



The Holy See

***DISCOURS DU PAPE JEAN-PAUL II
À S.E. PATERNOTTE DE LA VAILÉE,
NOUVEL AMBASSADEUR DE BELGIQUE PRÈS LE SAINT- SIÈGE
À L'OCCASION DE LA PRÉSENTATION DES LETTRES DE CRÉANCE****

Jeudi 20 décembre 1984

Mr. Ambassador,

1. It is a great joy for me to receive the distinguished representative of His Majesty King Baudouin I who is to carry out at the Apostolic See the very noble mission which has just been entrusted to him, in replacing His Excellency Baron Rittweger de Moor. You are received today and you will always be received with as much respect as interest. Your first words, which I deeply appreciated, revealed to me the profound satisfaction of your Sovereigns in view of the pastoral journey I will be making next May in Belgium, at the invitation of the bishops of your country. Would Your Excellency kindly assure the King and Queen - whose filial devotion touches me deeply - that their hopes and desires regarding this visit to the Catholics and to all the people of Belgium have found a great echo in my pastor's heart.

2. It is always with regard and affection that the Holy See views the people of Belgium, where each community, with its cultural expression - and this could be said of each city - is rich with a long history. It has been marked by Christian traditions in its customs, in its art and in its very soul. Nor can we forget the place that Belgium holds in Europe, all the more so since several European institutions have their seat there. Everyone knows also the influence that the Belgian people continue to have in the various continents, notably in Africa, above all through its culture and through the work of its innumerable missionaries. This means that today your country has its specific role in the community of nations and, in Rome itself, the presence of the sons of Belgium is well appreciated.

3. Your mission with the Holy See - and I wholeheartedly desire this for you - will be a new experience with respect to your important previous missions. The diplomatic relations between the Holy See on the one hand and the States or the International Agencies which reveal their desire to have such relations on the other, has nothing to do with political, economic or cultural agreements, however useful or necessary such agreements may be. These relations are absolutely unique. Any attentive and objective observer can verify that the principle governing these relations is inspired by the famous reply of Christ himself to those who were trying to embarrass him: «Render to Caesar the things that are

Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's» (cf Mt 22:2t).

4. Indeed, the distinction between the two domains, spiritual and temporal, allows for the possibility and even the necessity of dialogue and collaboration, when the good of individuals and peoples is at stake. The object would of course be to create by way of this dialogue an atmosphere conducive to peace and justice. But, at the humanitarian level, its function could also be to bring assistance in cases of widespread and sudden disaster, to organize and implement health programmes, to ward off endemic miseries, to organize literacy and assistance projects for certain populations for the improvement of their lands, to protect ethnic minorities, to save family values and the precious acquisitions of this or that civilization, and above all to support the flowering of the spiritual vocation of human beings.

5. Though sincerely desirous of respecting the autonomy of governments, the Church cannot remain silent – especially on the level of diplomatic relations that the Holy See has entered into with many States – regarding the ethical and special values which she feels certain she has received in trust, with the mission to propagate them. As Your Excellency yourself underlined, these values truly coincide with the demands of the dignity of every human person, with the rights and the liberties which constitute the very basis of a healthy society and with the search for true progress by means of tolerance, mutual assistance, and therefore of justice and brotherhood. Such diplomatic relations between the Holy See and civil society, with their fruits, visible or more hidden, immediate or more delayed, are very much in line with the important document *Gaudium et spes* of Vatican II. They represent a particular modality of the Church's presence in the world.

6. In Belgium, the Church and the State have continually practiced this style of relationship. For this reason the Holy See will always be happy to receive your observations and your suggestions, every time you judge it useful to communicate these for the good of your nation and, on a wider scale, of the community of peoples. And the Apostolic See will always be grateful to you for echoing at the level of your Government the convictions and desires that correspond to its sacred mission at the heart of the Church, as companion and instructor of the human conscience. Without wishing to enumerate here our major preoccupations, permit me to mention the safeguarding at all costs of peace in justice. Each nation can and must contribute to this, on the condition of accepting the imperatives of dialogue, of respect for others and of sharing with peoples in difficulties.

I express my warmest good wishes and desires that your country, already so deserving, continue to assume its role in the construction, always to be taken up again, of a world of justice and peace. And I add to your own intention, Mr. Ambassador, cordial good wishes for the happy and fruitful carrying out of a mission to which, I am sure, you will devote yourself wholeheartedly and which, in return, will bring you the happiness of an even better discernment of the Church's countenance. On yourself – as on the dear Belgian people whom I will soon have the great joy of meeting as Bishop of Rome whose mission it is to affirm the faith and to watch over ecclesial unity – I invoke with all my heart the help and the protection of

God.

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