables cultural and civic institutions to make genuine progress. The Catholic Church for her part will continue to pray and work for the further development of the Czech people and nation. As Your Excellency has kindly acknowledged, she is already actively involved in the spiritual and intellectual formation of the young, especially through her educational institutions. To the extent that her resources permit, the Church will expand her charitable mission most especially in the support of family life, through which the future of humanity passes (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 86), as well as through healthcare and social work facilities. Mr Ambassador, I am confident that your mission will serve to strengthen further the bonds of friendship between the Czech Republic and the Holy See. As you take up your new responsibilities I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia will be ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon you and your fellow citizens I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty

God.

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