



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT TO THE HOLY SEE*

Thursday, 7 September 2000 Mr Ambassador, It is with pleasure that I welcome you today and receive the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Holy See. I thank you for the gracious words which you have spoken and for the good wishes which you have brought from His Excellency President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak. I would ask you to convey to His Excellency my own cordial greetings, together with the assurance of my prayers for the peace and well-being of the Egyptian people. Your presence brings back the joy of my days spent in your country last February, and once more I express my heartfelt thanks to President Mubarak and to the Government for making that visit such a memorable and fruitful one. In this year of the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ, it was a great grace for me to travel to places of vital significance for the religious history of the world. I recall especially Mount Sinai where I was able to commemorate the gift of the Law which God wrote long ago on tablets of stone and which he continues to write in every age on the human heart. I have an especially warm recollection of my meeting with Grand Sheikh Mohammed Sayed Tantawi. We both expressed the wish for a new era of religious and cultural dialogue between Islam and Christianity. It is in this context, Mr Ambassador, that I am particularly pleased that you have spoken of Egypt as a land where unity and harmony are greatly valued and where differences of religion are seen not as barriers but as a means for mutual enrichment in rendering service to the nation. I trust most sincerely that this will always be the case, and that the difficulties that have arisen from time to time will be overcome, especially in view of the widespread willingness and positive conditions for interreligious dialogue and cooperation which can be found in Egypt. In a world deeply marked by violence, it is bitterly ironic that even now some of the worst conflicts are between believers who worship the one God, who look to Abraham as a holy patriarch and who seek to follow the Law of Sinai. Each act of violence makes it more urgent for Muslims and Christians everywhere to recognize the things we have in common, to bear witness that we are all creatures of the one merciful God, and to agree once and for all that recourse to violence in the name of religion is completely unacceptable. Especially when religious identity coincides with cultural and ethnic identity it is a solemn duty of believers to ensure that religious sentiment is not used as an excuse for hatred and conflict. Religion is the enemy of exclusion and discrimination; it seeks the good of everyone and therefore ought always to be a stimulus for solidarity and harmony between individuals and among peoples. Visiting your country, it was also a joy for me to meet with His Holiness Pope Shenouda III and representatives of the ancient Churches of Egypt and to celebrate with them the glorious past of Christianity in your land. I was deeply moved by the memory of the rich Christian culture that emerged in Alexandria, of the many Egyptian saints and martyrs of the Church, and of the Christian monasticism which appeared first in the Egyptian desert and spread from there

throughout the world. This is a rich page both of Christian history and of the history of your people; and the Catholic community in Egypt, though small, is determined to continue to work in every way for the progress of the land which gave such impulse to Christianity's spiritual and theological development. Today, Egypt occupies a central place among the nations seeking to bring a just and lasting peace to the Middle East. Although there have been positive developments in recent times, these are arduous days in the long and difficult path towards a solution of the many still unresolved problems affecting that deeply unsettled region. I am heartened by your assurance that Egypt shares the Holy See's constant concern for the future of that part of the world which the three monotheistic religions hold in such high esteem. No efforts must be spared in fostering a genuine and impartial solution which respects the rights and legitimate aspirations of all the peoples involved. I am grateful for what your country and in particular President Mubarak have done to ensure that the horrors of war and its futility are averted and that peace based on justice prevails after so many years of sorrow. The Church too is deeply interested in the search for peace in the region, though the Church, in serving the cause of peace, has a role quite distinct from that of civil and political authorities. In fulfilling her religious mission, the Church is present in the temporal order above all through her efforts to educate consciences to the truths and values which are the foundations of the well-being of individuals and of societies. This means proclaiming and defending human dignity, working to strengthen harmony and solidarity, and promoting effective action in favour of the common good. While her efforts are directed in the first place to the Catholic faithful, the Church remains firmly committed to cooperating with all men and women of good will for the true well-being of the whole human family. The Church willingly offers her support and encouragement wherever peaceful and lawful efforts are made to oppose those things which threaten the moral health of nations and peoples, or endanger the understanding and concord which should exist between them. Mr Ambassador, I am confident that your mission will further strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation already existing between Egypt and the Holy See, and that those bonds will bear fruit in serving the great cause of peace. Upon you, your family and all the people of your beloved nation I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty

God.

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