



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MRS NINA KOVALSKA,
AMBASSADOR OF UKRAINE****

Thursday, 20 May 1999

Your Excellency,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine. It is a fitting occasion for us to reaffirm the friendship and cooperation which exist between your country and the Holy See, bonds which go back in history a thousand years to the Baptism of Kievan Rus' and which have taken on new form and vigour since the advent of your nation's Independence. I see your presence here today as a sign of our mutual desire to consolidate the diplomatic relations established between Ukraine and the Holy See in 1992. I am grateful for the greetings which you have conveyed on behalf of His Excellency President Leonid Kuchma, whose visits to the Vatican I vividly remember and to whom I express my good wishes. I renew the assurance of my prayers for the peace and prosperity of your country.

The countries of Eastern Europe, including your own, are undergoing a period of rapid and profound transformation in the social, economic and political spheres. While such changes are not without great difficulty and cost, they are essentially positive changes, moving as they do in the direction of respect for the liberty and self-determination of peoples. After decades of being closed in a world order established on imposed decisions and ideological barriers, nations which lacked a voice of their own in the international community are now asserting their sovereignty and pursuing their destiny as equal partners on the world stage. The present moment therefore is one of extreme importance in the life of these peoples, and of grave responsibilities for their leaders.

With the effort and dedication of so many of your fellow citizens, Ukraine is making great strides along the path of progress towards a more prosperous, just and democratic society. Your

Excellency has indicated your country's intention to achieve a "complete reintegration into the European space which rests on Christian values". In striving for this goal you are rediscovering the strength of the spiritual and cultural roots which lie at the very heart of your nation's identity and your people's journey through history. The challenge is to grow in the noblest traditions of the past while being open to all the demands of the consciousness maturing among the world's peoples of the universal nature of human dignity and human rights.

In spite of the hard lessons of this violent century, Europe is unfortunately once again the theatre of the oppression of man by man and of the daily thunder of weapons of death and destruction. In the name of distorted ideals of cultural and ethnic distinction, the fundamental and real value of the inviolable dignity of every human being is being utterly denied. Beyond the rhetoric in which such conflicts are generally presented, it should be clear that the atrocities occurring every day on European soil in the Balkans are not the result of peoples' genuinely held aspirations; they have instead been fueled by unspoken motives representing particular interests and very definite forms of the thirst for power.

It must be the concern of everyone to ensure that dialogue replaces conflict. Dialogue and negotiation would signify the triumph of reason, while the continuance of ethnic conflicts and power struggles in any part of the world are a defeat of reason and a sign of the failure of solidarity and human partnership. We must hope that Europe will manage to find in its rich millenary heritage the truths and incentives it needs to restore the rule of reason and law.

Ukrainian Christians, both Orthodox and Catholic, are reviving the institutions and public expressions of their faith. In the Gospel and the traditions of their Churches they are finding inspiration and strength for the enormous tasks before them as responsible citizens of their newly independent country. It must be the conviction of all Ukrainian believers that mutual understanding and cooperation, not prejudice or rivalry, are what their faith requires of them. Difficulties between Christians must be resolved not just at the level of justice and equity, but at the much deeper level of *koinonia* before God and in Jesus Christ. I repeat a thought which I expressed to the Latin-rite Ukrainian Bishops on the occasion of their *ad Limina* visit in March of this year: "If respect for each other's identity is required by justice, it is even more a demand of love, which is the supreme law for the Christian". As Your Excellency has rightly pointed out, the fast-approaching celebration of a new Christian Millennium is a wonderful opportunity for all Christians to grow in peace, tolerance and respect for one another and for all people. I earnestly hope that a wise and positive unfolding of democracy and freedom in your country, coupled with a renewal of religious conviction and moral commitment, will bring about an era of flourishing development, and that Ukraine's presence and actions in the family of nations will contribute to that better and more peaceful world which people everywhere long for. May the already warm relations between Ukraine and the Holy See lead to increased understanding and cooperation in matters of common concern.

Your Excellency, I offer you my best wishes as you begin your mission, and assure you of the

readiness of the offices of the Holy See to assist you in your work. Upon you and your fellow citizens I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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