



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR. BIRGER DAN NIELSEN
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 12 December 2003

Your Excellency, I am pleased to welcome you today and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Denmark to the Holy See. Though my visit to your country took place some years ago, I fondly recall the warmth and hospitality with which I was received. I thank you for the gracious words of greeting which you bring from Her Majesty Queen Margrethe II, and I would ask you to convey to Her Majesty, to the Government and to the people of Denmark my good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the peace and well-being of the nation. The Holy See's steadfast commitment to promoting the dignity of the human person stands at the heart of her diplomatic activity. Without an authentic understanding of the incomparable worth of men and women, claims to defend fundamental human rights and efforts to attain peaceful coexistence among peoples will prove vain. It is only in the respect and protection of the inviolable dignity of every person that the search for solidarity and harmony in our world finds its sure basis. Indeed, the urgent need for the entire human family to give practical expression to what my predecessor, Blessed Pope John XXIII, called the four pillars of peace – truth, justice, love and freedom – stems precisely from their being "requirements of the human spirit" (*Message for the 2003 World Day of Peace*, No. 3). Within the international community Denmark has long been esteemed for the generosity which has marked its relations with the developing nations of the world. Tangible expression of such solidarity is found in Danish leadership of peace-keeping operations, generous assistance with aid projects, and readiness to contribute to the requirements of international stability and security necessary for social and economic advancement across the globe. In this regard, I am particularly glad to acknowledge Your Excellency's observation concerning the way in which Denmark and the Holy See have mutually supported the Millennium Declaration. Your nation's exemplary commitment to funding that Declaration's goals has not gone unnoticed and I am confident that Denmark will be a reliable supporter of the newly proposed International Finance Facility, the initiatives of which the Holy See welcomes. Effective solidarity is always an expression of a firm and persevering desire to promote the common good. Though this desire resonates deeply within the hearts of all men and women, it also requires the determination to foster actively a culture of acceptance. To this end, your country has sought to introduce peace education programmes, to support projects combating poverty and injustice, and to encourage tolerance especially in regard to the immigrant community. At their most significant level such laudable initiatives help to elicit a recognition of the essential nature of human life as a gift and of our world as a family of persons.

True commitment to human solidarity on an international level in fact finds its roots in the domestic family. If authentic and mature communion between persons within the family – the first and irreplaceable school of social life – is not truly appreciated and protected, then the relationships of international solidarity, marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love, which serve the common good will be severely impeded (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, No. 43). During my visit to Denmark I observed that your flag, the *Dannebrog*, is marked with the sign of the Cross. I suggested that by being faithful to this historical symbol of your existence as a people, Denmark will be faithful to her very self. Integral to your history is the Christian Gospel which, as an inspiration and support for your people (cf. *Arrival Speech*, Copenhagen, 6 June 1989), is as crucial today as it has been for over a thousand years. However, one cannot but notice that an eclipse of the sense of God has cast its shadow not only over your own country but over others on the Continent of Europe as well. Many people are disoriented, uncertain, and some even without hope. With numbers of Europeans living without spiritual roots, it is not surprising that there are political and social moves to create a vision of Europe which ignores its religious heritage and, in particular, its profoundly Christian soul (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, No. 7). The advocates of these misguided efforts assert the rights of the peoples of Europe, and claim to speak in their name, yet are blind to the reality of the higher objective law written on the heart of every man and woman and known to the human conscience. A vision of Europe detached from God can only herald social fragmentation, moral confusion and political disunity. In the face of the troubling signs which cloud the horizon of the European continent I wish to repeat again the words from Scripture which I quoted during my visit to your country: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ... this light has come into the world and those who live by his truth come out into the light so that it may be plainly seen that what they do is done in God" (*Jn* 3:16; 19-21). Christ's truth does not disappoint. It illuminates and directs our ways, dispelling the shadows of bewilderment and fear. Christ again invites us all "to blaze new trails leading to a 'Europe of the spirit', in order to make the continent a true 'common home' filled with the joy of life" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, No. 121). With these words of encouragement I assure you that the Catholic Church, in ecumenical fellowship with her Christian brothers and sisters in your land, will continue to work for the spiritual enrichment and social development of the Danish people. Through the witness of charity the Church reaches out to all men and women, irrespective of ethnicity or religion, facilitating the growth of a "culture of solidarity" and restoring life to the universal values of human existence (cf. *ibid.*, No. 85). Mr Ambassador, I am confident that the mission which you begin today will help to strengthen the cordial bonds of understanding and cooperation between Denmark and the Holy See. As you take up your new responsibilities be assured that the various offices of the Roman Curia are ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon you, your family and your fellow citizens I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty

God.

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